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Local vintners do well in competition

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More than 60 professional judges met at the Cloverdale Citrus Fair in January to evaluate entries in the 2009 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, one of the largest competitions of American wines in the world. Wine makers from the Santa Cruz Mountain appellation achieved several Best of Class and gold medal ratings in the competition that featured 4,736 wines from 1,500 wineries.

Professional wine judges representing trade, education, media, retail and restaurants throughout the United States appraised entries from wineries in 26 states. The judging took place over three days and a public tasting took place in San Francisco Feb. 28.

Wines were awarded as Bronze, Silver, Gold and Double Gold unanimous gold by the judges. In addition, there were Best of Class Awards given for each of the wine judging categories, and the prestigious Sweepstake Awards for the top Sparkling, White, Pink, Red, & Dessert/Specialty wines.

"It's such an honor to earn such high praise among so many diverse types of wine and wine-growing regions," says Shannon Flynn operations manager for the Santa Cruz Winegrowers Association. "Almost half of award winners are pinots. Since we are known for growing pinot noir, I thought that was significant with our coastal climate and what it means for our terroir."

Sarah's Vineyard, located along Hecker Pass, won two Best of Class ratings for its 2007 Sarah's Vineyard Pinot Noir Santa Cruz County and its 2005 Sarah's Vineyard Syrah Santa Clara Valley.

Also winning Best of Class were the 2005 Storrs Winery Petite Sirah SCM and the 2006 La Honda Winery Cabernet Sauvignon Chalone.

A host of local wineries also won gold medals for pinot noir, merlot, syrah and Chardonnay -- all wines that do well in our coastal climate.

Sarah's Vineyard, which straddles two appellations -- Santa Cruz and Santa Clara, grows pinot noir and Chardonnay as well as Syrah and makes Burgundian and Rhone style wines.

"We strive to make the best pinot noir, Chardonnay and syrah. We grow pinot and Chardonnay on the estate and buy grapes from Santa Cruz Mountains growers. We're glad our efforts were enjoyed," says winemaker Robert Henson.

"I love the fruit from the Santa Cruz Mountains. Pinot in general expresses its place more than any other," says Henson.

And pinot noir is one of the grapes that grows well in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Other wineries receiving golds for their pinot noirs read like a who's who: Roudon-Smith Winery; Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard; Storrs Winery; Beauregard Vineyards; Trout Gulch Vineyard; Cinnabar Vineyard; Loma Prieta Winery, Muccigrosso Vineyards; and Soquel Vineyards.

"A lot comes from the winemaking style. I don't use 100 percent of the grapes but take the best of what is given me and make wine out of that," says Henson. He keeps the wine in separate barrels according to origin then blends when it's time to bottle. "I created a wine that expresses the Santa Cruz Mountains as well as I could."

And the winners are...

The San Francisco Chronicle gave "Best of Class" awards to:

Sarah's Vineyard 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Cruz County

Sarah's Vineyard 2005 Syrah Santa Clara Valley

Storrs Winery 2005 Petite Sirah Santa Cruz Mountains (SCM)

La Honda Winery 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Chalona

Double Gold was awarded to:

La Honda Winery, 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Cruz Mountains, Lonehawk

Gold Medals were awarded to:

Alfaro Family Vineyard, 2006 Merlot Billy K SCM

Bargetto Winery, 2006 Reserve Merlot SCM

Beauregard Vineyards, 2006 Pinot Noir SCM Trout Gulch Vineyard

Bonny Doon Vineyard, 2006 Ca del Solo Dolcetto Monterey

Cinnabar Vineyards, 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands

Clos LaChance, 2007 Chardonnay, Monterey, "Glittering-Throated Emerald"

Clos LaChance, 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, Estate

Loma Prieta Winery, 2007 Pinot Noir SCM Saveria

Martin Ranch, 2005

Therese Vineyards Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, SCM

Martin Ranch, 2005 Therese Vineyards Syrah, Santa Clara Valley

Muccigrosso Vineyards, 2005 Zinfandel Santa Clara County Stan's Zin Moniz

Muccigrosso Vineyards, 2006 Pinot Noir SCM

Roudon-Smith Winery, 2007 Pinot Noir, SCM

Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, 2005 Pinot Noir SCM Bailey's Branciforte Ridge

Sarah's Vineyard, 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Clara Valley Estate

Sones Cellars, 2006 Petite Sirah Paso Robles French Camp

Soquel Vineyards, 2007 Pinot Noir SCM Bald Mt. Vineyard

Soquel Vineyards, 2007 Pinot Noir SCM Saveria Vineyard

Storrs Winery, 2005 Petite Sirah SCM

Storrs Winery, 2006 Pinot Noir SCM Wildcat Ridge

Storrs Winery, 2006 Pinot Noir SCM

Storrs Winery, 2007 Chardonnay SCM Stu Miller

Storrs Winery, 2007 Chardonnay SCM

Vine Hill Winery, 2006 Pinot Noir, Hicks Family Vineyard, Cumbre

Where to try Santa Cruz wines

PINOT PARADISE

Pathway to Pinot Paradise: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. March 28 at various participating wineries, Cost is \$25.

Grand Cruz Tasting: 2 p.m.-5 p.m. March 29 at Villa Ragusa, 35 S. Second St., Campbell. More than 30 wineries showcase their finest pinot noirs paired with gourmet appetizers from local restaurants. Cost is \$55 Advance \$65 at the door; \$75 Special VIP tour and pre-tasting at 1 p.m. (includes Grand Cruz Tasting).

Technical Session: 9 a.m.-noon March 29 at Villa Ragusa in Campbell. This program will offer in-depth seminars on the sub-regions of Pinot Noir in the Santa Cruz Mountains with presentations by experts in the field. Cost is \$55.

PASSPORT PROGRAM

11 a.m.-5 p.m. April 18. Explore viticultural region, taste wines and meet the wine makers. An opportunity to visit many of the wineries that are not open to the public at other times. At each winery you visit, a page of your Passport will be given a unique commemorative stamp. Passports do not expire until completed. TCall or check scmwa.com for list of participating wineries and other event information. One-time fee of \$40.