

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

September 2019

CLASS E7 – DRY RED CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Presented by Roger Ford (Mainland Chapter)

AFTER COMPLETING THIS SESSION, YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- The description and technical characteristics of this wine
- The areas of the world where this wine is produced
- History and origin of this grape
- Characteristics of this grape
- The effects of tannin and alcohol on Cabernet Sauvignon

CLASS C5. DRY RED CABERNET SAUVIGNON (BCAWA CLASSIFICATION)

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 C1, Dry Red Bordeaux Style.

INTRODUCTION

The flight that has been prepared, began with the idea to present only BC Cabernet Sauvignon wines. It seemed like a good idea at the time. While there are plenty of vineyards in BC planted with Cabernet Sauvignon, however, most end up not as varietals, but as components of Meritage wines. When contacted by Bill Huva in late June about the empty slot for the mainland chapter to present in September, I eventually chose to take this on. Sam Hauck provided a welcome sounding board for the endeavour, and both he and Bill were instrumental in accessing wines for me.

Here is where the idea and reality began to diverge. Mary Homer pointed me in the right direction, when asked about homemade examples. There were several examples of medal worthy BC Cabernet Sauvignon wines, although by the time I signed on to do this, little remained for me to access.

With 5 commercial BC examples secured, I looked to broaden my scope. That led to the inclusion of a handmade example from Napa grapes, and enigmatic Australian example. What I ended up with were: 5 BC examples, a Napa example vinified in BC, and an Australian example, which, all things considered, could represent Cabernet Sauvignon wine grown anywhere in the world. More about that in the Flight list notes.

The relevance of this flight, to judges of the guild, is, I believe, thus: the majority of the wines typify the terroir of BC; one, typifies the preference of BCAWA members to vinify Cabernets from American sources; and one illustrates the defining Cabernet Sauvignon characteristics of structure (tannin, alcohol levels and fruit). In addition, it provides a full range of quality – low, mid, and high-end wines. In mining parlance, you will discover at least one gold, some silver and bronze*, and maybe even some pyrite. Please keep this in mind during judging.

Cabernet Sauvignon (aka. Bouche, Bouchet, Petit-Bouchet, Petit-Cabernet, Petite Vidure, Sauvignon Rouge, Vidure) is the world's most renowned, but relatively recent, red wine grape. The grapes have thick skins, and the vines are hardy and rot resistant. Not surprisingly, it is rivalled only by Merlot (in the 1990's) as the world's most planted dark-skinned grape variety. Cabernet Sauvignon has spread to red wine regions around the globe.

Origins:

Grown commercially in such diverse areas as Bordeaux, Chile, Argentina, South Africa, California, Australia and New Zealand, it has also gained a strong foothold in many regions hitherto little known for red grapes – such as Washington state and our own Okanagan.

Believed to be an ancient varietal, recent genetic studies have revealed it to be the hybrid offspring of Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Franc. This was likely a chance crossing sometime in 17th century France. Long suspected to be related to these two, given its name, and the fact that it had both the black currant aromas and the grassiness of each respectively, the DNA results were not totally unexpected. What makes Cabernet Sauvignon remarkable to taste is not primarily its fruit flavour – but its structure and its ability to provide the perfect vehicle for individual vintage characteristics, wine- making and élevage techniques, and especially, local physical attributes, or terroir.

Characteristics:

There are a couple of noted Cabernet Sauvignon flavors that are intimately tied to 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 continues to ripen. To the human palate this compound is detectable in wines with pyrazine levels as low as 2 nanograms (ng) per liter. At the time of veraison, when the grapes first start to fully ripen, there is the equivalent pyrazine level of 30 ng/l. 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 flavor is not considered a wine fault but it may not be desirable to all consumers' tastes.

Two other well known Cabernet Sauvignon flavors are mint and eucalyptus. 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. There is some belief that 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. In Chile, one of the few places with ungrafted Cabernet Sauvignon vines the wines, if produced carefully in a modern winery, can be very good with aging potential.

The distinguishing marks of the Cabernet Sauvignon berry are its small size, its high ratio of pip to pulp, and the thickness of its skins, so blue, as opposed to red or even purple, on the vine. The pips are a major factor in Cabernet Sauvignon's high tannin level, while the thickness of its skin's accounts for the depth of colour that is the tell-tale sign of a Cabernet Sauvignon – as well as the variety's relatively good resistance to rot. The vine is susceptible however to powdery mildew, which can be treated quite easily, and the wood diseases eutypa and exoriose, which cannot. It both buds and ripens late.

In many aspects, Cabernet Sauvignon can reflect the desires and personality of the winemaker while still presenting familiar flavors that express the typical character of the variety. Also, the type of oak will have a great influence on the end wine.

Balance:

Cabernet Sauvignon grows well in just about any temperate climate that isn't very cool. It makes wines which are characteristically high in tannin, which is why they are typically blended with Merlot, Cabernet Franc et al. As a varietal, they illustrate the importance of balance, particularly regarding tannin and alcohol. To generalize, tannin gives red wine 'a backbone'. Too little and it lacks sufficient mouthfeel, that mid-palate textural impression. Too much, and the inside of your cheeks and gums register it instantly as astringent. Likewise, alcohol. Alcohol is the vehicle for the wine's aromas. Too little, and the wine is lacking in floral and/or herbaceous notes, too much, and it becomes 'hot' and jarring to the senses. If these aspects are out of balance, the resulting wine will either be flabby and insipid, or harsh and unapproachable.

Cabernet Sauvignon wines come in all price and quality levels. The least expensive versions are usually fairly soft and fruity, with medium body. The best wines are rich and firm with great depth and classic Cabernet flavor. Serious Cabernet Sauvignon can age for 15 years or more. I believe this flight runs the gamut.

VARIETAL AROMAS/FLAVOURS: PROCESSING BOUQUETS/FLAVORS:

Fruit: black currant, blackberry, Oak (light): vanilla, coconut, sweet wood black cherry, plum
Herbal: bell pepper, asparagus Oak (heavy): oak, smoke, toast, tar (methoxy pyrazine), green olive

Spice: ginger, green peppercorn, Bottle Age: cedar, cigar box, musk pimento, mint, anise, mushroom, earth, leather

Wine Characteristics

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Sources:

- Cabernet Sauvignon notes by Ron Rolleston for the December 2009 Cab.
- Wine Folly website
- *Hugh Johnson's Wine* Johnson, Hugh 2001
- *The University Wine Course* Baldy, Marian W. 2009

**For the record, Bronze is a compound, and would never be found as such, in nature*