BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

May 2027
CLASS J2 – COUNTRY (SOCIAL) WINES

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AFTER READING THESE NOTES YOU SHOULD KNOW:

1. What dramatic peaks are acceptable in this Country Social Wine class
2. Whether or not a touch of spritz acceptable in this wine class
3. The areas of BC where fruit wines are made commercially
4. The major fruit winemakers in BC
5. What is the life expectancy of a fruit wine
6. How and why the fruit wines are 'presented' in the flight
7. Foods that pair specifically with various fruit wines

BCAWA DEFINITION OF CLASS J2 – COUNTRY (SOCIAL) WINES

Any country wine intended to be appreciated on its own, rather than to accompany food. Country Social Wines are medium-dry to medium sweet and are not sweet enough to be dessert wines. Class J2 is intended primarily for wines which are outside the parameters of Class I (Social) grape wines because of their fruit characteristics and often sweetness.

Country Social Wines typically have one or more dramatic 'peak' 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 I (Social) grape wines.

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 wines.

Technical Characteristics:

Ingredients:	at least 95% non-grape ingredients *(including mead and melomel)*
Colour:	colour should be appealing; no brown or grey tinges
Sugar:	3 – 8% residual sugar (off dry to medium dry; and are not sweet enough to be dessert wines)

Note: The BCAWA Technical Characteristics do not indicate a range for ABV, but it has been found that most commercially made products range from 8% to 12% ABV

HISTORY:

Wine is more than a product of grapes.

In Canada, wine is legally defined under the federal Food and Drug Regulations and Excise Act as an alcoholic beverage produced through the complete or partial alcoholic fermentation of fresh grapes, fruit, or other approved plant products.

The oldest known molecular evidence for an alcoholic beverage was discovered at the Neolithic site of Jiahu (7000 BCE) along the Yellow River in China. Analysis of organic residues absorbed into the clay pores of ancient pottery vessels found biomarkers of a fermented beverage made from rice, honey and wild fruits.

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Historical data and archaeological consensus confirm that across the ancient Near East and Roman times, communities frequently brewed fruit wines out of pomegranates, dates, and figs.
These facts impact the way we traditionally think about the history of wine. It is not a single innovation based on the grape, but rather a broader human activity, wherever people had access to fruits or other plants containing fermentable sugars.

Commercial fruit wine production in British Columbia.

The first commercial winery in British Columbia was established to utilize an over-abundance of berries harvested on southern Vancouver Island. The harvest far exceeded the demand for fresh berries, which were difficult to transport off the island for sale as fresh produce. The Saanich Loganberry Association created Growers' Wine Company Ltd. in 1922. Established in Victoria, using start-up private capital of $5,000 and a government grant of $10,000 it produced non-grape wines at its Wharf Street and then Quadra Steet location, for its 50+ years of history. The first and best-known wine was made from loganberries, (Some locals will remember "Logana" wine). The wines tended to be sweet, and some were fortified. Over the years numerous corporate take-overs occurred, wine production was moved to Surrey, and the Grower's name now survives only on a popular brand of cider produced in the Okanagan.

Calona Vineyards, the first of many commercial grape wine producers, opened in 1932. However, during the 1930's and 40's, fruit wines and berry blends still accounted for 50 percent of wine consumption in British Columbia.

By the later twentieth century, improvements in grape growing and winemaking, followed by the development of the modern BC wine industry, made grape wine dominant. Fruit wines now account for approximately 5% of BC wine production.

GEOGRAPHY / REGIONS:

Five regions in British Columbia host fruit-based wineries. These are:

Okanagan Valley:
Elephant Island (Naramata)
La Casa Bianca Winery (Oliver)
Sleeping Giant (Summerland)
Farm Gate Winery & Fruit Stand (Kaladen)

Similkameen Valley:
Forbidden Fruit Winery (Cawston)

Lower Mainland *(including the Fraser Valley):*
Maan Farms Estate Winery (Abbotsford)
Krause Berry Farms and Estate Winery (Langley)
Lulu Island Winery (Richmond)
Sanduz Estate Winery (Richmond)
Festina Lente Estate Winery & Meadery (Langley)
Kermode Wild Berry Winery (Dewdney)

Vancouver Island:
Coastal Black Estate Winery (Black Creek)

Cariboo Region:
Northern Lights Estate Winery (Prince George)

JUDGING FRUIT WINES:

Although fruit wines are a different product from grape wine, the same principles apply when judging them. Judges and trainees should continue to apply their trained standards to fruit wines in regard to Appearance (is the colour appealing and clear?), Nose (are the aromas appealing, have good intensity?), Balance (are the sugar and acid levels balanced?), Flavour (is it inviting, and fruity?), Finish (is it long, medium or short; is it inviting, does the flavour linger have good intensity?). Finally, indicate the Overall Wine Quality (checking the scoring guide provided on your judging sheet).

Complexity is generally deemed desirable in wines and may not be present in aroma or flavour of single fruit wines. To achieve more dimension, some winemakers blend fruits. This, in turn, presents a challenge to balance the blend so that it reflects the attributes of each of the fruits. The lack of complexity should not be penalized. While lacking complexity, a great country fruit wine should show good intensity of aromas and flavours. They should be well balanced and have a long lingering finish that is both fruity and fresh.

Most non-grape fruits lack sufficient natural sugar or have excessive acid, requiring sugar and water additions. Achieving balance in sugar, acid and alcohol can be challenging for the winemaker.

Fruit wines often lack the natural protective tannins of red or oaked grape wines, and because of this they oxidize more rapidly. They are generally drunk young and do not improve with age.

FOOD PAIRING:

Pairing fruit wine with food relies on matching flavor intensity, balancing sweetness and acidity, and considering whether the wine is dry or sweet. Social wines typically have no need to be accompanied by food. However, fruit wines may be enjoyed with the following pairings:

- **Rhubarb, Cherry and Blackberry Wines**
  Pair well with fruit salads and fruit dominant desserts.

- **Raspberry Wine**
  Pairs well with grilled or smoked meats, pork, chicken, and barbecue sauces, where the bright fruit acidity cuts through rich or smoky flavors.
- **Blackberry Wine**
  Pairs well with aged cheese boards, dark chocolate, and rich red meat dishes due to its deeper, more robust flavor profile.
- **Blueberry Wine and Blackberry Wine**
  Pair well with fatty fish such as salmon.
- **Rhubarb Wine and Peach Wine**
  Pair well with white fish (such as cod or halibut) and white seafood and poultry, using its high natural acidity to lift delicate or oily proteins.
- **Apple and Berry Wines (Strawberry, Cherry, Mixed Berry)**
  Pair well with pork roasts, duck, or sweet-and-savory poultry dishes, and can be used directly in reduction or barbecue glazes.

THE FLIGHT:

This flight is comprised of fruit, berry, and plant-based wines. No mead (honey wine) or melomel (honey with fruit) has been included.

The wines are from four estate wineries and represent four of the five regions in British Columbia where fruit wines are made commercially

Five fruit or fruit blends have been chosen. The order chosen for tasting is a progression from one fruit variety to another, to lessen confusion on the palate of those judging the flight. This is the manner in which it is recommended that Judges and trainees assemble their country wine flights at competitions; helping to avoid palate confusion and reducing palate fatigue.

SUMMARY:

Fruit wine production played a key role in the evolution of wine making in British Columbia. It was integral to a much larger geographic and cultural picture dominated by an agricultural landscape of orchards, berries, and evolved partly due to "the practical need to turn local fruit into a valuable, storable product".(Wines of BC. Wine Growers of British Columbia). Although now eclipsed in volume by grape wine producers, fruit wine production has continued to grow and evolve, with BC wines now winning numerous national and international awards. From its modest beginnings on Vancouver Island, tackling an over-abundance of loganberries, fruit wine is now produced in multiple locations and in an astounding number of different wines; table, social, dessert, sparkling, and fortified.

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Winery websites:

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- https://maanfarms.com/pages/winery

Sleeping Giant Winery
- https://sleepinggiantfruitwinery.ca/

Northern Lights Estate Winery
- https://www.northernlightswinery.ca/

Forbidden Fruit Winery
- https://www.forbiddenfruitwine.com/

Coastal Black Estate Winery
- https://coastalblack.ca/

Buddhakat Winery
- https://buddhakatwine.com/6698-2

Robinette's Apple Haus & Winery
- https://robinettes.com/what-pairs-well-with-different-fruit-wines