

Connecticut wineries earn international medals

Day and night my thoughts incline to the blandishments of wine, jars were made to drain, I think; wine, I know, was made to drink.

— R.H. Stoddard (1826-1903)

Ten Connecticut wineries earned 32 medals in the recently held Amenti Del Vino's 16th annual International Wine Competition. Three hundred sixty-eight wines were entered from 26 states and two foreign countries. One hundred ninety one wines earned citations and medals.

The Connecticut wineries did very well particularly in view of the fact that several of the wineries are brand new and were competing on an international level for the first time ever. There are now 28 wineries functioning in Connecticut, up from less than a dozen five years ago. Winery development and grape growing has proven to be a viable alternative to agriculture development and with many former dairy farms discontinuing operations, their land is usually suited very well for grape growing. Modern technology has made it easier to grow quality, noble varieties of grapes and the national popularity of wine has encouraged ambitious entrepreneurs to venture into this revived ancient art or as some say, science.



Eugene Spaziani

WINE

Several longtime successful orchards (Bishop's in Guilford, Jones Orchards in Shelton, and the White Silo Winery in Sherman) have moved on to become farm wineries featuring wines made from their fruit harvests. There are other longtime orchards in Connecticut considering applying for the affordable Farm Winery License.

The increase of wineries in Connecticut is part of a national trend that has been going on for several years. Every state in the union has at least one winery located in it and now more than 6,000 wineries are operating in the United States. As a point of interest Alaska has six wineries and Hawaii has three. The proliferation of wineries in the United States continues to grow as the popularity of wine increases each year. The eventual number of wineries in the United States is impossible to predict, but with wine now being the number one alcoholic beverage consumed here, we can expect more and more wineries to develop.

The American spirit of entrepreneurial pursuits and challenges is deeply rooted in those who accept the challenge of growing grapes and operating a winery, a small, personal, retail business. Many wineries are small family-run businesses, the core of America's free enterprise society. Located in the cradle of American history, Connecticut is rapidly becoming, once again, a leader of New England business progress with its growing family of wineries. And there is probably more to come as success continues for those operating a winery today in our state.

Leading the Connecticut wineries with the highest number of winning entries in the international competition was a former orchard-turned-winery, Bishop's Orchards Winery of Guilford, with six winning wines. All six wines earned bronze medals and included: a Bishop's Orchards Winery Crimson Red, Bishop's Orchard Winery Amazing Grace, Bishop's Orchards Winery Paradise, Bishop's Orchards Winery Honey Peach Melba, Bishop's Orchards Winery Apple Raspberry Blush, and Bishop's Orchards Winery Hopley Impaired.

Another orchard-turned-winery, Jones Winery of Shelton, earned five medals with the Jones Winery Connecticut Ripon Red wine earning a gold medal. Two of the Jones Winery wines earned silver medals: the Jones Winery Connecticut First Blush and the Jones Winery Woodland's White. And two Jones Winery entries earned bronze medals: 2008 Jones Winery Connecticut Pinto Gris and the Jones Winery Connecticut Black Currant Bouquet.

The Maugle Sierra Vineyards of Ledyard, a new winery led by winemaker/owner Paul Maugle, a former amateur winemaker turned professional, earned five bronze medals, an amazing accomplishment for the new kid on the block. The five bronze medals were awarded for the

2007 South East New England Ledyard House Chardonnay, the Maugle Sierra Vineyards American 1740 Ledyard House Red, the Maugle Sierra Vineyards American Ledyard Sunset Red, the 2007 South East New England Maugle Sierra Vineyards Estate St. Croix, and the South East New England Maugle Sierra Vineyards Escencia of St. Croix.

Priam Vineyards of Colchester, a frequent entrant and medal winner, earned three bronze medals for its 2006 Priam New London County St. Croix, the 2008 Priam New London County Gewürztraminer, and the 2008 Priam New London County Riesling.

The well-established, and Connecticut's largest producer, Sharpe Hill Vineyard of Pomfret earned three medals in the international competition. The winning entries included a silver medal for the Sharpe Hill Ballet of Angel and two bronze medals for a Sharpe Hill Vineyard Red Seraph and a 2007 Sharpe Hill Vineyard South East New England Chardonnay. The Sharpe Hill Vineyard Ballet of Angels is the most popular wine produced in New England, with more than 20,000 cases being produced and sold, a tribute to Sharpe Hill's winemaker Dr. Howard Bursen and his winemaking talents.

Another new kid of the block, Miranda Vineyards of Goshen, a first-time entrant and new winery, earned three medals: silver medals for the 2007 Miranda Vineyards Western Connecticut Highlands Rosé and the 2007 Miranda Vineyards Western Connecticut Highlands Woodridge White, and a bronze medal for the Miranda Vineyards Western Connecticut Highlands Chardonnay.

A longtime established and successful Connecticut winery, DiGrazia Vineyards of Brookfield, earned three medals in the international competition. Silver medals were awarded to the 2004 DiGrazia Vineyards Blacksmith Port and the DiGrazia Vineyards Williams Sonnet Red. A bronze medal was awarded to the 2001 DiGrazia Vineyards White Magnolia White Port. Dr. Paul DiGrazia, the owner/winemaker at DiGrazia Vineyards, is a full time physician when not making wine or tending the vineyards.

Another brand-new winery, a first-time wine entrant, Walker Road Vineyards of Woodbridge, entered one wine and earned a bronze medal for its efforts. The bronze medal was awarded to the Walker Road Vineyards St. Croix, a red hybrid type.

A small fruit wine producer, White Silo Winery of Sherman, earned a gold medal for its White Silo Blackberry Wine. All of its fruit is grown at the winery. White Silo Winery has been reasonably successful since its opening several years ago. To earn a gold medal in an international competition is quite a feat and it should be congratulated.

A brand new winery, Sunset Meadow Vineyards of Goshen, earned a silver medal for its 2008 Sunset Meadow Vineyards Western Connecticut Highlands Sunset Blush. This was the first time entering an international competition for Sunset Meadow, and winning a silver medal is an outstanding accomplishment.

The final Connecticut winery earning a medal in this competition was another new winery, Savino Vineyards of Woodbridge. A bronze medal was awarded for its 2007 Savino Vineyards Connecticut St. Croix.

All of these Connecticut wineries should be congratulated and applauded for their efforts. The increase in medal winnings is evidence to the winemaking skills of these winemakers, particularly with the new ones who obviously have been schooled properly. The Connecticut consumer has a lot to look forward to as these wineries continue to hone their skills, improve technology, and continue to produce award-winning wines. With 28 wineries located throughout the state, it should be easy to find a nearby Connecticut winery to visit and evaluate their award-winning wines.

BEST BUY OF THE WEEK: Sharpe Hill Vineyard Ballet Of Angels, \$11.50. Connecticut's best-selling white wine. Crisp, full-flavored, slight tinge of sweetness, very pleasant and easy drinking. Very nice wine.

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