

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

October 2024

CLASS I: SOCIAL WINE

Presented by Ron Thorne (Victoria Chapter)

“The Rodney Dangerfield of Wine”

GOALS

Review current class description and technical characteristics

Review common varietals

Discuss ramifications of the class description

Discuss the flight

BCAWA 2022 CLASS DESCRIPTION

A Social Wine should be enjoyable without the accompaniment of food. Colour can fall into a wide range, but it should be inviting. The wine should have an inviting fruity aroma. The wine should be neither dry nor excessively sweet. It should not be too high in alcohol. In many types of wine, a peak or peaks appear in the flavour spectrum – for example a White Table wine might have an acid peak; in the Aperitif class, a bitter peak is not out of place. There should be no such peaks in a Social wine. Good balance between sugar and acid is essential. A touch of “spritz” is permissible. This is a patio wine not a table wine and may be served alone or with light style foods (snacks).

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients: No restrictions.

Alcohol: 8% – 11%

Colour: Appealing

Sugar: 10 – 25 g/L

Specific Gravity: 0.996 – 1.000

Acid: 6 g/l – 10 g/l pH: 3.1 – 3.4

pH: 3.1-3.4

This class is stylistically based and may contain many different varietals including:

- Kerner
- Chenin Blanc
- Gewürztraminer
- Muscat
- Pinot Blanc
- Riesling
- Sauvignon Blanc
- Semillon
- Others: Siegerrebe, Auxerrois, Bacchus, Chasselas, Ehrenfelser, Madeline Angevine, Madeline Sylvaner, Optima, Oraniensteiner, Ortega

I will not spend a lot of time on the varietals. In depth discussion of the varietals can be found in the previous iterations of the social class notes at <https://bcgwj.ca/social-wine/> .

Also:

- <https://www.watsons.ca/varietal-characteristics/>
- <https://www.winesnw.com/winecel.html>

“The wine should be neither dry nor excessively sweet. “

I found, when selecting wines for this tasting, that good information about residual sugar (RS) was very general and lacking the precision of our technical criteria. I recommend the LCBO site as they publish values for most wines.

I found nice wines that I would consider social wine only to find it not sweet enough by the technical criteria. In practice, few of us analyze residual sugar routinely. We tend to go by “if it tastes social, put it in that class”.

“Enjoyable without the accompaniment of food”

In pairing wine and food, often the food moderates a peak in the wine and helps forestall palate fatigue that comes from drinking strongly acid or strongly tannic wines. Examples include: Steak and California cabernet sauvignon-- protein moderates the tannin of the wine, making it more approachable. Pasta alfredo and Soave or lighter bodied chardonnay – acidity in the wine cuts through the creaminess of the sauce. If food isn't in the picture, what are we left with? Lower alcohol, balanced wine. The better wines in this category will differentiate themselves from cheap bargain box wine with balance.

“Patio wine not a table wine and may be served alone or with light style foods (snacks)”

Not to say always without food and not just light food. The technical standard for this wine lies between dry table and sweet dessert, hence the off-dry descriptor. Food-wise these wines are at home with spicy food. Examples, spicy asian flavours with off dry Gewurtz, or rose, or tacos, blackened fish or Cajun dishes with off-dry rose.

“No peak or peaks appear in the flavour spectrum”

This again suggests balance. What should we expect, all golds? Or are they boring with no point of interest?

“The Rodney Dangerfield of Wine”

Does Social wine get the respect it deserves? Social as a class of wine does not often appear in the mainstream wine press (the new Social winery label aside). Instead, you will see them referred to as patio or summer sippers with adjectives like “easy drinking”, or “uncomplicated”.

Commercial wine competitions such as Decanter or the London wine show are often varietally based and judge off-dry wines along with the dry table wines. The Decanter competition collects RS information and one can filter the results with that information, but the award itself has no mention of it, only varietal. The London wine show collects only varietal information.

"That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" - Shakespeare

Does it matter whether we call this class off dry or social?

It depends on the goal. If we are seeking a wine for our own use, and we understand where and how to look for them it doesn't matter whether we call it social or off-dry. If we are seeking to communicate the results of our competitions to a wider public, then maybe off-dry would communicate that better.

THE FLIGHT

When you see the wine poured, you will see that I have taken the challenge that rose and even red wines could be considered social based on residual sugar. I have also included some off-dry whites that are commonly in tastings for this class.