

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

February 2026

CLASS I Social

Presented by Bill Huva and Brian McConnell (Mainland Chapter)

AFTER READING THESE NOTES YOU SHOULD KNOW:

1. The BCAWA Definition and Technical Characteristics of a Social wine
2. History
3. Why they have a bad reputation
4. A resurgence of interest
5. Food Pairings
6. What to expect from this flight

BCAWA DEFINITION OF CLASS I – SOCIAL

A Social wine should be enjoyable with or 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 noticeably high in alcohol. In many types of wines, 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 would be a good choice of wine for a social function.

Technical Characteristics:

Ingredients: White or Red grapes/Juice

Alcohol: 8% - 12%

Colour: Appealing, no restrictions

Sugar: 1.0% - 6%

Specific Gravity: .994 - 1.014

Acid: 6 g/l - 10 g/l

pH: 2.9 - 3.4

HISTORY:

In the 2024 Guild presentation of Class I Social, Ron Thorne hit it calling this the Rodney Dangerfield of wines: it does not get any respect. When in fact, it is probably the oldest style of wine. Going back in history, the ancients put just about anything in wine but especially honey. The oldest recipe for beer, the Ode to Ninkasi¹ from about 1800 BCE has bread, wine, herbs and honey. Archeological analysis of amphora frequently shows a complex beverage with evidence of both wine and honey. And, of course, anyone who has made wine has had a stuck fermentation where the yeast just cannot make it to dry. Well, all fermentations before the mid-1800's were wild fermentations where getting stuck at a higher residual sugar level was very common leading to a taste for sweet wine. The growth of sweet port in the 1700's when wine from France was not available in Britain due to war shows a taste for sweet wines.

WHY THEY HAVE A BAD REPUTATION

Cloying, headache inducing, cheap, teenage binging, simple, overly processed, old fashioned. Many of the thoughts that go through your head when thinking of these wines. If you grew up before the North American palate started expanding after the Judgement of Paris in 1976, those descriptors are what this type of wine would have been. And as a segment, it does not appear in any competitions for commercial wines which are typically by grape and reward dry styles. This class is caught between the dry styles and the sweeter dessert wines. Reading the class description, it seems to say more of what it isn't than what it is. And "patio sipper" relegates it to seasonal interest.

A RESURGENCE OF INTEREST

Sweeter wines are done everywhere, as this flight shows. While most wine drinkers may turn their nose up at a sweeter wine, thinking it unsophisticated and for people with little taste, the high end of this style shows great complexity, varietal characteristics and adaptability for lighter and maybe more informal foods. Summer in Southern Europe is hot and a glass of chilled sweeter wine is a popular coolant. Even red wines are served chilled in Spain in the summer. There is even a new style in Europe that would fit in this class aimed at younger drinkers who are looking for something lighter called blouge², a blend of white (blanc) and red (rouge) wines at lower alcohol and sweeter.

FOOD PARINGS

The class description says may be drank without food but typically lighter foods and seafoods go very well with this style of wine. Yes, appetizers on the patio!

THE FLIGHT:

In putting together this flight, we have tried to show both geographical spread with European, Australian and BC wines and the variety of grapes that can be used both in a varietal and blend. Although the flight is all white wines, there are many roses and reds that could be included. We did use the criteria of "if it tastes like a social, it is". A few of the wines are higher in alcohol than the established criteria and it is very difficult to find accurate residual sugar numbers, so we had to rely on the BCL sweetness codes of 1 or 2 which are 6 to 24 g/l. The criteria above from the BCAWA Official Classes in the Competition Handbook lists it as 1% to 6% which translates to 10 to 60 g/l.

LIST OF REFERENCES:

1. <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section4/tr4231.htm>
2. <https://www.economist.com/culture/2026/02/02/why-a-new-playful-style-of-wine-is-delighting-drinkers>

SUMMARY:

Don't be ashamed if you like this style of wine. And accept the challenge to make it. This is not an easy style of wine to make well as, we all know, any residual sugar risks refermenting in the bottle.