



AWOnews



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A forum for the exchange of news and opinions on home

winemaking in Ontario

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The Early Fall Edition

"Tis the last rose of summer, left blooming alone;

All her lovely companions are faded and gone"

-Thomas Moore

"Irish Melodies"

IN THIS ISSUE:

by Paul Dunseath



As the harvest approaches, and the growers report veraison

in the vineyards, our thoughts turn to the new winemaking season. Our new

President presents his thoughts; a number of items gleaned from the news are

repeated; Gord Barnes reports on the results at the Canada finals; the Eastern

Ontario Amateur Wine Competition moves this year to Peterborough; Tom

Ostler shares his secrets of success; and some thoughts on sulphur to tickle your nose. On with the show!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Glenn Keown

As this is my first message as President of the AWO, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Clubs from Ottawa for their splendid Conference held in the Capital City.

To all the medal winners congratulations. As you may know some of these wines went onto the Canada Judging in Calgary and to those winners also congratulations.

To Dan Ostler, on behalf of all the members of the AWO, thank you for the time (years) you spent as President. I know from our conversations that you feel strongly about the organization and want to see it grow in all aspects.

Congratulations also go to Gordon Barnes, on being presented with the

Outstanding Service Award. As most already know, Gord is always there and can be counted on for going that extra mile for us.

To the new Board of Directors, congratulations. As of this writing the Board has not yet had a meeting to lay out plans for the following couple of years. Once the meeting has been held, further information will be posted for all members.

Shortly a survey will be distributed asking questions regarding interests and other topics related to winemaking. Elia Gallo, Chairman of Education, has spent a great deal of time working on this form. When the questionnaire is received PLEASE do not ignore it. Once these forms are returned, they will be tallied by the Education Chairman. This will enable us to pinpoint areas of interest and include them in our Education format.

Good luck to all winemakers for the Millennium harvest.

MUCH MORE REASONABLE ICEWINE FOR CHINA

On a recent visit to Vancouver (well, actually, Burnaby) we happened upon a

sign indicating "Brew on Premise" as well as wine kits for sale. Our natural curiosity led us into the store, and to Frank Wang, President of Xinfra Economic and Trade Ltd. Mr. Wang has penetrated the Chinese market with Canadian IceWine! There is a punitive tariff for alcoholic beverages imported into China, but Mr. Wang. has arranged for fine-quality juices and concentrates from Niagara to be imported into China, at low tariff, where they are fermented in his plant near Beijing to produce a "Canadaian" (sic) Ice-wine style wine, which sells - in the 375ml bottle - for about \$35 Cdn, quite a price at Chinese salaries. Frank tells us that the wine, in a presentation box, is selling well, and weaning the Chinese citizens in the area off the powerful - and health-damaging - products of the state, such as MauTai, which has a foul smell (believe me) and the kick of a mule.

May we salute an entrepreneur who is not only selling our superior grape products abroad, but is also showing a remarkable degree of entrepreneurship?

Xinfra Economic and Trade Unit can be contacted at

1215 Dewar Way,

Port Coquitlam, BC V3C 5Z1

or at fzwang@aicompro.com

AROMA WHEEL AVAILABLE

The August issue of "Vintages" magazine, available free from the LCBO as long as they last, contains a full-colour version of Dr. Ann Noble's "aroma wheel", suitable for laminating. Many wine tasters and judges find it a very useful tool in identifying aromas in wine, proceeding from the most general identifier to a specific one, such as for example from "Fruity" to "Tree Fruit" to "apricot". Recommended highly for the serious taster.

IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA...

Listeners to a recent "Ontario to-day" call-in dealing with the environment will have heard one caller, whose heart is probably in the right place even if her logic isn't, arguing that, since beer bottles are a standard size (oh?) and returnable for refund of deposit, wine and liquor bottles should also be standardized and

refundable. The mind boggles at the concept of a conference (which would have to be on an international scale) where every region but one is expected to end centuries of tradition and adopt a single shape. The Burgundians, of course, would argue that their shape should be the standard, whereas the winemakers along the Rhine would argue with equal vehemence that theirs is more elegant. Then, of course, comes the logistical problem (and environmentally costly issue) of actually returning those bottles to Chile, or Australia, even if they did agree in the first place. Royal Chambord liqueur, or Dimple Haig, in the same bottles as the cheapest red plonk. Sure.

Someone once said that the essential characteristic of a stupid person is to demand simple answers to complex problems....

A CANADIAN SOURCE OF BARRELS

A start-up company located in Almonte, Ontario, is planning to produce barrels for the home winemaking market and then expand into the commercial market.

Made from Canadian white oak, the "small barrels" (size unspecified) are

expected to sell for "about \$220". Caird's Cooperage can be contacted by phone at (613) 256-8211 or by e-mail at dcaird@netcom.ca.

SULPHUR IN WINEMAKING

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Sulphur has been used in winemaking for many centuries. In fact, from the Middle Ages until well into this century, barrels for storing wine were disinfected by burning a sulphur stick inside them. Today more controllable methods are used, but the end result is the same; and despite recent concerns about the use of "sulphite" (which is actually a partial term for one of the more convenient sulphur-containing chemicals in wide use), it is unlikely that we will see the elimination of sulphur from winemaking anytime soon. The reason is that no other method offers the range of desirable effects that sulphur provides, with its convenience of use, measurability, and low cost.

What we actually use is not sulphur itself, nor even (though we think of it in those forms), sodium or potassium metabisulphite, but rather the gas Sulphur

Dioxide (SO₂), which is obtained variously by burning pure sulphur, or by dissolving Sodium or Potassium Metabisulphite in water, preferably a slightly acidic solution. SO₂ is a gas with a pungent odour, although not to be confused with Hydrogen Sulphide (H₂S), which is the odour of rotten eggs. By contrast, the odour of SO₂ is the typical one you smell when you take the lid off a jar of metabisulphite.

As mentioned earlier, SO₂ is particularly useful in winemaking. It is an antioxidant, preserving the fresh flavour of the wine and preventing browning. It is a sterilant; and what is more interesting about this is that its effects are far more pronounced with wild yeasts and bacteria than it is with cultured wine yeasts, which have a fair tolerance for it. In other words, it's selective in its actions and favours the organisms that we wish to favour. It can also be used to stop a malolactic fermentation where this type of activity is undesirable. By inhibiting new budding of the yeast it enhances clearing of the wine. Finally, in small concentrations it results in the final products of fermentation showing above average levels of glycerol, which makes wines smoother and more fully bodied in the taste.

Sulphur Dioxide can be added to wines in a number of ways; by burning elemental sulphur (a practice which probably has died out most everywhere...), by either adding a measured dose of sulphuric acid or bubbling pure SO₂ gas through the wine (techniques used in some wineries), or by adding a chemical which produces the gas in known quantities. For simplicity, home winemakers usually employ the latter technique. The products we use are Potassium Metabisulphite, Sodium Metabisulphite and Campden Tablets (a pelletized form).

Taking them in order, Potassium Metabisulphite in crystal form is the cheapest and - for people making a reasonable quantity of wine - probably also the most convenient. Sodium Metabisulphite has fallen into disfavour, in part because it leaves Sodium in the wine, a concern for people with high blood pressure, but also because Potassium Metabisulphite assists in the deposition of Potassium Tartrate crystals, while the Sodium salt does not. Finally, Campden tablets, pre-measured doses of Potassium Metabisulphite, have the convenience of being precise doses, but with the drawbacks of higher cost and the bother of crushing them up before using them.

Whichever your choice, when the raw material is dissolved in water, much the same things happen. The material disassociates, by which we mean that it breaks up into particles that could not exist on their own, and are looking for other particles to team up with -- sort of a singles' bar for molecules. The action is swift and constant, and all possible combinations come to exist (wow, this is getting to be pretty steamy stuff!), with the interesting effect that the combinations all stabilize. One of those, for our purposes, is sulphur dioxide. What that means is that if you add sulphur, in whatever form, or remove it, the amount of free SO₂ is constant as a percentage of the total sulphur available.

How Much to use?

For preserving a wine, a level of 50 parts per million (ppm) is normally recommended. This is achieved by using 1 Campden tablet per gallon, or 1/2 teaspoon of Potassium Metabisulphite crystals in 4 gallons (1 teaspoon of Potassium Metabisulphite, or K₂S as you may see it in some bills, being equal to 8 Campden tablets). At 50 ppm you should not normally detect an objectionable sulphite content. Many people can at 100 ppm, and most people do at 150.

It is instructive to determine your level of sensitivity to SO₂, specifically 50, 100,

and 150 ppm. It is useful therefore to set up a "smell test" of sulphite to determine your threshold. Remember that 50 parts per million (ppm) is equal to 1 ml per 20 litres. Look for it primarily in the nose, and only secondarily in the taste. Following that, you might want to try increasing the concentration to determine where you find the sulphite smell. This is how we train judges!

WHAT'S NEW ON WINETALK?

One of the most contributed-to "threads" on Winetalk has been on corks, natural vs composite vs plastic; and the issue of corkiness.

Interestingly, the magazine Wine Spectator recently reported that Spain's Bodegas Vega Sicilia has recalled its Valbuena 5.0 Riserva 1994 (\$70 US per bottle) "after discovering a problem with trichloroanisole taint, which causes 'corkiness' in wines". After testing the entire facility a consultant determined that two batches of corks were 'inconsistent'. The recall is expected to cost \$3 million (US).

REPORT FROM THE AWC

by Gordon Barnes

The results of the AWC 2000 competition (July 8) were announced on a Calgary web site [<http://www.cadvision.com/corbett/AWC/index.htm>] the day after the event. The Ontario entries got the most points by a slim margin.

The AGM dealt with several issues which could have an impact on future competitions. BC brought 3 motions - 1. Raise the Bottle fee, 2. Change the awards to medals rather the 1-2-3-4, and 3. Change class definitions to include some varietals. (Your club rep has the full text of these motions.)

Although some discussion floated around during the year, the official wording was received only a few days before the meeting. Since this did not provide an opportunity for discussion and for the provincial clubs to express their views, the vote was postponed until the new year.

It should be noted that the 2 clubs in Manitoba have little difficulty selecting the 4 bottles per class to represent the province at the National Competition. Alberta

and BC have provincial competitions which are open to all the provincial members - not just the club winners as in Ontario. For example George Gibson (formerly from Ottawa and now BC rep) got 2 Bronze medals from the 64 entries in the BC "Bordeaux Style" class and 2 Bronze medals from the 27 entries in the "Red Pinot Family" class.

The addition of 3 classes to the national competition would result in a total of 17 classes (Sparkling Cider, 3 brews and 13 wines) Given the 2000 changes, the Ontario 2001 Finals will have 30 classes (21 wines, 6 brews, Cider, Label and Mead(demonstration). An Excel spreadsheet on Winetalk details what I believe to be the situation in the other 3 competing provinces.

I believe that most AWO members will support the National change to medal judging as it will give a better and broader reward for excellence. It will not reward the best bottle in a poor class with 100 points as the current system does. If passed, the 2001 competition of 17 classes, allowing 4 entries per class, will give each province 68 entries.

Try this one on for size. Since medal judging recognizes excellence, could we better display our best products if we could send 68 entries of our best wines -

regardless of class, but still limiting one entry per maker per class. If that were the case this year we have sent few Rosés and Brews and a dozen bottles of White Table wines. Discuss this at club level and have your Club Rep report to Dan Ostler - our AWC Provincial Director

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

by Tom Ostler

Sorry I had to miss the convention - you guys always put on a terrific show, so I have not been surprised by positive comments I've heard from those who did make it. I have been totally tied up with work - completing a major assignment before taking off for France in July. I was even more sorry about missing when I found out that I had won two golds, and the best red trophy - WOW!!!! - reading about it on "makewine" website is no substitute for jumping up and down in front of your peers!

The site doesn't mention ingredients, although Gord did post them on Winetalk.

I thought that I owed it to the readership of the AWOnews to let them in on

these two wines. It may, or may not, be unfortunate, but both of my wines were from Peter Brehm product, and I noted from Gord's notes that a number of others were too. This is probably worth a note in the news regarding quality of original product.

More importantly, my two entries exhibit two of the prime axioms of winemaking, that we sometimes fail to abide: 1. patience is a virtue = my Gold in Cab Family class was 100% Cab Sauv from Chalk Hill in Sonoma purchased through Peter Brehm in 1985!!!! It was the first batch of grapes that Peter Aust and I made on our own when we first established Humber Valley Vintners. It was aged on oak chips, filtered and bottled in 1987. 2. the whole is greater than the sum of its parts = my Gold in Other Red and the Best Red in show was a 50/50 blend of Syrah and Mourvedre from Sonoma purchased from Peter Brehm in 1994. It was barrel aged from fall of 1995 until 1996 and bottled in 1997 - unfiltered.

My thanks to all the judges who looked favourably on these wines - in terms of judging consistency, both wines were head and shoulders above all other reds in our club competition where they were double judged and awarded Gold medals.

Tom Ostler

AFTER ACTION REPORT - AWO 2000

By virtually any measure, AWO 2000 was a resounding success. Near record numbers attended, and the final accounting shows that AWO will receive its maximum share of the overall revenues.

So many people registered for the seminars, in fact, that some seminars had to be "capped" due to the physical size of the available seminar rooms, or, in the case of the "Vertical tasting of Cabernets and Chardonnays - to the availability of the wines. Only two bottles were available of each, which led to a practical maximum of 40 participants. To accommodate the several disappointed attendees who had wanted to attend, but could not, Ralph Buttrum came up with the idea of "Who wants to be a sommelier?", offered as a late addition to the program, and this was well attended.

In numeric terms, there were 161 registrants. Of these 122 attended the Saturday Lunch, 129 the Saturday Banquet, and 127 the Sunday Brunch.

The Seminar program attracted the following numbers:

Cooking with Wine: 64

Filtering for results: 86

Grape growing in northern climes: 45

Yeast and varieties: 50

Which wine? Which glass? 45

Improving club activities: 36

Lab testing: 39

What's "hopping" to my beer?: 17

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The bus tour: 18