

BATHURST NATIONAL COOL CLIMATE WINE SHOW CHAIRMANS REPORT 2011

The 2011 National Cool Climate Wine Show was most successful from both entry numbers and a record total of 41 Gold medals being awarded.

Entries were slightly above 2010 in a year when most wine shows had reduced entries. The Gold medal total reflected a welcome lift in wine quality across many, but not all classes.

The strongest classes were the oaked Chardonnay and Shiraz from 2009 and 2010 while the 2008 Shiraz class still showed many fresh and interesting wines.

It seems clear that both oaked Chardonnay and Shiraz styles are undergoing a quiet revolution towards lighter, brighter and more fruit driven wines.

The better Chardonnays still show the traditional complex characters of barrel fermentation, lees stirring and malolactic, but this is overlaid onto an intense core of bright, earlier picked fruit for fresher livelier wine with greater longevity.

Sadly most of the unwooded Chardonnay entries were still bland and uninteresting.

The 'new wave' Shiraz style is medium bodied but has intense and complex fruit often helped by carbonic notes from whole bunch or berry inclusion. These wines have excellent length of flavour, ripe but not obtrusive tannins, and are dressed up with high quality, mostly French oak. Again freshness is a hall-mark.

The judges' comments for both the Shiraz and Chardonnay classes suggested that oak should be used carefully and not become a primary character. Quality rather than quantity is the key. Both of these newer styles seem ideally suited to cooler climate fruit.

The Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc classes produced few outstanding wines although the standard of the 2011 Sauvignon Blanc was surprisingly good given the difficult season. Too many 2010 and older wines were tired and / or phenolic.

There were four Gold medals awarded in the Pinot Gris/Grigio classes which would probably equal the total Gold medal tally in all the major shows combined. The lesson from this appears to be that Pinot Gris, which mostly lacks flavour and interest when grown in warmer climates can shine in cooler areas.

The 'other' white and white blend classes were disappointing with many wines lacking freshness and varietal intensity. This also applied to the sweet white classes,.

While the Pinot Noir classes produced four Gold medals and the Champion Wine of the Show the judges noted that too many wines showed premature development. This was noticeable in the 2010 class and worsened in the older classes.

No Gold medals were awarded in the 2008 class with wines described as "past their use-by date" Three year old Pinot Noir wines should not be over the hill!

In the Cabernet Sauvignon classes the judges were looking for wines with good varietal character, generous middle palates and ripe tannins, but too often found green, astringent and tired wines. Again the 2008 wines were the most disappointing, with no Gold medals awarded.

Merlot confirmed its position as a valuable component of Bordeaux style blends but was not exciting as a straight varietal.

Apart from an excellent Tempranillo the alternative red varietals failed to impress, with judges commenting on a general lack of intensity and defined varietal character.

The judges unofficial 'Dare to be Different' award was given to a Pinotage /Voignier blend in class 6030. Brave stuff, but good.

In the white and rosé sparkling wine class a large gap existed between the top award wines and the balance of the entries. The top wines were aged, balanced and complex while still fresh and lively, however, too many of the others were simple and primary or too obviously varietal.

In conclusion, while a record number of Gold medals were awarded and the general standard of entries has undoubtedly improved, there are still too many wines scoring below Bronze level.

Lack of freshness and varietal character in whites and prematurely brown colours, over use of oak and green flavours and tannins in red are still major problems that winemakers should recognise and address

Tim Knapstein
Chair of Judges