

1. Wine Seminar May 27th 2012

Introduction

1 why do you want to enter in a competition

A] get feedback on your wine

B]be judged against your peers

C]get recognition for your wine making skills

I am often asked what I do to get such good results. Entering into competition is not really what I use for regular drinking wine. Every bottle that goes into competition needs to be looked at, opened, smelled and tasted. For a large competition like the Provincials I often spend 10 to 15 hour in preparation. If you just want to pull a bottle off the shelf and enter it, you will never get the results that you want. Let's take a look at what is required to improve your results in a competition:

You need to ask yourself the following questions:

1 what wine do I want to enter and why

2 how many classes do I want to enter

3 what results do I expect

Here are some of the basics

Pick the best wines that you have. This is always a good start. Remember it takes as much time to make a good wine as it takes to make a bad wine, therefore, buy the best grapes you can afford. You can still make bad wine from good grapes, but you cannot make good wine from bad grapes. At best you can make a passable wine.

In choosing a bottle to enter you have several decisions to make:

Is my wine ready or is it too young or too old

As a rule of thumb younger wine generally fares better than older wine

If the wine is too young and tannic, it generally also does not fare well.

Do my wine have any obvious issues [ie. Do I want a judge to tell me how to fix my wine]. Problem wines are not a good starting position. Most of the time, if there are significant flaws or faults the wine does not get tasted and is just removed from competition. This is a waste of your money and the judge's taste buds. In one case I had the same wine 3 times in different competitions and I even recognized who the wine maker was and I had to write on the comment sheet to stop wasting his money. The wine was still bad and would not get a better score.

Having said this, if on the first attempt your wine does not get the score you think it deserves, there is no reason not to try again. I have entered the same wine in several competitions and have received from no medal to gold for the same wine. When this happens, it can be very frustrating and you ask yourself am I right or the @??!! Judges. I will go into this a little later.

Have I opened the bottle to test if it is o.k. There is such a thing as bottle variation, which can be quite significant. It has happened that I had to open 3 bottles before I found the 'right one'. Also, you can be quite sure that if you do not open your bottle it will be the one which is corked. This has happened several times to me, even though I do not encounter this very often. The most significant case was when I dropped a bottle destined for the nationals. I did not have time to go back and check it again due to time constraints. Of course this new bottle from the shelf was corked. A gold medal for this wine as in the provincials would have given me first place rather than 2nd. Murphy is alive and well!

When you open your bottle smell it, give it a score and then taste it. This is best done in the morning when your taste buds are fresh. Beware of the taste of coffee, tooth paste and milk. When I do this, I swisch the first couple of wines around in my mouth and wait until it tastes right. Keep in mind to spit and do not drink. This will also distort your taste buds. If you want to do this in the evening, make sure that you are past your dinner tastes. Garlic and heavy spices also distort the taste. Heavy protein makes you not taste the tannin. Again, this is not ideal for getting the right

impression of your wine. I even find that it is a good idea to have a wine buddy, someone who knows a little about wine and can give you an honest feedback. My wife is very good at it and has no compunction to tell me it this wine is not good [in her words: why do you want to enter this crap?]

When you taste your wine, it is very important that you observe where you taste. Under ideal conditions, there should be something happening all around your mouth, all parts of your tongue as well as the roof of your mouth and the throat. Also there is something called mouth feel, or how dense is your wine. Is it thin or does it have good body. How long does the taste hang around in your mouth. A good wine is present for several minutes. A lacking wine dissipates quickly. When you notice that there is something lacking,, now is the time to fix it. You should always have some wines available to you for blending. It often does not take very much to change the character of a wine. In the case of Petite Verdot 1-2% can transform your wine to have better back palate. Remember, you can add up to 15% and can still call it varietal. Just make sure that you do not distort the character of the grape or wine class you are entering. As amateur wine makers, we do not have the same restrictions as commercial wine makers. We can add [even though I do not advise this] substances that will alter the mouth feel like glycerine [I prefer this to develop naturally over time]. When you overdo this your wine will taste metallic. This cannot be fixed, only diluted out. A problem that we often encounter in young wine is that it is tannic. What can you do, if the wine tastes like chalk in your gums and the inside of your cheeks pucker so hard that they touch each other. In an ideal case you wait [sometimes for years]. Winemakers have to be a patient lot. If you are not so patient there are several ways to alter this. The most aggressive way is to use Bentonite or egg whites to fine your wines. Both methods remove a lot of tannin. Also, it helps to open your wine for a period of time prior to the competition. Not only does this help for the mouthfeel, but often it also really helps the aroma. Young wines can often be asleep, they do not smell right and they do not taste quite right. The aroma is always your first impression of a

wine and a very good indicator of what to expect from the wine. If smell and taste correspond, you have a winning combination. More about smell later. If there is no smell or an off odor, this indicates a problem. In many cases this can be fixed. The most common issue we encounter is a Sulphur problem. This can vary from rotten egg smell to no smell at all. If there is little or very subdued smell use some copper [old penny or coil made from electrical wire] to test. If the smell changes, you may have a Mercaptan problem. The copper treatment will also change the taste. I do not want to spend too much time on wine problems, but before you enter competition this should be done. The competition is not the place where the judges should have to tell you.

Let's take a look at what is important for the judges and the judging process. Once you understand the process, it is much easier to understand the results you are getting. In a very simplified way, there are several areas which are important:

- 1] Aroma. This is worth 5 points or 25% of your mark. Make it count!
- 2] Balance This is worth another 5 points
- 3] General quality 9 points
- 4] Appearance 1 point [is it clear or not] only significant cloudiness will cost you here.

1] Aroma . If your smell is complex and has good volume [[intense], you will get a good mark and the expectation of the judge is already high and favorable. If the smell is off you are at the bottom of the pile and your wine will get tasted last. This is generally not good and leads to no medal There are many things you can do to enhance the aroma of your wine in the making process, which we will not go into here. If you find any off smells, deal with it or do not enter the wine.

2] **Balance.** Normally this is a 'give me' section. Only if there is something very wrong in either the sugar /acid balance or the tannin level, will you get deductions here. Often the deductions are relatively minimal .5 or 1 point.

3] **General quality.** This section is subdivided into 3 parts of 3 marks each: Flavor, Finish and general quality. Each of these sections is important and often they reflect each other in the score. Flavor to me is most important. If it is inviting and long lasting with appealing varietal characteristics and complexity, you have a winner. This section is where blending and good wine making skills shine.

Finish is about long lasting after taste and mouthfeel. Often nice, complex new flavors may intensify as you swill the wine in your mouth and inhale air through it. If there are any problems in the wine or it is lacking, the general quality section is where you lose your medal.

For you at home often a holistic approach is most valuable. On first smell and taste is it a medal or not. Be honest with yourself and ask your best critic. Does it smell and taste good. If the answer is yes, it is worth to enter the wine in competition. Once this decision has been made, it becomes more difficult and you need to start to really pay attention. Good results are in the details.