

THE NATIONAL COOL CLIMATE WINE SHOW 2015

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Tim Knappstein Chief Judge & Chair

Riesling;

Australian style Riesling should be bright, fresh and lively with citrus flavour and citrus/floral notes on the nose. Wines should be squeaky clean and very low in phenolics, finishing with clean acidity balanced by fruit intensity.

It is the epitome of "wine made in the vineyard"

The judges commented that the best wines showed pure Riesling fruit with depth and intensity but many wines had touches of oxidation, were forward or showed obvious phenolic characters. Other problems were fermentation related – V.A and sulphide.

Sauvignon Blanc;

Traditionally Sauvignon Blanc has been made as a pure fruit style, but a number are now appearing with various degrees of barrel ferment characters, where makers seek wines with more interest and complexity. The Gold medal wine in the 2013 & older class is an excellent example of this style. The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc class was disappointing with many wines showing as dull and generally lacking varietal intensity. Several wines showed fermentation V.A, excessively green fruit characters, for which residual sugar is not an antidote. As for Riesling and any other aromatic white variety, care in wine handling is vitally important.

Other White Varieties;

A mixed bag, with some wines badly oxidised or showing poor phenolic management. Viognier seems to present a particular challenge in achieving a balance between good varietal character and excessive phenolics. Cool climate Semillon continues to straddle the fence between ripe herbaceous fruit and green characters. Too many fall on the green side. It is encouraging to see so many Gruner Veltliners appearing, albeit with lots of style variations.

Sweet Whites;

A difficult class for both the exhibitors and judges, encompassing everything from simple Moscato styles to fully botrytised and concentrated traditional wines. This was not helped by wines in both classes lacking freshness and showing winemaking faults.

Pinot Noir;

An important cool climate red class, with this show probably having the *largest Pinot Noir classes of any mainland show*. Pinot Noir is all about perfume and flavour in a light to medium bodied wine, and the judges commented on a trend towards bigger, more tannic styles making a significant number of wines look solid and dry 'reddy'. Pinot is about grace and elegance, not bigness. Other issues are lack of freshness and premature development – poor browning colours and over use of oak. Use of whole bunches in fermentations can give Pinot Noir wines a significant life on the nose, but can also introduce sappy flavours and green tannins, so should be used with restraint.

Sparkling Wines;

A particularly diverse class, with a wide range of colours ages and dosage levels. The judges were looking for freshness and good levels of autolysis but many wines were rated as dull and stale.

Cabernet Sauvignon;

Although Cabernet Sauvignon classes have been stronger in recent shows, problems remain; the most important of which is the lack of ripe fruit characters. This shows not only in green aromas, but in lean palate structures and green astringent tannins. Cabernet Sauvignon as a late ripening variety, particularly in cool climate areas, requires warm sites (North Facing) and optimised fruit exposure to sunlight to develop ripe flavours and tannins. This in turn may help with another problem; forward colours. Other problems include over use of oak and the usual winemaking issues of V.A, Brett etc.

Chardonnay;

This is rapidly becoming the most vibrant class of the show, with exhibitors vying to follow the new trend of fresher, lower alcohol but very complex and interesting wines. The judges rewarded a range of styles, showing more or less wine making artefact but all with a strong cover of fruit flavours. Is it pleasing to see that the overall standard of wine handling has improved, the judges having been very critical of the freshness of barrel fermented whites in the past. It should be noted that this newer, lighter style of Chardonnay needs a lighter hand with MLF and oak use.

Shiraz;

An important and increasingly interesting class, with the cool climate Shiraz style evolving rapidly. Wines are becoming increasingly complex with the inclusion of whole bunches and whole berries in fermentation giving enhance and lifted fruit characters. These wines are medium weight and fruit driven and a marked counterpoint to the traditional heavy and oaky warm area styles. As with the modern Chardonnay style, care should be taken not to overdo oak use, or whole bunch inclusion to the point where sappy, stemmy flavours become obvious.

This change in Shiraz style is accelerating, with many more of these wines showing in the 2013 Shiraz class. However good the top wines are, the old problems of Brettanomyces, sulphide and over use of oak remain to be rectified.

Pinot Gris;

Unfortunately the Pinot Gris wines from 2014 lived up to the reputation of being a hard variety from which to extract any flavour and interest. With one notable exception the wines were generally described as dull and lacking varietal character. Faults included premature development fermentation V.A and sulphide. The older class was described as “unimpressive”

Rose;

A disappointing class, with many wines showing poor, dull colours or presenting as light dry reds. Many wines showed faults premature development, V.A and Brett.

Red Varieties & Blends;

A good selection of “other” varieties, with Malbec making a welcome appearance – Thank you Argentina! However several of the usual winemaking faults were present – V.A, premature development and Brett with several comments on green unripe flavours and tannins. The blends were more conventional with most being Cabernet Merlot variations, including all the Gold medals. Faults again included green characters, V.A and over use of oak.

There is a message here- spend less money on oak and make better wine!