

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

December 2025

CLASS E7 – DRY RED CABERNET SAUVIGNON

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INTENDED OUTCOMES:

After completing this session, you should know:

- The BCAWA Class description and technical characteristics of the class
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- History and Characteristics of Notable Regions
- Food pairings
- What to expect from this flight

BCAWA CLASS DESCRIPTION:

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 herbs, 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 – 0.994

Acidity: 5.0g/L – 7.0g/L pH: 3.4 – 4.0

Tannin: May be somewhat astringent.

HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF NOTABLE REGIONS

Okanagan, Canada

History

Cabernet Sauvignon has a relatively recent but significant history in the Okanagan Valley, which has emerged over the past few decades as one of Canada's premier wine regions. Though grape growing in the Okanagan began in the early 20th century, Cabernet Sauvignon was not widely planted until the 1980s and 1990s, when the region began to shift from hybrid grapes and fruit wines toward *Vitis vinifera* varieties.

The 1990s saw a surge in quality wine production, aided by improved viticultural practices and a better understanding of microclimates across the valley. Cabernet Sauvignon, a grape that thrives in warm climates, found a home in the southern Okanagan, particularly around Oliver and Osoyoos, where the growing season is hot and dry enough to achieve proper ripening.

Today, Okanagan Cabernet Sauvignon is gaining international recognition, especially from regions and critics seeking high-quality cool-climate reds. While it's still produced in smaller quantities compared to Merlot or Pinot Noir in the region, Cabernet Sauvignon continues to grow in prestige, with standout bottlings from wineries like Burrowing Owl, Nk'Mip Cellars, and Painted Rock.

Characteristics

Cabernet Sauvignon from British Columbia's Okanagan Valley offers a unique blend of fruit intensity and cool-climate finesse. The wines typically feature bold flavors of dark berries like blackberry, blackcurrant, and cherry, with a signature balance of acidity that keeps the wine fresh. The Okanagan's warm days and cool nights help preserve the fruit's natural brightness while allowing the grapes to ripen slowly, resulting in wines with both depth and elegance. Earthy undertones, like tobacco or cedar, can complement the fruit profile, and subtle oak aging often brings out layers of spice and vanilla. Overall, Okanagan Cabernets are known for their smooth tannins, vibrant fruit, and a nuanced finish that reflects the valley's diverse terroir.

Miapo, Chile

History

Maipo Valley, located just south of Chile's capital, Santiago, is one of the country's oldest and most renowned wine regions. The valley's proximity to the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, combined with its fertile soils and ideal climate, have made it a prime location for growing high-quality grapes. Cabernet Sauvignon has been a central grape variety in the region for centuries, with its history in Maipo tracing back to the late 19th century, when French grape varieties were first introduced to Chile.

In the mid-1800s, Chile began to establish itself as a significant wine-producing country, and Bordeaux varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon were brought in by French winemakers who sought to replicate the success of Europe's famous wine regions. Maipo Valley, with its sunny days and cool nights, proved to be a perfect environment for Cabernet Sauvignon, a variety that thrives in warm, dry climates but benefits from temperature shifts that allow the grapes to retain acidity.

By the late 20th century, Maipo's reputation as Chile's "Cabernet Sauvignon heartland" was firmly established, with the valley producing wines that began to gain international recognition. Over the years, local producers have refined their practices, embracing both traditional methods and modern technology to enhance the quality of their Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today, Maipo Valley continues to be recognized as one of the premier regions for Cabernet Sauvignon in Chile, offering wines that combine power with elegance. The region's favorable climate, diverse soils, and winemaking expertise make it a benchmark for high-quality Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon, and the wines continue to gain prestige and international acclaim.

Characteristics

Cabernet Sauvignon from Maipo Valley, Chile, is renowned for its rich structure and expressive character. These wines typically feature bold flavors of blackcurrant, blackberry, and plum, often accented by notes of mint, eucalyptus, and a touch of green pepper. The warm, sunny climate of the Maipo Valley allows the grapes to ripen fully, resulting in wines with ripe tannins and a smooth, balanced finish. Subtle oak aging often adds layers of vanilla, spice, and tobacco, giving Maipo Cabernet Sauvignon its distinctive depth and elegance.

California, USA

History

California's wine history is deeply intertwined with the rise of Cabernet Sauvignon as one of the state's flagship varieties. While wine has been produced in California since the 18th century, it was during the mid-19th century that European grape varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, were first introduced to the region by pioneers like Agoston Haraszthy, who is often called the "Father of California Viticulture." The arrival of Cabernet Sauvignon in California was part of a broader movement to establish the state as a leading wine producer.

By the late 1800s, California began exporting wine, and Cabernet Sauvignon started to gain recognition for its potential in the state's diverse terroirs. However, the early 20th century was marked by the Prohibition era, which severely impacted the wine industry. After Prohibition ended in 1933, California's wine industry began to rebound, and Cabernet Sauvignon emerged as one of the most important varieties, especially in regions like Napa Valley and Sonoma County.

It wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s, however, that California Cabernet Sauvignon achieved international acclaim. Landmark events like the 1976 Judgment of Paris, where California wines famously outperformed French Bordeaux wines in a blind tasting, cemented the state's reputation for producing world-class Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today, California Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the most sought-after wines in the world, renowned for its boldness, complexity, and expressiveness. The state's combination of diverse terroirs, innovative winemaking, and a long history of viticulture has solidified California's position as a global leader in Cabernet Sauvignon production. Whether from Napa Valley's iconic estates, Sonoma's more restrained expressions, or Paso Robles' powerful renditions, California Cabernet Sauvignon continues to represent the pinnacle of New World winemaking, appealing to collectors, critics, and wine lovers worldwide.

Characteristics

Cabernet Sauvignon from California is known for its bold, fruit-forward profile and full-bodied richness. These wines typically showcase deep flavors of black cherry, currant, and raspberry, often with hints of plum, mocha, and a touch of oak-derived vanilla or spice. The warm, sun-drenched climate in regions like Napa Valley and Sonoma contributes to ripe, round tannins and a smooth, approachable finish. Depending on the region and winemaking style, California Cabernets can also display herbal notes, such as mint or eucalyptus, and a velvety texture that balances the wine's natural acidity and structure.

South Africa

History

Cabernet Sauvignon was introduced to South Africa in the late 19th to early 20th century, but it wasn't until the mid-20th century that the variety gained real traction. Initially, South Africa's wine industry focused more on local varieties like Pinotage and Cinsault, but the introduction of Bordeaux varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, began to elevate the quality of South African wines.

After the end of apartheid in the 1990s, South Africa's wine industry blossomed due to the lifting of international sanctions. This period saw a renewed focus on quality, with South African winemakers embracing modern techniques and better vineyard management. Cabernet

Sauvignon flourished, particularly in regions like Stellenbosch and Paarl, where the climate and terroir are well-suited to the grape.

Today, South Africa is known for producing high-quality Cabernet Sauvignon, with wines praised for their depth, structure, and aging potential. The country's wines are characterized by ripe fruit flavors, firm tannins, and a distinctive balance of freshness and richness, making them highly competitive on the global stage. Notable producers include Kanonkop, Meerlust, and Spier Seaward.

Characteristics

South African Cabernet Sauvignon is known for its bold, well-structured profile, often displaying deep, rich flavors of blackcurrant, cassis, and dark plum. These wines typically have a firm tannin structure, with a good balance of acidity, making them age-worthy. Common tasting notes also include hints of tobacco, cedar, and bell pepper, especially in cooler-climate regions like Stellenbosch. Some expressions, particularly from warmer areas like Paarl, offer riper fruit notes with a touch of chocolate or spice. These wines often show a refined elegance, with layers of complexity that evolve as they mature, making them a favorite for collectors and those who appreciate wines with depth and aging potential.

FOOD PAIRINGS

Cabernet Sauvignon, with its bold flavors of dark fruits and robust tannins, pairs wonderfully with hearty dishes like grilled steaks, lamb, and Beef Wellington, where the wine's depth complements the richness of the meat. It also works well with aged cheeses like cheddar and Gruyère, and savory charcuterie such as salami and prosciutto. Roasted vegetables like Portobello mushrooms and root vegetables, as well as stews and chili, are excellent side dishes. BBQ ribs, grilled sausages, and pasta with Bolognese sauce also make great pairings. For dessert, dark chocolate, especially with high cocoa content, and chocolate mousse are perfect matches, balancing the wine's boldness with their richness. Overall, Cabernet Sauvignon is a versatile wine that enhances both savory and sweet dishes.

THIS FLIGHT

In this flight, we will explore Cabernet Sauvignon wines from a range of styles and regions around the world. The flight will include wines from Argentina, Australia, Chile, Canada, South Africa, and the USA. These wines will range from gold medal to no medal standing ranking.

REFERENCES

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