
Published: Wednesday, November 11, 2009

Rainy-side winners

State fair contest honors bottles with local grapes

By [Sarah Jackson](#)
Herald Writer

Wine is a great go-to holiday gift.

It's practical, relatively inexpensive and may literally lift the spirits of your loved ones.

But how do find a truly special wine?

Local is one way.

Though there are myriad Washington wines to try, did you know a handful of Western Washington wine makers are not only crafting their own wine, but also growing their own grapes?

This emerging niche of hyperlocal wine — showcasing numerous cool-climate grapes unknown to most wine drinkers — was honored during the first Western Washington wine competition held earlier this year at the Evergreen State Fair in Monroe.

Out of 32 entries in 10 categories, nine commercial wineries took home awards in the contest, held for the first time by Snohomish County to honor wine makers who cultivate their own fruit.

Judging the contest were local wine experts, including certified sommelier Christopher Chan, executive director of the Oregon Wine Awards and the Seattle Wine Awards, and Richard Kelsey, wine director for Ray's Boathouse in Seattle.

Categories appealed to the Puget Sound region's top-performing grapes, including the fragrant white varieties of madeleine angevine, siegerrebe and Müller-Thurgau. There were also categories for reds grown on the rainy side, including pinot noir and red blends.

Kevin Nasr, owner of Wicked Cellars wine shop in Everett, said Western Washington wine makers are doing a "phenomenal job" with locally grown whites.

He said reds are coming along more slowly, including pinot noir, a relatively new grape for Western Washington wine makers.

"They're working hard at producing really good pinot on this side of the mountains," Nasr said. "Some have achieved it and some haven't."

Though Nasr hadn't yet tried the state-fair award-winning pinot noir from Carpenter Creek Winery of Mount Vernon, which sells for about \$28 a bottle, he said he would definitely recommend the 2003 and 2006 reserve vintages of pinot noir from Challenger Ridge Vineyard & Cellars of Concrete and Woodinville.

Eric Emery, co-owner of Wine Styles in Marysville, said wine lovers should check out all the winning wine makers' offerings, including those made with nonlocal grapes.

One of his favorite locally made wines is Carpenter Creek's meritage, a top-selling cabernet sauvignon blend.

"It's just the ultimate wine with grilled salmon," he said. "When salmon season is running, I can't keep enough of the meritage in."

If there was a clear winner in the Evergreen State Fair contest, it was Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery.

Bainbridge, which does its own small-scale distribution, took home numerous top awards, including the Best of Show award with its 2006 late harvest botrytised siegerrebe.

Andy Perdue, editor of the quarterly magazine Wine Press Northwest, facilitated the blind-tasting contest at the fair.

He tastes more than 5,000 wines every year and found the event to be a refreshing change of pace, thanks to the unusual grape varieties.

"It was exciting to see these kinds of cooler-climate wines highlighted," Perdue said. "Most people don't understand that there is viticulture in Western Washington."

Perdue was not surprised to see the dessert wine, one of his favorites, win.

"It is so complex and so beautifully balanced and so interesting that the judges couldn't resist it," Perdue said. "I love recommending that wine to people because they've never seen it, they've never heard of it and they're blown away by it. It is a treasure."

Ballard Market in Seattle is one of a few stores in the region that sells the wine.

Though many wine drinkers may be leery of sometimes sickly sweet dessert wines, Ballard Market wine manager Marshall Gill recommends the award winner.

"It's almost nectarlike in consistency with a nice acid balance in the finish," he said. "What that means in English is that it doesn't come off as cloyingly sweet. It means it's got just enough acidity that it finishes clean."

Though a half bottle of the stuff costs about \$30, you don't need much.

Gill recommends serving 1-ounce tastings of the wine with a spicy rum raisin cake or another holiday dessert.

"It would be perfect with pumpkin pie or sweet potato pie," he said. "Even if you just had a nice biscotti with very subtle almond flavor, it would be lovely."

If dessert wine isn't your bag, you might simply broaden your horizons by trying a new-to-you Western Washington grape.

You'll be on the cutting edge. If you're giving a gift, your offering will be original.

"This is what wine lovers like," Perdue said. "You're always looking for what's new and what's different and what people don't know about."

Sarah Jackson: 425-339-3037, sjackson@heraldnet.com.

State fair winners

Snohomish County sponsored its first Evergreen State Fair competition for wines made with grapes grown in Western Washington. Here are the winners to give as gifts or to pair with a special holiday feast.

Though most of the wines listed here aren't readily available at major grocery stores because of limited distribution, you can check with individual wineries online or in person, grocery store wine buyers or your local wine shop to place

Best of Show: Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2006 Late Harvest Botrytised Siegerrebe

Best Pinot Noir: Carpenter Creek Winery 2006 Pinot Noir

Best Müller-Thurgau: Bainbridge Island 2006 Traditional Müller-Thurgau

Best Madeleine Angevine: San Juan Vineyards 2007 Madeleine Angevine

Best Siegerrebe: Bainbridge Island 2008 Siegerrebe

Best Other White: Bainbridge Island Ferryboat White

Gold

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2006 Late Harvest Botrytised Siegerrebe

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2008 Siegerrebe

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2006 Traditional Müller-Thurgau

San Juan Vineyards 2007 Madeleine Angevine

Silver

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2004 Dry Müller-Thurgau

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2007 Madeleine Angevine

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery Ferryboat White

Carpenter Creek Winery 2006 Pinot Noir

Hollywood Hill Vineyards 2007 Regent

San Juan Vineyards 2008 Madeleine Angevine

San Juan Vineyards 2008 Siegerrebe

Whidbey Island Winery 2007 Madeleine Angevine

Bronze

Bainbridge Island Vineyards & Winery 2003 Pinot Noir

Challenger Ridge Vineyard & Cellars 2006 Estate Pinot Noir

Eagle Haven Winery 2006 Siegerrebe Madeleine Angevine Blend

Lopez Island Vineyards Wave Crest White

Perennial Vintners 2007 Müller-Thurgau

Whidbey Island Winery 2007 Siegerrebe

Resources

Puget Sound Wine Growers Association: Find Web links and more information about 14 wineries and 12 vineyards of the association at www.pswg.org.

Washington Wine Commission: Learn more about all Puget Sound wineries at www.washingtonwine.org.

Whites to know

Madeleine Angevine (MAD-ell-enne AN-jeh-vine) is a lesser-known French grape that has been grown for wine in the Puget Sound region for more than 25 years. Dry, crisp wines made with this grape typically feature citrus and fruit flavors and a floral aroma that pairs well with oysters, fish, chicken and vegetable dishes. Like sauvignon blanc, it can even be paired with a salad course. If the pronunciation challenge makes you nervous, call it by its unofficial nickname, "Mad Angie."

Siegerrebe (see-ga-RAY-buh) is a cross between Madeleine Angevine and Gewurztraminer. It is typically used to make dry or semi-dry dinner wine with spicy and grapefruit flavors and a floral aroma. Like Gewurztraminer, it pairs well with spicy Asian, Indian or Mexican foods as well as seafood, such as steamed crab or even fish and chips.

Müller-Thurgau (MEW-luhr TOOR-gow) is the most widely planted grape in Germany. It can taste similar to a light and fruity riesling or fume blanc when grown in the Puget Sound climate. It's great for sipping on a hot summer day or as a match for a variety of seafood dishes.

© 2009The Daily Herald Co., Everett, WA