



AWOnews



Produced by The Amateur Winemakers of Ontario

A forum for the exchange of news and opinions on home winemaking in Ontario

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The 1999 Winter edition

"The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

-Mary Wollenscraft Shelley

"Ode to the West Wind"

IN THIS ISSUE:



by Paul Dunseath

Lots of stuff about the upcoming Festival in this issue. Our friends in London have produced three pages of information, including a list of seminars and a sign-up form, which we include on pages 5 and 6; and a Registration form on the back page, so that you don't have to choose between sending in a seminar form or a registration form.

The issue also has the traditional "Chief Judge's Corner" by Peter Pigeon, and President Dan Ostler's column, as well as a discussion, pro and con, on including as a medal category the idea of "Wine Taster of the Year". Please consider these well-reasoned arguments and instruct your club rep how you wish to vote at the next Annual General Meeting.

We also note inside with great sadness the passing of Fran Arthur, wife of the indomitable "Buzz" Arthur and matriarch of the Arthur Clan. Wine.Art has been very good to us over the years, and I am sure that members will wish to remember, in their prayers, Buzz, John, Linda and Michael in their time of personal tragedy.

On a brighter note, Ottawa is coming along well for the year 2000. The hotel has been booked, a sufficiency of wine is fermenting thanks to the great generosity of Wine.Art and Kamil Juices, and a source of souvenir INAO-standard wine glasses has been identified (some clubs have expressed an interest in piggy-backing on this order, which can be arranged; these 24% lead crystal, tasting glasses work out - at current exchange rates - to about \$3 each.)

IN FAVOUR OF "TASTING AS A CLUB POINTS COMPETITION"

by Peter Pigeon

As a judge I meet many AWO winemakers and their wines. Better grapes, improved technical winemaking knowledge, and the latest in

winemaking equipment has created a vast potential for many great amateur wines. However, there are simply too many bad wines being produced by people who truly want to do better.

We winemakers are a technically oriented group. So much so, that we believe that if we have the right equipment, we will automatically make good wine. Most winemakers avoid a basic truth - the most important winemaking tool is the skill of critical tasting, recognizing the correct balance of a wine's components and wine faults. The common avoidance strategy has winemakers saying that they simply can't taste well. The truth is that we all have the ability to taste, but few people take time to build that essential skill.

I test many judges and potential judges. Every person who sits a taste test more than once, improves their score. Every time! Clearly, trained tasters make better wines. Have you noticed the number of judges that win many winemaking medals each year? If AWO sees within its role assisting members in better winemaking, then creating an incentive to improve tasting skill is essential. We are a club based organization so it is only fitting that club championship points be used to encourage otherwise disinterested members in building their basic tasting skills. With no incentive, we judges will continue to hear from winemakers who think the only criteria for rating a wine is simply that a judge "likes" that particular flavor or style of wine. Ignorance is not going to produce better wine.

[WINE TASTER OF THE YEAR COMPETITION POINTS: A CONTRARY 10:42 AM 1/31/05VIEW"](#)

by Gord Barnes

Intro - History

In the past several years the Festival programs have included a seminar called "Wine Taster of the Year." Participants took tests similar to the ones which are used to qualify the AWO judges. The program served two functions - for individual members there was a chance to test their tasting skills. The second function is a happy by-product. For the Judges Commission it helped to identify candidates for Judge Training. Now there is a request to give competition points to the winning club for this test.

Pros

It seems an undeniable truism that a good winemaker must be able to recognize a quality wine. If one does not know what a quality wine tastes like, how can one recognize when one has made one? Or more likely, how can one take a wine that has started and craft it into a better product?

Given that the objective of the AWO is to help make better winemakers, it seems to follow that every technique that furthers that aim is just and desirable.

Cons

The problem here is that this argument relies on an "The ends justify the means" appeal. This statement easily expands into " Good and Desirable Ends justify any Means." The means here are competition points which for three decades have been awarded for fermented entries of the highest quality. The points accumulate to recognize the Grand Champion Club

The meaning of the points seems far enough from the Wine Taster of the Year to keep the two activities separate.

Conclusion

It seems clear that encouraging tasting skills is a desirable goal. However, the means in this case are competition points. They are designed to reward the whole winners, not a single skill helpful in becoming a winner..

Alternatives

Given the value of sensory development, are there other effective ways they can be offered and encouraged. The workshops offered by the Commission gives a club the opportunity to train these skills in the privacy of their club meeting.

At future Festivals the Wine Taster of the Year or other training and testing opportunities can provide this opportunity.

CHIEF JUDGE'S COLUMN

by Peter Pigeon

Another club competition season will soon be upon us. Given the last couple of wonderful harvests, we judges are salivating in anticipation! As good as the weather was, it will be interesting to see how many winemakers were on top of balancing low acids and crafting truly ripe grapes into clean, luscious wines.

In selecting your club judges, be aware that there are now nine "master judges"; Tom Van Zuiden, Bill Thornton, Werner Roesener, Teny Rayner, Don Panagapka, Marta Mihoff, Rodney Nicholson, Ted Giesbrecht and Peter Pigeon. Soon, of course, there will be more. Unfortunately the response to our call for candidates for the taste test for January 31st. was under subscribed. The next opportunity will be at the AWO Festival in London. The AWO Winetaster of the Year, the trial run for the club taster competition, and the New Judges Training qualifying test will all be combined in the same event. To do the best evaluating of your competition wines, we need more judges, so please consider sitting the test. It is entirely confidential, and honestly, a fun experience.

PASSAGES

Members of AWO will have been saddened to hear of the death in January of Fran Arthurs, wife and best friend of Buzz Arthurs, one of the stalwarts and founders of our hobby. Our sympathy goes out to Buzz and also to John, Michael and Linda, and the grandchildren. She will be missed.

WELCOME TO A NEW CLUB

We welcome to our membership the New Woodbridge Club. Details of location and contacting are available from the indefatigable God Barnes, to who we are indebted for this welcome news.

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Dan Ostler

Well it is obvious by now that our Niagara wines from the fall will likely be the best that any of us have ever made from the region! I think the hardest part will be deciding when to start "dipping into them". The natural tendency is to hang on to the best of the cellar and drink the others. The trick is to not miss the peak for each wine, whenever it occurs. It will certainly be a delight to test along the way!

The Class Definition Committee has been hard at work. Some areas of discussion include Zweigelt and the Pinot/Gamay family, Concentrates, Social class and Sherries, minor adjustments to definitions of White Table, Rosé, Sparkling, and the ongoing discussion of whether Gewurz dominates the Other White class. Club Reps should watch for a detailed discussion paper from the committee. Be sure to give all the ideas a good airing at your club meetings prior to the upcoming Festival in London. At that time we will be voting on changes to go into effect for club judging in 2000.

Our Web site continues to get a lot of visits but our Webmaster Rowan Shirkie would love to get more submissions of material on our hobby from the members to fill in some of the gaps. Everyone seems to be busier than ever with work, family etc. but I know that some of you have excellent notes in your cellars, or even perhaps an article or two written sometime in the past, that could be dusted off and sent to Rowan. Our winemaking fraternity is about sharing and what better way than to reach a large group through the Web site. The same applies to AWOnews - material is needed for both our educational outlets.

I have finished updating the historic point totals and Rowan has posted them to the Web. If any club would like a paper copy, or a diskette with the results, give me a call.

You have heard it many times before but here goes again.....we will be electing a new Executive at the AGM in London in June and we need

more volunteers. My term as President will be up and at least one other long standing Director will be stepping down. We only have 3 or 4 meetings a year so the time commitment is NOT onerous. Please give me a call if you are interested.

HOW TO TASTE A WINE

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When all is said and done, the proof of the winemaking, to paraphrase the expression, is in the tasting. This is no less so of amateur wines as it is of their commercially-produced cousins. Wine, after all, is made to be consumed, and in the process tasted, tasting being a conscious act of appreciation of the flavours and characteristics of the wine.

Much of the wine on the market, both here and abroad, is very plain. "Plonk" is the term the British give it. It is blended, mild-flavoured wine, suitable for those who wish a simple beverage without requiring - or deserving - critical analysis.

But some wine does not fit this mold of conformity. It is meant to be tasted, to be enjoyed, as an art form in itself. Wine of this type is tasted many times during its development; first of all in the winegrower's cellar, where the producer monitors its development; next by the négociant, who determines whether to purchase it for resale; later by the bulk purchaser or the merchant; by the end-user, who may in fact taste a wine several times over the years if he or she has a large cellar, in order to determine when it is ready to serve; and finally by the consumer and his or her guests, either in a formal tasting or for sheer enjoyment.

Amateur winemakers, being all of the above, taste their wines at several stages of development in order to verify that it is maturing as it should, and to determine when to consume it. Consequently it is important for the home winemaker to understand how to taste wine intelligently and knowledgeably.

In a formal tasting, as opposed to a dinner party, a number of rules have evolved over the years with practice. Briefly they are as follows:

Locale: The wine should be tasted in an area which is well-lit, and free of strong odours from cooking, floor polish, colognes or aftershave, or smoking. In particular, **NO SMOKING!**

Containers: Wine should be served in standard wine glasses, preferably those which conform to INAO design. These are tulip-shaped with a clear bowl, and are of the best proportion to show the wine while allowing the bouquet to develop. Spittoons should be provided; anything from old but clean plastic bleach bottles with a cutout in the side, to water pitchers, will do.

Accompaniment: Plain bread and sparkling water should be available. For less formal tastings, apples are also suitable. There is an old saying, "Buy wine over apples, sell it over cheese", which correctly reminds us that apples increase our critical faculties for wine, while cheese decreases it. You want all your faculties sharp, so do not use cheese in a serious tasting.

Documentation: Tasters take notes and score the wines. There are two basic approaches to scoring, and which one you use really depends on your personal preference. The first method is to score each wine out of twenty points. This has two sub-variants; in one, the taster subtracts points for such faults as excess acidity, low or poor bouquet, oxidation, and so on. This tends to be very mechanistic, and can easily result in a wine with some strong points but also a couple of very serious faults rating equally with one which is rather innocuous with only a few minor faults, and which is consequently much more drinkable. The second subvariant is to simply assign a score based on overall impression; in the total, 18 and above represent an extraordinary wine, 15 to 17 an excellent one, 12 to 14 a good one, 9 to 11 a pleasant one, 6 to 8 an acceptable wine, and 0 to 5 a poor or objectionable wine.

Both of these sub-variants are suitable primarily where wines are to be assessed by a "jury" and the individual ratings averaged. In addition, the top score of 20 leaves little room for differentiation among a number of wines.

Where a smaller number of judges is to consider a larger number of wines, or where one wishes to be absolutely certain that his or her own rating fairly represents the difference between wines, the approach used by the Amateur Winemakers of Ontario and the Amateur Winemakers of Canada offers the most flexibility. This approach uses a maximum score of 100, divided into four categories. These categories, and the rating guide used with them, are as follows:

Colour: Maximum 5 points

0 Unattractive

1 Unsuitable

2 Poor

3 Weak

4 Acceptable

5 Ideal

Clarity: Maximum 10 points

0 Muddy

1-2 Cloudy

3-5 Hazy

6-9 Clear

10 Brilliant

Bouquet: Maximum 25 points

Bouquet: Maximum 25 points

- 0- 11 Unpleasant
- 12 Lacking in any serious bouquet
- 13-17 increasing development of bouquet with definite quality
- 18-21 Excellent bouquet
- 22-25 Bordering on perfection rich, typical, clean and inviting

Overall quality and Balance: 60 points

- 0- 29: Flawed
- 30 So-so
- 31-39 Increasing quality as decently-made wine
- 40-49 Definite quality, wine which displays the finesse that one expects in the above average to sup
- 50-60 A wine of great rarity and quality; seldom experienced.

HAIKU FOR THE COMPUTER ERA

by Ralph Buttrum

Ralph Buttrum of Perth Tay sends along the following Haikus for those condemned to use silicon tools:

A file that big?

It might be very useful.

But now it is gone.

The Web site you seek cannot be located but endless others exist

Chaos reigns within.

Reflect, repent, and reboot.

Order shall return.