



## Sydney International Wine Competition 2011

### Report from Chairman of Judges Kym Milne MW (South Australia)

It was, as always, a pleasure to be Chairman of Judges at the 30th Sydney International Wine Competition, in my seventh year as Chairman and my 11th time as a judge. The smooth organisation for the judging of 2000 wines by 13 judges, with the added complication of the final 400 wines being rejudged with food, is a remarkable achievement and a credit to organisers Warren and Jacquie and their stewards. The judging team this year consisted mainly of returning judges, as well as a good mix of several new international judges who all showed great dedication to the judging, along with some good humoured banter, making the competition a pleasure to chair.

This wine competition is all about providing the consumer with a range of wine options for a range of different dining situations, and I believe the competition has again achieved this. A real diversity of wine styles produced from an every increasing range of grape varieties have been awarded either TOP100™, Blue Gold or Highly Commended status. It is pleasing to see not just diversity between the categories, but also within the classes, providing the consumer with some really interesting wine options to experiment with.

In the Sparkling Wines Category there were some outstanding Australian and New Zealand wines competing with French Champagnes. This reflects the significant improvements made in quality sparkling wine production in Australasia over recent years, with the move to cooler climates and the development of more classic base wines producing wines of real elegance and complexity.

In the Sparkling Red Category, shiraz-based wines dominated, with all of the TOP100™ and Blue Gold places being taken up by shiraz or shiraz-dominated blends.

Rieslings once again dominated the Aromatics Category, with a range of styles produced from an even mix of New Zealand and Australian regions. Three gewurztraminers also made the higher levels, with two very good examples from New Zealand making the TOP100™ selection, and one other, also from New Zealand, achieving a Blue Gold award.

The Sauvignon Blanc Category has often been a clean sweep for New Zealand at this show, but this year a barrel-fermented style from Margaret River featured in the TOP100™, along with nine wines from New Zealand, providing a refreshing style difference in this category that the New Zealanders have made their own.

The Pinot Noir Category in past competitions has also been the domain of the New Zealanders, and this was again the case. All 23 of the wines that were awarded either TOP100™ or Blue Gold status came from New Zealand. Within these wines, Central Otago was the most-awarded region, although there was a good range of other New Zealand regions represented in the results, as well as a good range of styles from the elegant, perfumed more restrained, through to the very ripe and fuller-flavoured styles.

The judges have awarded a fabulous array of styles to choose from in the Lighter-Bodied Whites Category. In both the TOP100™ and Blue Gold results, there are some very good examples of interesting new varieties (to Australasia) such as gruner veltliner and roussanne, as well as the more classical Hunter semillons, both aged and bright young examples. Vibrant semillon–sauvignon blanc blends, pinot gris, verdelhos and a few of the more restrained chardonnays add to the variety of consumer choice in this category.

Chardonnay is much more widely represented as we move to the Medium-Bodied Dry White Category, offering some very elegant wines. Pinot gris is also making its presence felt more and more in this category each year, with three examples selected amongst both the TOP100™ and Blue Gold Awards. Some of these pinot gris show real ripeness, depth of flavour and spice, and I would strongly recommend them to consumers who have been put off this variety by some insipid, bland offerings that have hit the market in recent years. Pinot gris in these richer styles provide excellent food wines, with their texture and softer acidity also often working extremely well with spicier Asian dishes. A South Australian savagnin is also an interesting inclusion amongst the Blue Gold Award winners and worth seeking out.

The Fuller-Bodied Dry White Category is more the domain of the chardonnays, with the top five wines in the category being Australian chardonnays, with Hunter Valley, Margaret River, Yarra Valley and Adelaide Hills all being represented. These top-rated, fuller-bodied chardonnays all showed real elegance as well as complexity within the category and are a testament to the dramatic improvement in Australian chardonnay over the past few years. Pinot gris, viognier and a roussanne–viognier also featured in this Fuller-Bodied Dry White Table Wines Category.

In the Light-Bodied Dry Red Category, shiraz from cooler climates was the most awarded style, with half of the wines in the TOP100™ awards being from New Zealand, in particular Hawkes Bay. A number of lighter bodied cabernet sauvignons, as well as a smattering of merlots, grenache and a touriga nacional from South Australia add interest to a varied array of the wine styles recommended.

The Medium-Bodied Dry Red Category was the most successful category in the entire competition, with 21 wines being selected for the TOP100™ and a similar number of

winners in the Blue Gold list. Shiraz was again the leading variety, with a fabulous diversity of styles from both the classic regions and the emerging regions of Australia, as well as from New Zealand, one Hawkes Bay shiraz. A number of very stylish cabernet sauvignons also featured strongly in both the TOP100™ and the Blue Gold selections. A lagrein from McLaren Vale was an interesting addition to the TOP100™ list, and was a very good example of this little-seen variety that originates from the north-east of Italy.

As might be expected, the Fuller-Bodied Dry Red Category was dominated by Australia. Traditional regions featured very strongly, with some rich, full, extremely high quality wines with cabernet and shiraz predominating, as well as some interesting grenache blends. An Italian nero d'avola based blend is a new addition to the TOP100™ this year, providing a different, more savoury profile compared to many of the other wines.

In summary, again, within this year's award winners, at various price points in each of the different style categories, the consumer has a very interesting and diverse range of high quality wines from which to select, providing many enjoyable options for a complete range of dining occasions.