

The Amateur Winemaker

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From the Editor's Chair



*Sing! Who sings
To her who weareth a
hundred rings? Ah, who is this lady fine?
The Vine, boys, the vine!
The mother of the mighty Wine,
A roamer is she O'er wall and tree, And
sometimes very good company.*

-A Bacchanalian Song: B. W. Procter.



SPEEDY GROWER

.... an appropriate verse for me today (I write during August week-end) for I have just spent some time this afternoon pruning the Baco No. 1 vine now growing strong in what is (sometimes!) a sun-warmed corner of the house. Baco never ceases to surprise me with its vigour and speed of growth; an established vine's laterals will grow as much as 16 to 20 feet in a single season. So if you are planting one of this variety allow it plenty of elbow room. It is an excellent variety, disease-resistant, needing no spraying or sulphuring, and, once it is well established, a prolific cropper. The teinturier grapes are small, but make an excellent red wine with the minimum trouble, though I find that the acid content is so high that normally the juice has to have added almost an equal quantity of water to reduce the acidity to the desirable level, and corresponding sugar additions or, as the French prefer to call it, chaptelisation.

This summer has, on the whole, been a sunless one so far, so it looks as if this story will be repeated, and that the grapes will be late in ripening, even if they ripen at all. Let us hope that the late summer and autumn see plenty of sun. One consolation is that the abundance of prunings always makes some excellent wine, so one is never wholly disappointed.



APPLE FOR BLENDING

In the south, at least, it looks like being a wonderful year for apples, and I'm looking forward to making a good quantity of wine again, for I'm convinced that apple is one of the most rewarding wines we can make from our native fruit. Apples, I think, must be about the best fermentable material we have that is fairly generally and easily available, and most people can obtain enough apples to make a quantity of apple wine, for one needs only 6-12lbs. of fruit per gallon. I now prefer the latter figure, although I have in the past used as much as

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24lbs. to the gallon. Apple pulp has many virtues, because it ferments so well it is an excellent addition to the ingredients of other less vigorous wines-root, grain or flower wines-and can be used instead of the more usual raisins or sultana to provide a basis of good, fermentable material. Since its flavour is not strong, it blends well with the wine being made. The same is true of completed apple wine-it will blend well with almost any other, and will often effect a startling improvement. For instance, I have several gallons of elderberry wine two years old which is so dry and high in tannin as to be unpleasant. Blended with some slightly 'sweet apple wine, however, it fermented vigorously for about a fortnight, cleared miraculously quickly again, and was fit for drinking (and really smooth and enjoyable) within five or six weeks.



ROUTE TO CONSISTENT SUCCESS

The more blending I do the more I am convinced that herein lies the secret of consistently producing well-balanced, wholly satisfactory wines. One's chances of producing a perfectly balanced wine from a single main ingredient are not high, and I would join issue with my friends Cyril Shave, Peter Duncan and Bryan Acton, who all specialise in blending, but in the initial stages. This, it seems to me, can be little more than inspired guesswork (though I do not expect them to agree with me!). Blending of two or three *finished* wines is much more accurate, and the results quite predictable, though there are obviously exceptions to the rule. This blending of finished wines is an aspect of our hobby we tend to neglect, but I am convinced that eventually, as they realise the excellent results they can obtain in this way, more and more winemakers will come to practise it. The prime requirement for practising it, however, is to have one or two wines available in some bulk, and two ideal ones which leap to mind and which I largely use are elderberry and apple, both of which are sound fermentable material and blend well, either initially (as Cyril Shave suggests in this issue with elderberry) or finally. And now is the time to make quantities of both.



JUDGING DEVELOPMENTS

This month "Andy" Andrews, who does great work for "the National" as convenor of the judges, a task which grows steadily more difficult as the size of the wine show increases, reinforces the remarks I happened to make in the last issue about the need for systematising our judging. No-one is more aware than the National Committee of the need for better means of communication between the judge and the exhibitor (if the latter is to learn anything by exhibiting). There is also a crying need for more judges of national standard, whose authority and verdicts are unquestionable. To produce these at the drop of a hat is impossible, for they have first to reach a recognisable standard, and before that can be done that standard has to be set down, and means of anyone attaining it devised. That is the problem the Committee is wrestling with now; the full fruits of their labour, though, are not likely to be seen for at least another 18 months (though some may be apparent at the next National). One idea that I have suggested, by the way, is that the next National should concern itself largely with this one theme-judging.

EDITOR'S CHAIR - Continued

ONE WAY TO LEARN

There is not only a need for more judges but, as Andy points out, a need as well for more study of wine appreciation within Circles. The level of knowledge about what constitutes a good wine is still far too low, and in part, I think, stems from the unwillingness in many Circles to have anything to do with commercial wines. Yet the subject of wine is indivisible, and to my mind it is indisputable that, if you wish to know what a good wine tastes like, it is necessary to have *some* knowledge of commercial wines as well as our own country wines. The knowledge need not be wide, and certainly not of the rather "precious" type affected by the wine snob, but I would think that it is essential for any aspiring winemaker to have tasted, and remembered, some of the main types of commercial table wines—say a hock, a sweet white wine, a dry white wine, a Sauternes, a rough dry red wine, a Burgundy, a sweet red wine, ports and sherries, Madeira, and so on. There is no need to be a connoisseur (one only needs a working knowledge) but inevitably the desire to know, and study, more, will follow.

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JUDGING PRACTICE

There is also a crying need for more knowledge of judging, of what the judge is looking for, both qualities and faults, and of the problems that confront him. It is a great help if Circles arrange for their members to practice judging, and one way to do this is to borrow from Mrs. Cherry Leeds the set of marked glasses and all the impedimenta which she used for "Judge with the Judges" at the National. Five or six wines are placed in order of merit by a recognised judge (who can later give the reasons for his or her choice) but his placings are kept secret. The members then each judge the wines and, when the judge's placings are revealed, can see how far their own assessment tallied with them. Mrs. Leeds has everything needed for this in one box—containers, plastic cloth, judging forms, pourers, the lot I—and is charging 5/- for the loan of it for an evening, to cover expenses. If your Circle would like to use the kit, write to her at Willow Corner, Ember Reach, Thames Ditton, Surrey.

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TOO MANY!

May we draw the attention of Circles to one small organisational point? We find that in some clubs two, three or even four different people are ordering our publications, either the magazine or books, on behalf of their members. This means that as many individual accounts have to be sent out each month, with a consequent great increase in our book keeping. It would be a great help if clubs would channel *all* their orders through one "supplies officer" where possible. Thanks!

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FILMS

Does any Circle want to produce a winemaking film? Mr. A. W. Read, of "Ceres," 499 High Road, South Benfleet, Essex, a winemaker who is also keen on cine-photography, would like to produce an 8 m.m., 200ft. colour film to run about 15 minutes, and would like to hear from any club which could help with scripts and winemaking apparatus. Being retired he says, he has plenty of time to spare!

FIRST TASTE -OF JUDGING

by J. Northam Ridge

A winemaker of considerable experience and an exhibitor of more than average success discusses the urgent need for judges of wine who "know what they are about."

Two examples

In the first the fault was entirely my own. She was recommended to me as a good, experienced judge. I submitted the draft schedule (which included a class for home-made wines). She agreed to judge; she made no comment upon any of the classes.

As it happened, she turned out to be a member of a family of teetotalers whose only taste of wine had been at a wedding, many years ago when she sipped some champagne!

I was the show secretary; my wife was this judge's steward—that's how I came to know her lack of experience.

In the second case, the fault was definitely not my own. I had entered a local show of some standing. My bottle (corked firmly with a "corker") was unplaced; unopened; the cork bore no trace of the scars of the judge's (or his steward's) corkscrew; mine wasn't the only bottle whose virgin cork was unscathed.

These two episodes convinced me that amateur winemakers who go to the trouble of showing often are not given a fair deal—and that is why, when I was invited to judge the wine class, at a local show, I readily accepted, not because I had done the job before but because I felt that I should be capable of giving the entries at least the benefit of what little knowledge I have gained in the course of several years work and study of the craft.

Would-be judges, take heart! The experience is salutary, the value inestimable.

To be confronted with an array of bottles, all vying with one another for your favourable opinion, and with the knowledge that competitors have entered their best but that the decision is yours and yours alone, all these facts combine to make you realise what a challenge you have accepted.

But, quite frankly, I was rather appalled at the entries. True, the class was a small one (an advantage, for one could devote extra time to each entry). Some of the entries were remarkable for their apparent clarity and brilliance but hardly one was free from a more than considerable amount of sediment. Many had "floaters."

Poor

Now, I know full well that wine is meant to be drunk, and in my opinion the great bulk of points must finally be given for flavour—both original and after—and I could forgive a trace of sediment if the flavours were all that were to be desired, but I have seldom seen such carelessness in presentation—labelling, old corks, and unpolished bottles.

Several wines were cloudy—none was what I, as an amateur, would have termed a "first prize" wine. Yet I had to choose. Was I right to award three prizes when I was not convinced that the wines merited the cards? Was it better to select the three of the class that I thought were the best rather than to withhold the prizes and so discourage my unknown friends of our craft?

Upon serious reflection, I am sure I did the right thing. Three bottles were duly labelled, "First Prize," "Second Prize" and "Third Prize." Three winemakers are satisfied that their wine was better than the other entries and I am satisfied that whatever I might have thought of the wines, each and everyone had as fair and unbiased an appraisal as I could possibly give it.

I, too, shall learn—but, do you know, one bottle labelled Parsley 1961 was the nearest I've ever tasted to ginger beer!

Thoughts on judging

by S. W. Andrews, Convenor of Judges at the National Conference and Show

Many interesting points emerged from the mammoth task of judging the 1,200 entries at this year's "National" at Brighton, so we invited the Convenor of the judges, Mr. S. W. Andrews, to give us his comments.

Now that the hustle and excitement of the National Show has died down, we have time to sit back quietly and analyse things a little. It was very unfortunate that the comments of the judges were not given until after the AGM when everyone was a little tired - myself included - and time was running out rapidly. The result was that I had insufficient time to say what I would have liked to have said. However, here now are some observations.

First, the low standard of the exhibits! The standard this year was definitely lower. Each judge was given a form and was asked to indicate the percentage of the exhibits which were considered to be below the standard expected from our National Show. The result was both enlightening and disappointing. The highest figure was 90 per cent. and the lowest 5 per cent. The average over all the classes was 50 per cent. Several judges commented, "The standard was not even high enough for a Circle Show."

Main faults noted by the judges were as follows:

On presentation: Dirty and badly fitting corks; dirty bottles; foreign bodies and sediment; poor labelling.

On the wines: Instability; poor clarity; too strongly flavoured; lacking in vinosity; off flavours; unpleasant bouquet; immature.

General remarks were that:

The sweet classes contained many wines which were too sweet; in many cases the alcohol content was too low for a sweet wine. A number of wines were insipid and lacked "bite." Many wines had too many raisins used in their production. To quote the judges: "In a great number of the classes there was no wine of outstanding quality."

So much for the analysis of judges' comments. Now, what lessons have we learnt from the '63 Show?

Lessons

(a) That the standard of the exhibits has fallen below that of previous years.

(b) Although we had a record entry a fair percentage of them should never have reached the show bench.

(c) To prevent anomalies between the judges, a standard set of rules for procedure and judging must be prepared.

(d) Methods must be devised for adjusting the classes to manageable numbers.

(e) There is need for better liaison between the judge and the exhibitor, for example, an exhibitor is entitled to know why an exhibit is disqualified.

(f) A complete and revised set of rules must be prepared for the guidance of the exhibitor.

(g) The winners of the Premier A wards should be presented with their awards in a decorous manner compatible with the distinction that they have earned. The presentation of awards at Brighton left a lot to be desired!

It was fairly obvious at Brighton that the Show has outgrown its own organisation; we now have a relatively small committee running a really large show and conference. So one thing we must do is to enlarge the Organising Committee.

More guidance is needed both for judges and exhibitors. At the moment there is no standard procedure for judging, but it is vital we have one if we are to avoid the anomalies that exist between some of the judges. This means that some form of training and vetting must be devised for increasing the number of available judges.

Means must be devised for letting the exhibitor know something more about the judge's opinion of his wine.

The National Committee is aware of these and of other points connected with the Show, a subcommittee has been formed to investigate and suggest a revision of rules and procedure, this committee has already met and work is proceeding along the lines as suggested.

So much for the organisers. Now what of the exhibitor? This is where Circles could help tremendously.

May I humbly suggest that a little more time be spent at Society meetings on wine appreciation? Also recognising basic faults such as over- or under-acidity, astringency, etc., recognising by palate the difference between a dry and a medium sweet wine, understanding the meaning of such terms as "stability" and "clarity." Without this knowledge the exhibitor will never be able to estimate the show potential of his or her wine.

A great deal of useful knowledge and instruction could be disseminated on a Society level which would assist in the elimination of poor wines in our Show.

I myself would like to see a standard set of classes drawn up which would be used in all shows, from the Circle to the National. This would enable a series of elimination rounds to be held, starting with the Circle competition. The winners of the Circle competition would then compete in a regional show, and the first half dozen (say) in each class would then go forward to the National.

By this time all the faults which are apparent to the visual part of judging should have been eliminated. This would mean that the judge at the National would then be able to devote all his time and concentration on THE WINE, which is surely the main object of the operation.

Fewer but better?

1, would rather see 800 bottles of wine of a high standard on our show benches than 2,000 entries, of which 50 per cent. were sub-standard, and I feel confident that the majority of the discerning members of the Amateur Winemaking Movement would agree with this sentiment.

This chain of Circle - Region - National could also play its part in the training and selecting of judges. This is a very important factor of our movement, we **must** increase our number of competent judges.

A trainee judge could start with circle competitions, graduate to the Regional Show where the judging could be supervised by a National judge. Future candidates for the National Show could ultimately be selected from the Regional Show, these same candidates could also act as stewards at the National in the meantime, here they would be working with but under - a National judge.

I do feel that any winemaker who aspires to be a judge should have certain basic qualifications - in

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THOUGHTS ON JUDGING (continued)

addition to a palate! I would say that a good wine-making background is essential, and the aspirant should have competed in a number of shows with some success, and should have acted in the capacity of steward in wine competitions, you see, it is no earthly good having a palate, if, having used it, you are unable to form a diagnosis.

There is however some opposition to this idea of eliminating rounds. As many of you will remember, I have discussed this idea over the past two years, and there have certainly been more "ayes" than "no's." Nevertheless I know that there are certain difficulties, one person said it would prevent the exhibitor from competing if he had only one bottle of good wine to enter; by the time it had passed through the Circle competition the wine level in the bottle would be too low for the next round! I refrain from comment. I think that the idea could be made to work, not this year - or the next, but as more and more circles group themselves into regions - and in my experience a Regional get together is just about the right size for maximum enjoyment - then I think that the idea could be borne in mind as a long term possibility.

Finally, on behalf of the National Committee, I would like to thank the judges and stewards for their invaluable assistance at Brighton. I know only too well the inconvenience and expense involved in acting in this capacity; perhaps at some future date we shall be able to reimburse at least the travelling expenses incurred, unfortunately we are not in a position to do this at the moment.

May I also thank all the exhibitors for supporting the classes. Each section of the show is equally important, an exhibitor must rely on a judge, the judge - to a point - upon the help of the steward, but neither judge nor steward would be needed if there were no exhibits and if there were no exhibits, judges or stewards there would be no need for an organising committees! So in case anyone has queer ideas of priorities I would like to make it clear that every person involved with the Show is equally responsible for its success - or failure!

May I wish you all the best of luck at Bournemouth in 1964. We of the organising committee will do our best to iron out the organising faults, will you, the exhibitors, please work equally as hard to improve the standard of the exhibits? New corks, clean bottles, labelling according to schedule, a reasonable standard of clarity, stable wines - in other words - exhibits worthy of our Premier Show.