

Chairman of Judges Report 2017 SIWC

It was, as always, a pleasure to be Chairman of Judges at the 37th Sydney International Wine Competition, in my thirteenth year as Chairman.

This year represented the first year of the competition that the new Directors Brett and Michaela Ling were running solo following the retirement of the founder of the competition Warren Mason. I am pleased to report, aided by a very professional and experienced back of house team, the competition was once again run in a very professional and efficient manner. Michael Manners and his army of chefs produced the usual quality of superb food for not just the judging with food section, but for the whole week, so there were certainly no judges that went home hungry - more likely a number that went home with belts moved out to the next notch. Hence, congratulations to Brett and Michaela for the smooth running of the competition this year.

The smooth organization for the judging of 2000 wines by fourteen 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 7 Australian based judges, 4 New Zealander based judges, one Swiss based American and one Canadian. Amongst this group there were six Masters of Wine (MW), 6 winemakers, 3 wine journalists 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. 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 6 of the 10 wines in the Top100 & Blue Gold categories coming from Champagne. The other 4 wines came from the cool climates of Tasmania, Marlborough, and Central Otago, with an interesting Sparkling Riesling from Waipara adding a quite different style to the mix.

Riesling dominated the Aromatics category again this year, with 5 out of the 9 wines in both the Top 100 and Blue Gold categories. Four of these Rieslings were from the Clare Valley Polish Hill sub region, a classic region for dry Riesling. Interesting 3 of these Clare Rieslings were from one producer – Jaeschkes Hill River – an outstanding result. Two excellent Gewurztraminers from New Zealand spoilt a clean sweep for the Rieslings, and I would strongly recommend trying these two wines alongside some Thai food. Gewurztraminer is a much underrated food wine in my opinion, and these two excellent examples are worth serious consideration.

The Semi-sweet white class had 4 wines achieving either Top 100 or 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 3 wines in the Top 100 and Blue Gold categories were from Marlborough. Two wines were from Marlborough's neighbouring region of Nelson, and a wine from Margaret River that made the Top 100 category was all that stopped the kiwi's taking the whole class.

The Pinot Noir classes again produced a strong showing with 19 wines selected for the Top 100 and Blue Gold categories. New Zealand dominated the results with all 19 of these wines with a fairly even spread of awards between Marlborough, Central Otago and the Wairarapa/Martinborough regions. Vintages were mostly 2015 and 2014, reflecting two very strong years for Pinot Noir in these regions.

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 categories feature wines made from Pinot Gris, Viognier from New Zealand, as well as Semillon, Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc blends, Vermentino, Gruner Veltliner, Chardonnay and a very good Italian white blend all from a wide variety of Australian regions and climates. Add to this list an Albarino from the Rias Baixas region of Spain and there is a lot of fascinating quality wines available to the consumer to choose from.

The Medium Bodied Dry White provided 14 wines selected in to the Top 100 and Blue Gold categories. Moving into the medium bodied whites meant Chardonnay the predominant variety with 10 of these wines, 7 from Australia and three from New Zealand. A wide variety of Australian regions featured with wines from cooler areas such as Mt Benson, the Adelaide Hills and Margaret River alongside warmer area such as the Barossa, Eden and Hunter Valley. New Zealand was represented with 3 Pinot Gris from Marlborough, a region that is proving to be ideally suited to the variety. A Sauvignon/Semillon blend from the Margaret River region again showcased what has become a benchmark blend of the region.

The Fuller Bodied Dry White Class is the domain of Chardonnay, with 9 of the 10 places in the Top 100 and Blue Gold lists being awarded to Chardonnay. Australia and New Zealand shared the honours with 5 wines each. The Australian wines came from three of the most highly regarded regions for Chardonnay in Australia, namely the Yarra Valley, Margaret River and the Adelaide Hills. The New Zealand wines came from Marlborough, Hawkes Bay and Gisborne. The list was made up with a very good quality Viognier from Hawkes Bay in New Zealand which showed that this variety can produce very classy full bodied whites when not overdone and allowed to keep some freshness and elegance.

The Light Bodied Dry Red category was dominated by Shiraz this year with 12 of the 16 wines that achieved Top 100 or Blue Gold status coming from this variety. Cooler climate regions are producing some excellent lighter bodied reds from this variety and there are some excellent examples in these awards from regions such as Hawkes Bay in New Zealand, as well as Great Southern in WA, the Adelaide Hills and some Central Victoria regions. The remaining wines in these awards are quite diverse, with a Nebbiolo from Central Victoria, a Grenache from Portugal, and two blended Cabernet and Merlot based reds from C.J.Pask winery in Hawkes Bay providing some interesting diversity to the list.

The Medium Bodied Dry Red category was again a very successful category, with 40 wines being selected for the Top 100 and Blue Gold awards being the most of any class in the show. This category has unsurprisingly long been the domain of the Australian wines and this year was no exception with all but 4 wines in these 2 categories being Australian. Varietal wines from either Shiraz or Cabernet Sauvignon dominated the class with classic area such as Margaret River, Clare Valley, Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale all producing a large number of top wines. A Tempranillo from the Barossa and a Cabernet Franc/Merlot blend from Pemberton provided two interesting alternatives that are worth seeking out. New Zealand featured with only two Syrah wines, one from Central Otago and one from Hawkes Bay, although the excellent Hawkes Bay Syrah also won the trophy in this class. An interesting Garnacha/Monastrell (Grenache/Mataro) blend from Spain is also worth seeking out, and

for something completely different a DOC wine from Italy's Marche region made from the Lacrima grape variety is worth trying.

The Fuller Bodied Dry Red class had 21 wines awarded in the Top 100 & Blue Gold categories. This class was rather unsurprisingly dominated by Australia, with two reds from Italy and one from Chile stopping a clean sweep. Shiraz was the most represented variety with the two classic full bodied red regions of the Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale the most featured. Cabernet Sauvignon was also well represented with McLaren Vale featuring strongly. From Italy an interesting Aglianico from the Campania region, and a Primitivo (Zinfandel) from Puglia provide two very contrasting and food friendly wines to seek out. A Chilean Carmenere also provides an interesting point of difference from this classic old Bordeaux variety.

In summary, I feel the consumer has a diverse range of wine styles to select from this year's awards and I hope the results will provide encouragement and confidence to try a wide variety of options for different dining occasions.