

Chairman of Judges Report 2016 SIWC

It was, as always, a pleasure to be Chairman of Judges at the 36th Sydney International Wine Competition, in my twelfth year as Chairman.

This year is a significant milestone in the history of the competition, as the Founder and Competition Director Warren Mason is stepping down from his role to enjoy a well deserved retirement with his wife Jacquie. The new Directors of the competition Brett and Michaela Ling were heavily involved in the organization and running of this year's competition and have a great enthusiasm for the competition – I am in no doubt the competition is in good hands. With Warren and Jacquie moving nearby and available for consultation I am sure their guiding influence will mean a seamless transition.

From its small beginning in the early 80's when Warren developed this competition within the NSW branch of the International Wine and Food Society, the competition has grown under his guidance in to a tremendously successful consumer focused wine competition. The first of its kind to offer wine consumers the results of wines tasted at the table alongside appropriate food it remains the pre-eminent wine show of its kind. The food also deserves a special mention. For well over 20 years Jacquie Mason created and prepared all of the dishes for the competition judging and I can say from my many years involvement the food has always been superb. Jacquie's Goats Cheese Soufflé that was served as an accompaniment to the Sauvignon Blanc class is still often mentioned in glowing terms by returning judges that were lucky enough to judge that year.

The smooth organization for the judging of 2000 wines by thirteen judges, with the added complication of the final 400 wines being re-judged with food, is a remarkable achievement by the very professional team who run this unique competition. The judging team this year consisted of some returning judges, as well as a good mix of new judges, consisting of seven Australian judges, four New Zealanders, one American and one Swede. Amongst this group there three Masters of Wine (MW), one Master Sommelier (MS), six winemakers, a wine journalist and a wine researcher/lecturer. Overall an excellent mix of both technical and style judges who all showed great dedication to the judging as well as some good humoured banter, and I thank them for making the competition a pleasure to Chair.

This wine competition is all about providing the consumer with a range of wine options for a range of different dining situations, and I believe the competition has once again achieved this. A real diversity of wine styles produced from an ever-increasing range of grape varieties have been awarded either Top 100, Blue Gold, Gold or Highly Commended status. It is pleasing to see not just diversity between the classes, but also within the classes, providing the consumer with some really interesting options of wines to experiment with.

In the Sparkling Wines class the French dominated this year with five of the seven wines in the Top100 & Blue Gold categories coming from Champagne. Deviation Road winery from the Adelaide Hills is a winery fast developing a reputation for high quality

Sparkling at it was the only non-Champagne in the Top 100. Likewise a New Zealand sparkling wine stopped a clean sweep by the French in the Blue Gold awards. Two quality sparkling Shiraz wines from Victoria also featured in the top awards.

Cool climate Riesling dominated the Aromatics category this year, with eight out of the ten wines in both the Top 100 and Blue Gold categories. One Riesling from Marlborough in NZ was very highly rated, along with three from the classic area of Eden Valley. It was also exciting to see newer regions featuring strongly such as Mount Barker in WA, Orange in NSW and Mt Gambier from the southern tip of South Australia. Breaking the Riesling mold in the class were two excellent Gewürztraminers from this much underrated variety from Marlborough and Nelson.

The semi-sweet white class had four wines achieving either Top 100, Blue Gold or Gold status, all from New Zealand and all made from Riesling, reflecting the suitability of NZ's cooler climates for producing high class wines of this style.

The Sauvignon Blanc class was as usual dominated by the Marlborough region of New Zealand, a region that has become a world benchmark for this variety. All but three wines in the Top 100, Blue Gold and Gold Sauvignon Blanc winners were from Marlborough. One wine from Marlborough's neighboring region of Nelson, a classy barrel fermented style from CJ Pask winery of Hawkes Bay, and a lone Australian SB from the Adelaide Hills were all that stopped a clean sweep of the category by Marlborough.

The Pinot Noir classes again produced a strong showing with 30 wines selected for the Top 100, Blue Gold & Gold categories. New Zealand dominated the results, including 27 from the Marlborough region. Central Otago fared well and was joined by one wine from North Canterbury and one from Hawkes Bay. Australia featured with three wines, two from the exciting region of Tasmania, and one from Geelong.

The Lighter Bodied Whites class has proved to be one of the more interesting and varied of all the classes in terms of results. The Top 100 & Blue Gold award winners feature wines made from Pinot Gris, Verdelho, Semillon, Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc blends, Vermentino, Gruner Veltliner, Sauvignon Gris, Albarino and Savagnin. Add to this list an Italian Pecorino from the Marche region that received a Gold medal and there is a lot of fascinating quality wines available to the consumer to choose from. The Gruner Veltliner in particular that I selected for the Chairman of Judges trophy is a very good example of this alternative variety.

The Medium Bodied Dry White category included 14 Top 100 and Blue Gold medal winners. Australian Chardonnay was to the fore with seven elegant wines from the classic Chardonnay areas of Margaret River and the Yarra Valley, as well as Coonawarra and the Barossa. New Zealand was represented with three Pinot Gris from Marlborough, a region that is proving to be ideally suited to the variety, and one from Central Otago. A Gruner Veltliner from Marlborough and an Arneis blend from the Riverina added some welcome diversity to the results.

The Fuller Bodied Dry White Class is the domain of Chardonnay, with nine of the 11 Top 100 and Blue Gold medal winners being awarded to Chardonnay. Australia had five wines from a range of five different high quality cool climate regions. The four NZ wines were also well spread, coming from Gisborne, Hawkes Bay and Marlborough. Two Pinot Gris from Marlborough again highlighted the success of this variety in that region. Pinot Gris is providing Marlborough an opportunity to be known on the world stage for another white wine apart from Sauvignon Blanc.

In the Light Bodied Dry Red category a good mix of wine styles was represented, although not quite the diversity of varieties as in previous years. GSM blends from the classic areas of Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale featured strongly. These were contrasted by a range of cooler climate Shiraz wines from a range of regions. Hawkes Bay in NZ is building a strong reputation for this style of wine which was supported by a strong showing in this class. A number of Australian Shiraz's also featured from a variety of areas such as Orange and Adelaide Hills. The dominance of these Rhone varieties (Shiraz, Grenache) was broken only by two Tempranillo wines, one from Padthaway and one from McLaren Vale, highlighting the versatility of the grape to make the full spectrum of styles in Australia from light to fuller bodied wines.

The Medium Bodied Dry Red category was again a very successful category, with 37 wines being selected for the Top 100 and Blue Gold awards, the most of any class in the show. This category has long been the domain of the Australian wines and this year was no exception with all but three wines in these two categories being Australian Shiraz or Cabernet Sauvignon dominant wines. Margaret River was the most successful region for Cabernet Sauvignon which is of no surprise, with a particularly strong showing from the 2013 vintage. The Shiraz wines in these top two categories were all South Australian from a diverse range of regions, all the way from the warmth of the Barossa through to the cool climate of Mt Benson. This Australian dominance was halted by the inclusion of three very interesting imported wines – two blended red wines from Portugal and one Primitivo (Zinfandel) from Puglia in the heel of Italy.

The Fuller Bodied Dry Red class had 25 wines awarded in the Top 100 & Blue Gold categories. This class is rather unsurprisingly dominated by Australia, with two reds from Spain stopping a clean sweep – one a Carinena/Shiraz/Grenache blend and one a Grenache dominant blend – two interesting wines worth seeking out. The Australian wines are made up of Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon dominant wines, and are from a pleasingly diverse range of regions and climates. One Tempranillo from the Barossa Valley also rated very highly and showed the exciting potential for this variety in the warmer regions of Australia.

Hence, in summary, I feel the consumer has a very interesting and diverse range of high quality wines to select from this year's results providing many enjoyable options for a range of dining occasions.