

UPDATE with judges' comments: Brys Estate captures Cab Cup

AUGUST 21; Updated AUGUST 26 -- The entries and winemakers came from all over the state. But the trophy and medals went back to Old Mission Peninsula.

Michigan's most expensive red wine -- Brys Estate's 2007 Artisan Series Cabernet Franc, priced at \$50 -- won the Harding's Cup at the first-ever Michigan Cabernet Franc Challenge on Thursday, August 20. The same wine took a double gold medal earlier in the month at the Michigan Wine Competition.

And in a clean sweep for Old Mission wineries, the six-judge panel awarded second and third place medals to the just-bottled 2 Lads Reserve Cab Franc and Brys's own regular release.

Twenty-two wines entered the Challenge, almost evenly split between the state's northern and southern wine regions. The event was organized and sponsored by Kalamazoo-based Harding's Markets and took place at that city's Park Club.

William Harrison, Chairman of the Michigan Grape and Wine Council's Research Committee and one of the judges, termed 11 of the wines "excellent quality that could be comparable to any similar red wines anywhere in the world."

Master Sommelier Claudia Tyagi, another judge, called them, "an exceptional array of well made wines from a stunning Michigan vintage."

Only wines from 100% Cabernet Franc in the 2007 vintage were eligible to enter, according to Terry Stingley, wine director for Harding's.

"This is a clear victory for vinifera grapes and the notion of terroir in Michigan," said Stingley.

Harrison was unsurprised by the showing of Old Mission's two reserve bottlings. {xtypo_quote_left}"An exceptional array of well made wines from a stunning Michigan vintage." --Claudia Tyagi MS{/xtypo_quote_left}

"Wines like the Brys Estate Artisan and the Two Lads Reserve benefit tremendously from their wineries' commitment to very small crop size in the vineyard and special handling throughout the winemaking process," he noted. "These wines are made in very limited quantities, even by Michigan standards, and command a very high price."

Aside from the Brys Artisan Series at \$50, the Brys regular Cab Franc sells for \$30. 2 Lads Reserve, bottled just two days before the Challenge, is scheduled for October release; its price isn't set.

Harrison had several other observations on the wines:

- 2007 Cabernet Franc produced by a number of Michigan wineries is of world class quality.
- Wines from Northern Michigan were generally richer, darker colored and more complex than those from SW Michigan.
- Wines from the top eight finalists that did not win a medal, but are "quite worthy" include Black Star Farms Arcturos, Two Lads regular bottling and Bowers Harbor.
- Five wineries didn't make it out of the first round but deserve commendation. Lawton Ridge and Hickory Creek were somewhat lighter versions, but well balanced, fruit forward and very easy drinking. Raftshol was richer, lively and delicious. Shady Lane and Cascade Winery also produced a worthy wine in this group.

Following the tasting, Tyagi expressed a clear stylistic preference among the wines.

"It was not inappropriate to compare these wines to a classic French Chinon... Our best wines demonstrate the class, structure, and nuance of the finest old world, terroir driven wines," she said. "We should not expect anything from Michigan to be successful in the zaftig, high alcohol styles of California or Australia, and I strongly feel that our winemakers should not try to produce wines in this style."

Tyagi singled out seven favorites from the judging: Black Star Farms Arcturos, Bowers Harbor, Brys Artisan, Raftshol, Shady Lane, and both wines from 2 Lads.

More than a dozen winemakers attended the Challenge and awards reception. They included Brys's Coenraad Stassen, 2 Lads' Cornel Olivier, Shady Lane's Adam Satchwell, and Domaine Berrien's Wally Maurer.

Other judges were Sommelier Michael Cregar, owner of Wines of Distinction, Patrick Fegan, head of the Chicago Wine School, Jean-Jacques Fertal of Eagle Eye Imports, and Dean Rondy from Oxford Wine and Beverage.

CORRECTION: William Harrison's affiliation with the Michigan Grape and Wine Council was previously misidentified. He is Chairman of its Research Committee. It's been corrected in the text and is noted here.

{xtypo_alert}MichWine live-blogged from the event; read the feed here{/xtypo_alert}