BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

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CLASS E3 NON-VINIFERA RED

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PRESENTATION NOTES

After completing this session on non-Vinifera red wines, you should know the following:

- The definition and characteristics of wines in this class.
- A basic understanding of the history and origin of the wines in this class.
- An appreciation for the range of varietals that are within this class.

WINE CLASS – TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Currently, there is no wine class designated or any technical characteristics detailed for non-Vinifera red wines by the *BC Amateur Wine Association* (BCAWA).

The *Amateur Winemakers of Canada* (AWC) has defined Non Vinifera Red Wines as Class E3, and provides the following definition:

- A red table wine made from grapes of which at least 95% are inter-specific hybrid varieties
- The wines as varietals or blends include *Baco Noir, Castel, Chambourcin, Chancellor, De Chaunac, Frontenac, Landal, Landot, Lucie Kuhlmann, Léon Millot, Maréchal Foch, Michurinetz, Sabrevois, and St. Croix* among many others
- The remaining 5% of a non Vinifera red wine may be any ingredient
- As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style

WINE CLASS HISTORY

Non-Vinifera wines are derived primarily from inter-specific hybrid grape varieties. The hybrid grapes are the product of inter-specific crossings between two or more different *Vitis* species (a genus that includes about 60 species of vining plants). Hybrid grapes refer commonly to those grape varieties which are the product of a crossing between two or more different *Vitis* species.

The wines defined by *AWC's* Class E3 are derived primarily from French American hybrid grapes. They were developed in response to the *phylloxera plague* that destroyed most of the wine grapes in Europe (most notably in France) during the mid-19th century.

It should be noted that *Phylloxera* are very tiny, microscopic lice. They are pale yellow sap-sucking insects (related to aphids) that feed on the roots and leaves of grapevines. In general, *Phylloxera* causes deformations and secondary fungal infections to develop on roots in a girdle-like fashion. With time, the flow of nutrients and water to the vine are gradually cut off to the grape vines.

Historically, Phylloxera was introduced to Europe when avid Botanists in Victorian England collected specimens of American vines in the 1850's. Because phylloxera is native to North America, the native grape species are at least partially resistant. By contrast, the European wine grape Vitis vinifera proved to be very susceptible to the insect.

The *phylloxera* epidemic devastated vineyards in Britain and then moved to the continent, destroying most of the European wine growing industry. In response, French grape breeders in the 1860's began developing grape plants that had the wine producing characteristics of the European *Vitus vinife*ra with the *phylloxera* resistance of the American species.

During the 20th century, various hybrid breeding programs were developed in an attempt to deal with the consequences of the *Phylloxera*. After extensive attempts, the grafting of European varieties onto North American rootstock *(V. Lambrusco* and *V. riparia*) proved to be the most successful method of dealing with the problem. Those varieties which derive from *Vitis Lambrusco* parentage often have strong wild strawberry-like aromas. Hybrid grapes that are products from *Vitis riparia* often have an herbaceous nose with flavours reminiscent of black currants.

THE WINES OF THIS CLASS

The non-Vinifera red wines are based on hybrid grape varieties that have been introduced as a solution to many of the viticulture problems associated with cooler and more humid wine regions. These French American hybrid grapes have been broadly accepted across North America and have helped in the production of regionally specific wines (especially from smaller vineyards). The hybrid grapes are grown within the cooler, mid-latitude regions of North America (generally between latitudes 30° to 50°). They tend to be less susceptible to frost and cold winter temperatures, as well as fungus and disease. They are able to produce the appropriate chemistry for table wines.

Brief descriptions for several of the non-Vinifera Red Wines in this class are provided.

Baco Noir

This wine produces a medium body, deeply tinted red wine which is fruit forward and often carries aromas of black fruits and caramel. The wine's hybrid grape originated in the Burgundy region of France (see Figure 1)

Castel
This wine produces an intense full body red that is often characterized by cedar and tobacco aromas, with hints of plum and raspberry. The wine's hybrid grape originated in the Burgundy and the Loire Valley regions of France (see Figure 1)

Chambourcin

This wine produces spicy aromas, fruity flavors and some herbaceousness if fruit clusters are appropriately thinned. The wine can be somewhat low in tannins and can benefit from extended skin contact during fermentation. The wine's hybrid grape was originally developed in France's Rhone Valley (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The principal wine regions of France showing where the French American hybrid grapes were produced.

Chancellor

This wine is described as a sound, medium bodied red and rose' wines. The wine's hybrid grape has origins in the Rhone Valley of France (see Figure 1).

De Chaunac

This wine is described as a fruity, balanced red wine with good colour and body. It often has low to mild tannic content, and it is commonly used as a tannin diluting blending component in tannin-rich bulk wines. The wine's hybrid grape originated in the Burgundy region of France (see Figure 1).

Frontenac

This wine is described as a full-bodied red wine with cherry-plum aromas and moderate-to-low tannins that usually needs malolactic fermentation to reduce its cool climate acidity. It is often used in blends with low acid red wines. Frontenac wine is derived from a modern hybrid grape development program that originated in Minnesota in the late 1970's.

Lucie Kuhlmann

This wine is described as well balanced and mild, with a fruity Gamay-like taste profile. It is a French American hybrid with origins in the Rhone Valley of France (see Figure 1).

Leon Millot
This wine is a full body red with good colour and distinct berry aromas. The wine is derived from a French American hybrid grape with origins in the Alsace region of France (see Figure 1).

Maréchal Foch

This wine is a light body red that is deeply coloured with Burgundian-like character. The quality of the wine is dependent on vine age. It is a French American hybrid with origins in the Loire region of France (see Figure 1).

Sabrevois

This wine is a high-acid medium bodied complex red wine with good tannins. It ages well and is reported to blend well with Frontenac wines. It is derived from a modern hybrid grape development program similar to Frontenac wines.

THE FLIGHT

The non-Vinifera red wines in this flight are from Canada. Except for one, all the wines are from British Columbia. That is, from the Okanagan Valley in south-central BC, and the Cowichan Valley on southern Vancouver Island.

In this flight, you should expect balanced dry red table wines that have fruity aromas, with medium-to-long finishes. See the accompanying tasting notes for the complete description of these wines.