

CLASS E7 - DRY RED CABERNET SAUVIGNON
BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES PRESENTATION – JANUARY 2018
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AFTER READING THESE NOTES YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- What area of France is recognized for growing Cabernet Sauvignon?
- What are the other major growing regions for Cabernet Sauvignon?
- What two grape varieties were accidentally bred to create Cabernet Sauvignon?
- What grape varieties can be found in Meritage?
- What attributes does Cabernet Sauvignon grown in warm climates have?
- What attributes does Cabernet Sauvignon grown in cooler climates have?

BCAWA WINE CLASS and TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

CLASS E7 - DRY RED CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Wines in this class must contain at least 85% Cabernet Sauvignon.

WINE CHARACTERISTICS

Black currant, cassis, plum, black cherry and spice. It can also be marked by herb, olive, mint, tobacco, cedar and anise, and ripe, jammy notes. Generally accepted that oak improves it by softening tannins and imparting, woody, toasty, cedar, vanilla characters.

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	11% - 16%
Colour:	Medium red to garnet
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 - 0.995
Acidity:	5.0g/L - 6.7g/L
pH:	3.4 – 4.0

All entries in this class will be considered for the AWC National Competition as Class E1, Dry Red Bordeaux Style.

INTRODUCTION:

Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the world's most widely recognized red wine grape varieties. In the past century Cabernet Sauvignon has enjoyed a swell of popularity as one of the noble grapes in the world of wine.

HISTORY:

In the seventeenth century in southwestern France, an accidental breeding occurred between a red Cabernet Franc grape plant and a white Sauvignon Blanc grape plant and thus was born the most popular grape among wine drinkers: Cabernet Sauvignon

The word “Sauvignon” is believed to be derived from the French *sauvage* meaning “wild” and to refer to the grape being a wild *Vitis vinifera* vine native to France. The grape's true origins were discovered in 1996 with the use of DNA typing. The DNA evidence determined that Cabernet Sauvignon was the offspring of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc and the grape found its champion in the region of Bordeaux.

WHERE CABERNET SAUVIGNON IS GROWN:

Cabernet Sauvignon is grown in nearly every major wine producing country among a diverse spectrum of climates from Canada's Okanagan Valley to Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Major growing regions are France, Chile, United States, Australia, Italy, South Africa and Argentina.

In 1976, a Cabernet Sauvignon from Stags' Leap in the Napa Valley beat out the top Bordeaux Chateaus in the 1976 Judgment of Paris in a blind taste test. From that moment on, California Cabernet Sauvignon was launched into the world and began to be ordered at steakhouses around the globe.

Canadian examples of Cabernet Sauvignon abound, from retrained cooler-climate wines from Ontario to more full-bodied ones from British Columbia. Canadian Cabernets are normally sold under the varietal name, and they are often blended with Merlot or Cabernet Franc. Some blends are labeled “Meritage”. Note; Meritage (to rhyme with heritage), is a name for red and white Bordeaux-style wines without infringing on the Bordeaux (France) region's legally protected designation of origin.

A 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from the Old World is rare because the old world winemakers are awesome at blending varietals together. Cabernet Sauvignon became internationally recognized through it's prominence in Bordeaux wines where it is often blended with Merlot and Cabernet Franc. From France, the grape spread across Europe and the New World. For most of the 20th century, it was the most widely planted premium red wine grape until it was surpassed by Merlot in the 1990's. It's popularity is often attributed to its ease of cultivation – the grapes are thick skinned and the vines are hardy and naturally low yielding, budding late to avoid frost and resistant to viticultural hazards such as rot and insects. The vine is however susceptible to powdery mildew, which can be treated easily, and the wood diseases eutypa and exoriose, which cannot.

TERROIR AND TASTING NOTES:

What makes Cabernet Sauvignon remarkable to the taster is not only fruit flavor but its structure and ability to provide the perfect vehicle for individual vintage characteristics, wine-making and *levage* techniques (term meaning to “bring up” or “raise”, implying the complex processes and work needed to bring out wine's characteristics, qualities, and potential), and especially, local physical attributes and terroir.

The “green bell pepper” flavor:

There are a couple of noted Cabernet Sauvignon flavors that are intimately tied to the viticultural and climate influences. The most widely recognized is the herbaceous or green bell pepper flavor caused by pyrazines, which are more prevalent in under-ripened grapes. Pyrazine compounds are present in all Cabernet Sauvignon grapes and are gradually destroyed by sunlight as the grape ripens. In cooler climates, it is difficult to get Cabernet Sauvignon grapes to ripen fully to the point where pyrazine is not detected. The green bell pepper flavor is not considered a wine fault but it may not be desirable to all consumers' tastes.

The “mint and eucalyptus” flavor;

Mint flavors are often associated with wine regions that are warm enough to have low pyrazine levels but are still generally cool, such as Australia's Coonawarra region and some areas of Washington State. Soil could also be a contributor to the minty notes, since the flavor also appears in some wines from the Pauillac region but not from similar climate of Margaux. Resinous Eucalyptus flavors tend to appear in regions that are habitats for the eucalyptus tree, such as California's Napa and Sonoma Valleys and parts of Australia, but there has been no evidence to conclusively prove a direct link between proximity of eucalyptus trees and the presence of that flavor in the wine.

The classic profile of Cabernet Sauvignon tends to be full-bodied wines with high tannins and noticeable acidity that contributes to the wine's aging potential. Alcohol content can vary from 13.5 to 15.5%. Since Cabernet Sauvignon is grown in a wide range of climates and regions throughout the world it has varied flavors. It is a full bodied red wine with dark fruit flavors and savoury tastes. From New World countries the flavors are fruitier such as black cherry, licorice, black pepper and a dash of vanilla.

In cooler climates, Cabernet Sauvignon tends to produce wines with black currant notes that can be accompanied by green bell pepper notes, mint and cedar which will all become more pronounced as the wine ages. Clay and limestone based soils are often cooler, allowing less heat to reach the vines delaying ripening.

In more moderate climates the black currant notes are often seen with black cherry and black olive notes. In regions where the climate is warmer, there is emphasis on soil that is less fertile, which promotes less vigour in the vines which keeps yields low.

In very hot climates the current flavor can veer towards the over-ripe and “jammy” side. In parts of southern Australia, Cabernet Sauvignon wines tend to have a characteristic eucalyptus or menthol notes. In the Napa Valley the soil is more alluvial and dusty. In South Australian region of Coonawarra, Cabernet Sauvignon has produced vastly different results from grape vines planted in the region's “terra rosa” soil.

AGING AND OAKING:

One of the most noted traits of Cabernet Sauvignon is its affinity to oak, either during fermentation or in the barrel. In addition to having a softening effect on the grape's naturally high tannins, the unique wood flavors of vanilla and spice complement the natural grape flavors of black currant and tobacco. American oak, particularly from new barrels, imparts stronger oak flavors that are less subtle than those imparted by French oak.

Another noted trait is its ability to age and develop in the bottle, in addition to softening some of its austere tannins, new flavors can emerge and add to the wine's complexity. Overall, the majority of Californian Cabernets are meant to be approachable after only a couple of years in the bottle but can still have the potential to improve over time. Many premium Australian Cabernets will also need at least ten years to develop though many are approachable after two to five years. New Zealand wines are typically meant to be consumed young and will often maintain their green herbal flavors even with extended bottle aging. South American Cabernets have very pronounced fruit flavors when they are young and the best made examples will maintain some of those flavors as they age. South African wines tend to favour more Old World styles and typically require six to eight years aging before they start to develop.

PAIRING WITH FOODS:

Cabernet Sauvignon is a wine that needs to be drunk with foods, given its acidity, tannins and alcohol. It is a very bold and assertive wine that has the potential to overwhelm light and delicate dishes. The wine's high tannin content as well as the oak influence and high alcohol levels associated with many regional styles play important roles in influencing how well the wine matches different foods.

Fatty meats, such as lamb pair well, steak or dishes with heavy butter cream sauce neutralize tannins allowing the fruit of the wine to be more noticeable. Oak influenced flavours and aromas normally found in Cabernet Sauvignon pair well with dill weed, brown sugar, nutmeg and vanilla.

While Cabernet Sauvignon has the potential to pair well with bitter dark chocolate, it will not pair well with sweeter styles such as milk chocolate. The wine can typically pair well with a variety of cheeses, such as cheddar, mozzarella and brie, but full flavored or blue cheeses will typically compete too much with the flavors of Cabernet Sauvignon to be a complementary pairing.

DECANTING:

Younger wines:

A common reason to decant a younger wine is to aerate the wine. Many young wines can be tight or closed on the nose or palate. Decanting introduces oxygen, which releases aromas and flavors in all red wine. Most tannic red wines will take about 2-3 hours.

Older wines:

Slowly and carefully decanting an older wine ensures that the sediment stays in the bottle and you get a nice clear wine in the decanter, and subsequently in your glass. A particularly fragile or old wine (especially one 15 or more years old) should only be decanted 30 minutes or so before drinking.

THE FLIGHT:

- There are old and new world examples in the flight.
- There are wines from cooler and warmer climates in the flight.
- There are examples to highlight tasting notes in wines grown in different terroirs.
- There is one BC wine included.

REFERENCES:

- BCAWA Competition Handbook
- Wine Spectator.com
- Winefolly.com
- A Taste for Wine by Vincent Gasnier (Master Sommelier)
- The Oxford Companion to Wine
- BC Guild of Wine Judges Handbook
- Wikipedia.org