

# BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

2019

## CLASS J1 - COUNTRY TABLE WINES

Presented by Carol Fornelli (Nanaimo Chapter)  
in collaboration with Peter Huyghebaert

### AFTER COMPLETING THIS SESSION YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- The BCAWA definition of Country Table Wine
- Where country wines are made.
- The broad scope of ingredients possible in country wines.
- The more typical ingredients in country wines.
- A brief history of their making.
- The difference between the main acids in grapes vs country wines.

### BCAWA DEFINITION:

#### Class J - Country Wine

A country wine is any wine made from at least 95% non-grape ingredients. Some country wines are intentionally made in a style closely matching the description of one of the "functional" grape classes: A (Aperitif Sherry), B (Aperitif), F (Dessert), G (After Dinner), or H (Sparkling) and must be entered in those classes. Others may fit the definitions of classes E6 (Other Dry Red), D (Rose), C4 (Other Dry White), or I (Social) and may be entered there or in Class J1 (Country Table) or J2 (Country Social), whichever seems most appropriate. The Country Wine Classes J1 and J2 are intended for those country wines which depend heavily on their non-grape origins for their interest and character and have been made in a functionally table or functionally social style. Still meads and melomels are appropriate for this class and should be entered in either J1 or J2 depending on sweetness.

#### Class J2: Country Social Wine

Any country wine intended to be appreciated on its own, rather than to accompany food. Country Social Wines are medium dry to medium sweet (3-8% Residual Sugar) and are not sweet enough to be dessert wines. Class J2 is intended primarily for wines which are outside the parameters of Class J1 (Table) because of their fruit characteristics and often sweetness. Country Social Wines typically have one or more dramatic "peaks" in their profile - an immediately recognizable intensity of fruit aroma and /or flavour, or noticeable acidity and freshness, or a hint of bitterness, or a higher alcohol level through fermentation than is suitable for Class J1. Astringency and/or bitterness and/or high acidity are not faults in themselves but must have been balanced by appropriate sweetness and/or flavour intensity and/or mouthfeel. A touch of spritz is acceptable, especially in lower alcohol or less intensely flavoured wines.

#### Class J1: Country Table Wine - *The meat of the current flight.*

Any dry to medium dry (0-3% Residual Sugar) country wine intended as table wine. Balance is of great importance in determining a successful wine. Flavour may range from very delicate to very intense. A touch of "spritz" is acceptable, especially in lower alcohol or lighter flavoured wines.

## **INGREDIENTS:**

Country Wine is a wine made from anything other than grapes and legally cannot even be called wine...that name belongs to the holy grape. There are multitudes of wines made over the centuries from all the other fruits, vegetable and grains all over the world and these wines have a lot of leeway as far as taste, sweetness, alcohol content, colour, sugar, pH and S.G. They can be very sweet and thick like an aperitif or sweet cordial, in this case they are known as Country Social wines. For the purpose of this tasting, we are experiencing the taste of drier Country classified wines...these are known as Country Table Wines.

There are so many things that Country Table Wine can be made from. We have the usual suspects...blackberry, blueberry, apple and plum but the list is endless for candidates for these wines...Think rice wine, big in Japan and fortified as Sake. Basically any fruit and lots of veggies can be used. There's rhubarb, kiwi, even potatoes and parsnips. Oh, and then there's carrot, chive, hibiscus and dandelion. Maple syrup and honey or Mead are also made into non-grape country wine. There's even a San Quentin Prison method of country wine making...apparently the guests save the fruit from the day's meals....add sugar wherever they can get it....even ketchup will work....they put these ingredients into a plastic bag and put a couple of slices of bread for the yeast, let it ferment and voila! A local special country wine affectionately known as "Pruma"...not quite Primo but it does the trick. Please don't try this at home. It can be dangerous to your health. These wines, which can be made from such a wide variety of base ingredients (other than grapes) can have aromas and flavours further enhanced by the use of flowers and herbs.

## **THE DIFFERENCES:**

Some of the main differences between grape wine and fruit wine are that Grapes happen to have an ideal balance of water, sugar, acidity, tannin and nutrients for yeast to process and easily produce a chemically stable and deliciously drinkable beverage. Fruits, on the other hand, are not so well balanced. They are often very rich in both Malic and Citric acid which requires more intervention to produce enjoyable wines - such as the addition of water, sugar and extra yeast nutrient to soften intense acidity, provide balance, and stabilize the wine. Blending various varieties of a fruit or fruits can also help to soften the harsh natural acids and achieve a more balanced, flavourful wine. MLF can be used sometimes, but can be foiled by very low pH and high acid levels, leaving the winemaker with fewer options of achieving a balanced result.

Fruit wines, like grape wines, also provide the health benefits and antioxidants of the fruits which they are made from. Fruit wines do not contain the histamines that many grape wines contain, hence people who are subject to headaches from grape wines do not suffer the headaches that histamines can cause. Ironically, most people blame this on the innocent Sulphite additions. Fruit wines are usually slightly lower in alcohol content than grape wines.

## **HISTORY:**

There is a long history of people turning fruit into wine. Scientists think that fruit was first domesticated and first wines made in the region of the world that includes the Black and Caspian Seas along with the northern parts of Persia (today's Iraq and Iran). Evidence of tartaric acid, a common wine residue, was found in ancient pottery dating back to about 8500 BC in Turkey. Perhaps it all originated with a 'happy accident' when fruit was left a little too long and natural yeasts worked their magic. And the ancient people enjoyed the results.

## **WHERE COUNTRY WINES ARE MADE:**

Over the centuries the fruit wine making benefited all the northern regions of the world that were inhospitable to grape growing and have been popular in cool climates such as North America and Scandinavia. In Africa, India and the Philippines, wine is made from bananas. Plum wine is very popular in China, Japan and Korea and is often fortified. Pomegranate wine is very popular in Israel, where it is called Rimon. Pineapple wine is a soft, dry, fruit wine with a strong pineapple bouquet and is popular in Thailand and other SE Asian countries, probably wherever pineapples grow. Any of us who have been to Hawaii have tasted the pineapple wine produced there. In Mexico, fermented pineapple beverages are popular and known as Teach. Pineapple wines are produced commercially in Africa, Dominica Republic and Okinawa, Japan. Orange wine is produced by home winemakers in White River, South Africa, with great care taken to clean and sanitize the fruit due to the complications encountered by a type of Penicillin that can stop fermentation. There are even a handful of commercially produced dandelion wines in the US. Elderberry wine is commonly produced, and additions of elderberries added to grape wines, although tainted elderberry wine is used to commit murders in Joseph Kesselring's play and Frank Capra's adaptation of Arsenic and Old Lace. So wherever fruit and flowers, herbs and vegetables grow in the world, people have been fermenting them into wines.

There are about 700 wineries out of over 6300 in the U.S. producing fruit wines...most tend to come from smaller sustainable farms but popularity is gaining there. Fruit wine is usually less expensive to make and doesn't have to be stored or aged. This is very appealing to small farm producers since it is an excellent way to maximize the value added aspect of their orchards and berries.

In Canada, there are 60 licensed fruit wineries, making us one of the world's top fruit wine producers. There are also 15 registered Meaderies in Canada, 2 right on Vancouver Island...Middle Mountain on Hornby Island and Tugwell Creek in Sooke. In Canada, 1% of the wines consumed are fruit wines. However, the last decade has seen the increase in the number of wineries producing fruit wine. These wineries have refined the process and are creating varied, complex and interesting wines. Across B.C. we have 30 fruit wine growers dedicated to producing clean, bold, crisp wines. Sadly, there is no access to VQA sales channels because the B.C. VQA program does not include fruit wines. Additionally, the "vintages" are so small that the BCLDB cannot obtain enough to stock all their major outlets, so they do not handle them at all. Hopefully this will change as their popularity and production continue to increase.

## **ABOUT THE FLIGHT:**

We are delighted to bring a very interesting flight for you to taste. Our flight is a selection of B.C. drier Country Table Wines made from the fruits grown from the ground up to the tree tops: hard fruit and soft fruit as well as one flavoured with flowers. All are BC grown and made in the Similkameen and Okanagan Valleys, Prince George and our own Vancouver Island. We offer you a balance of white, red and rose styles, bringing a broad test of the palate.

The flight, in accordance with Presentation Instructions, contains wines ranging from Gold, to Silver, to Bronze to non-medal. Enjoy the process of detecting the difference!!

## **JUDGING A COUNTRY WINE:**

Many country wines can taste one dimensional, depending of the fruit selected and whether or not the winemaker has chosen to blend more than one fruit to add complexity. For example, a raspberry wine could easily be overpowering and simply taste like raspberry juice (with a kick of alcohol). If that raspberry flavour is used in a smaller amount and combined with other fruit, the palate may enjoy a more complex tasting experience. Complex country wines, like their grape counterparts, should score somewhat higher than a simple one-dimensional country wine.

Country wines should be enjoyed slightly chilled. When judging country wines, however, a flight of over-chilled wines may serve to prevent judges from detecting the more delicate aroma and/or taste nuances in the wine (both good and bad).

*Stewards are therefore asked to prepare their wines in consideration of the temperature environment in their respective tasting venues.*

## **NOTE TO EACH CHAPTER STEWARD:**

Each wine bag contains a sheet with pertinent details of the wine just tasted.

## **REFERENCES:**

- the Country Wine notes from BCGWJ website from February of 2018. Please
- Review these, as well as George Beck's very in-depth article on Blackberry wines.
- BC. Wine Trends
- Linda Moran's article in the Daily Fruit Wine
- Wikipedia's research on fruit wine.
- Sarah Aschiman, editor for the Blueberry News, published by the Florida Blueberry Assoc.