

Why White Heron Does Not Enter Competitions

When we started in 1986 and for many years afterwards we entered competitions as a way to get the winery noticed. If you come into our tasting room and peruse our scrapbook you will find information about medals we have won tucked away here and there.

Eventually we realized that none of the reviews (also tucked away in our scrapbook) or medals made any difference in our sales. This was primarily because we never won the super triple gold platinum award. This is because the un-oaked, fruit forward, and unfinned style of wine we make does not fare well in competitions. We then stopped entering competitions as, on average, it costs \$40 per wine to enter.

Why does the White Heron style not fare well in competitions?

A recent competition near here featured over 200 wines. I have myself worked as a judge in wine competitions. You are served a flight of comparable wines, say five Chardonnays. You rate these Chardonnays without food or atmosphere. You then move on to the next flight of Chardonnays. From each flight a wine is selected, assuming enough judges liked the wine. The wine selected is the wine that tastes the best compared to the other wines in the flight in that environment. The 'winning' wines from each flight are then returned to be tasted where eventually the 'best' wine of all is selected.

So to stick with our hypothetical Chardonnay, what is this Chardonnay best for? It is most likely the wine with the strongest aroma, smoothest body, and with low acids. In other words, it is the perfect wine for the cocktail hour where it will offend absolutely nobody. As a whole, this is the mistake with judging

wine, the best wine depends on the individual person, the environment it is served in, and the food it accompanies.

To return to our hypothetical Chardonnay, it probably would not fare well if served with pesto, braised scallops, and a mango salsa. It would not be bad, it would just be bland. Whereas, a Chardonnay from the Chablis region of France with a strong mineral taste, higher acid, and some astringency – a wine that would not do well in our competition – would form a synergy of flavor with the scallops that would elevate both the food and the wine.

When you taste over 200 wines in a day you are inevitably comparing them to one another. Awhile ago I read a great article by a professional wine judge. He commented that whenever he really loved a wine, another judge hated it. This meant that the wine he loved was eliminated from the judging. With such a system we are in essence removing any wine with character from the competition. Yet for some of us these wines are the best and these wines are the most interesting with food.

A friend who owns a wine shop once brought me a wine and said, “Taste this and tell me what you think.” I tasted it and commented on the rather bland overall character, nothing wrong with it, just uninteresting. He said, “I know, I know, but it just won a double gold medal.” As an aside, why is there no double silver or bronze?

Herb Lynch, an American wine importer, once described visiting a friend in France. In France you can readily purchase wine in bulk and bottle it yourself. Lynch accompanied his friend on such an expedition and spent the afternoon helping to bottle the wine. Naturally they had to drink the wine as they bottled and Lynch was at first unimpressed with his friend’s selection, it seemed thin and light. As the afternoon progressed and they continued to drink the wine Lynch suddenly realized that this was the perfect wine to

drink throughout the afternoon precisely because it was not an overpowering wine.

At White Heron we have come to realize over the years that people are dramatically different from one another. This means that anything perceived by the senses is going to evoke intensely different responses from different people. This also means that no movie, no painting, no music, no wine can be quantified as the 'best'. At White Heron we make wine with character because we love wine with character. We truly believe that every wine has a moment and a food with which, for that moment, it is the best wine in the world.