

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

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CLASS C2 – Aromatic White Vinifera

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AFTER READING THESE NOTES YOU SHOULD KNOW:

1. The definition and key technical characteristics of BCAWA Class C2 – Aromatic White Vinifera.
2. The principal grape varieties associated with the class, including the five varieties represented in this flight: Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Viognier, Bacchus and Ortega.
3. The history and development of aromatic white varieties globally and in British Columbia, including the Becker and Duncan Projects.
4. Where the principal C2 varieties are grown internationally and in British Columbia, and how climate can influence their style.
5. The typical aroma, flavour and structural characteristics of the varieties included in this flight.
6. How dry and off-dry styles, acidity, residual sugar, winemaking and bottle age can affect the style of aromatic white wines.

BCAWA DEFINITION OF CLASS C2 – Aromatic White Vinifera

A dry to off-dry white wine made from *Vitis vinifera* grapes.

The 2026 BCAWA Class Description identifies aromatic white varieties including Bacchus, Ehrenfelser, Gewürztraminer, Malvasia, Muscat varieties, Optima, Ortega, Pearl of Csaba, Scheurebe, Schönburger, Siegerrebe, Symphony, Viognier and White Riesling. Aromatic non-vinifera grape wines are also acceptable in this class.

Unblended varietals that demonstrate a striking perfumed quality tend to be more successful than blends. Aromatic quality may reflect floral characters, fruit characters, or both. Preferred examples will usually have been cold fermented. The final determination of what best represents “aromatic” is left to the judges. C2 wines should be judged cool. As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style.

Technical Characteristics:

Alcohol: 9% - 13.5%.

Colour: Pale bronze or bronze-pink to pale straw to light gold. No amber, brown or grey tinges.

Sugar: 0.0% - 3%.

Specific Gravity: 0.990 – 1.002

Acidity: 6.0g/L – 9.0g/L.

pH: 3.0 - 3.4

HISTORY:

“Aromatic” is a sensory description rather than a single grape family. Many grape varieties contain naturally occurring compounds or precursors that produce distinctive floral, fruity, spicy or musky aromas in finished wine.

Some of the varieties associated with Class C2 have ancient histories, while others are comparatively recent breeding developments.

Riesling: has a long history in Germany and is particularly associated with the Rhine and Mosel regions. It has subsequently become an important international variety.

Gewürztraminer: a pink-skinned aromatic mutation of the Traminer family. The name is associated with the German word Gewürz, meaning spice. It is particularly associated with Alsace and Germany but is now grown in many cool and moderate climates.

Viognier: an ancient Rhône variety that was historically associated with northern Rhône appellations, particularly Condrieu. Its popularity expanded internationally during the late twentieth century.

Bacchus and Ortega: German-bred varieties developed in the twentieth century and selected in part for their ability to ripen in relatively cool conditions while producing aromatic wines. Bacchus was bred by Peter Morio from a crossing involving Silvaner and Riesling with Müller-Thurgau. Ortega was bred by Hans Breider from Müller-Thurgau and Siegerrebe.

In BC, aromatic white varieties were mainly through government-supported experimentation with German and other cool-climate grapes.

The Becker Project in the late 1970s–early 1980s helped introduce and evaluate varieties such as Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Ortega and Bacchus. Riesling and Gewürztraminer became widely planted, particularly in the Okanagan Valley. Ortega was later identified as well suited to Vancouver Island through the Duncan Project in the early–mid 1980s, while Bacchus became associated with the Fraser Valley. Viognier was introduced later to the Okanagan as BC growers expanded beyond German varieties and experimented with grapes suited to warmer sites.

Today, Riesling and Gewürztraminer are among the five most widely planted white varieties in BC, while Viognier is one of the more substantial plantings among the province's numerous secondary varieties. As of 2023, the planted acreage in BC for each of these varieties was:

Riesling:	664.30 acres
Gewürztraminer:	659.96 acres
Viognier:	244.88 acres
Bacchus:	52.96 acres
Ortega:	49.16 acres

GEOGRAPHY:

Climate strongly influences aromatic white wines. Cooler conditions generally preserve acidity and produce fresher citrus, green-fruit and floral character. Warmer conditions encourage riper peach, apricot and tropical fruit flavours and can result in higher alcohol and softer acidity.

REGIONS / COUNTRIES WHERE GROWN:

Riesling: Germany, Alsace, Austria, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. Germany is particularly renowned for Riesling, producing styles ranging from bone-dry to richly sweet, with high acidity providing balance. Clare Valley in South Australia is known for intensely dry Rieslings with pronounced lime, lemon and mineral character. BC produces both dry and off-dry examples.

Gewürztraminer: Alsace, Germany, northern Italy, Austria, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Alsace is particularly renowned for Gewürztraminer, producing aromatic wines with floral, tropical fruit and spice character.

Viognier: Northern Rhône, southern France, Australia, California, Chile, South Africa and Canada. The Northern Rhône is particularly renowned for Viognier, producing full-bodied, aromatic wines with peach, apricot, floral and spice character. Australia and California are also important producers.

Bacchus: Germany and England, with smaller plantings in other cool-climate regions including BC. Germany is traditionally associated with Bacchus, while England has become particularly well known for dry examples with bright acidity and citrus, green fruit and herbal character. BC and other cool-climate regions can similarly produce fresh, aromatic styles with pronounced acidity.

Ortega: Germany and other cool-climate regions, including England and Canada. Germany is the principal home of Ortega, producing wines ranging from dry to sweet with ripe stone-fruit and floral character. England and Canada also produce Ortega in suitable cool-climate areas.

VARIATIONS IN STYLE:

Aromatic whites can vary considerably while remaining within the C2 definition.

This class encompasses both dry and off-dry wines. Residual sugar should be considered together with acidity: high acidity can balance sweetness and maintain freshness. Riesling is the clearest example of this relationship.

Winemaking can preserve or alter aromatic character. Cold fermentation is commonly used to retain volatile floral and fruit aromas and is specifically noted in the BCAWA class description. Oak should generally be restrained so that it does not obscure varietal character.

Bottle age can add complexity. Riesling is particularly capable of developing honeyed, mineral and petroleum-like characteristics with age.

THE WINE:

Riesling: High acidity with aromas of lime, lemon, green apple, pear, peach, apricot, honeysuckle, flowers and mineral. Mature examples can develop petroleum and honeyed notes. The BCAWA describes Riesling as having “racy” acidity and a long finish.

Gewürztraminer: Highly perfumed, with rose petal, lychee, peach, apricot, grapefruit, anise and spice. Typically, broader and fuller on the palate than Riesling. Slight bitterness can be a varietal characteristic.

Viognier: Honeysuckle, jasmine, apricot, peach, candied peel, musk and spice, often with a fuller, creamy texture and softer acidity than Riesling.

Bacchus: Typically floral, citrusy, herbal and green-fruited, with elderflower and gooseberry among common descriptors. Its character can sometimes remind tasters of Sauvignon Blanc.

Ortega: Generally ripe and fruit-driven, with peach, apricot, pear and floral characteristics. Its early ripening makes it useful in cooler climates.

FOOD PAIRING:

Aromatic whites are versatile because acidity, fruit, aroma and residual sugar can all contribute to a successful pairing.

Riesling: seafood, shellfish, pork, poultry and spicy Asian cuisine.

Gewürztraminer: Thai, Vietnamese and Indian dishes, aromatic curries and soft cheeses.

Viognier: richer seafood, poultry and creamy dishes.

Bacchus and Ortega: seafood, salads, lighter poultry and fresh cheeses.

For off-dry wines, residual sugar can moderate spicy heat, while acidity keeps the pairing balanced and refreshing.

THE FLIGHT:

The flight demonstrates the range of Class C2 Aromatic White Vinifera through five grape varieties: Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Viognier, Bacchus and Ortega.

The wines include examples from Europe, Australia, Chile and multiple BC regions, providing Old World and New World perspectives.

The flight illustrates:

- Different grape varieties and distinctive aromatic profiles.
- Different climates and growing regions.
- Dry and off-dry styles.
- Aromatic expressions ranging from floral and perfumed to fruity, herbal and spicy.
- Differences in acidity, body, sweetness and texture.

The purpose of the flight is not simply to identify grape varieties. It demonstrates that “aromatic” describes a spectrum of varietal expression, and that a successful C2 wine must combine pronounced aromatic character with appropriate structure and balance.

SUMMARY:

Class C2 – Aromatic White Vinifera encompasses dry to off-dry white wines that show pronounced aromatic character. The class includes a wide range of varieties, beyond those represented in this flight.

Aromatic white wines can vary considerably in aroma, sweetness, acidity, body and texture. Climate and growing region influence these characteristics, while winemaking choices such as cold fermentation

can help preserve varietal aromas. Residual sugar should be considered together with acidity to assess balance, particularly in off-dry wines. Bottle age can add further complexity, especially in Riesling.

Aromatic white varieties have a significant history in British Columbia. Early experimentation with German and other cool-climate grapes through projects such as Becker and Duncan helped establish varieties including Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Ortega and Bacchus, while Viognier was introduced later as BC growers expanded into warmer sites.

The five varieties represented in this flight demonstrate the breadth of the class. Riesling is marked by high acidity and citrus and mineral character; Gewürztraminer by intense perfume, floral and spice notes; Viognier by ripe stone fruit, floral character and fuller texture; Bacchus by floral, citrus, herbal and green-fruit character; and Ortega by ripe fruit and floral expression.

Ultimately, a successful Class C2 wine should demonstrate pronounced aromatic character while maintaining the structure, balance and dry or off-dry table-wine style expected of the class.

LIST OF REFERENCES:

- British Columbia Amateur Winemakers Association (BCAWA). BCAWA Competition Handbook – Class C2: Aromatic White Vinifera. 2019.
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- Deutsches Weininstitut (German Wine Institute). “Bacchus” and “Ortega.” History, breeding, parentage and characteristics of these German varieties.
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