

BEST OF THE BEST IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST

Platinum Judging

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This year marked our ninth annual Platinum Judging, in which we attempt to identify some of the best of the best in the Great Northwest. By far, this was our largest judging, as we received 329 entries in this by-invitation-only competition. This surpassed last year's record number of 259.

All wines in the Platinum earned their way in by winning a gold medal or equivalent in any of about 30 regional, national and international competitions we track.

With the most entries also came the most Platinums we've ever awarded: 54. Was that too many? Because we list the wines in order of finish, then I would conclude it is not. Our judges did not award Platinums lightly; rather, they argued and cajoled over wines to ensure the medals they gave were well deserved.

A few trends I noticed from this year's competition:

- Riesling was our largest single category with 38 wines. This was partly because one of our competitions focused on Riesling and partly because Riesling is a hot variety in the Northwest.
- Syrah performed particularly well, winning eight Platinums.
- Vin du Lac, a winery on Washington's Lake Chelan, won a Platinum for its Cabernet Franc for the fourth consecutive year, a stunning achievement.
- Our list of wines includes a lot from British Columbia. We received a larger-than-usual

number of entries from B.C., and they tended to perform extremely well. Gehringer Brothers Estate Winery in Oliver, B.C., won four Platinums. Wild Goose Vineyards in Okanagan Falls, B.C., and La Frenz in Naramata, B.C., won three each.

- Ste. Michelle Wine Estates won four Platinums from its various wineries: Northstar, Chateau Ste. Michelle, Spring Valley Vineyards and Snoqualmie Vineyards. Equally notable, Domaine Ste. Michelle's Blanc de Noir did not win a Platinum for the first time in years (in fact, it wasn't in the competition this year).
- Eight wines won Double Platinums, meaning our judges unanimously agreed on the awards.
- Wineries winning two Platinums each were Maryhill, Tsillan and Willamette Valley Vineyards (including its Griffin Creek label).

Our judges this year were: Vanessa Bailey, a soil microbiologist and member of our tasting panel; Bob Woehler, the dean of Northwest wine writers and our tasting editor; Parks Redwine, a wine broker from Atlanta, Ga., who owns the Northwest Wine Summit, the largest judging of Northwest wines; Ken Robertson, a Wine Press Northwest columnist; and Coke Roth, an international wine judge and member of our tasting panel.

The judging was conducted Nov. 1-2 at the Clover Island Inn in Kennewick, Wash.

BEST OF THE BEST

Cascade Cliffs Vineyard & Winery \$30
2006 Barbera, Columbia Valley Owner/winemaker Bob Lorkowski has been impressing wine lovers for the decade he has owned this small winery in the eastern Columbia Gorge, crafting wines from well out of the mainstream. This stunning red uses

WINE RATINGS

All wines earned gold medals or the equivalent to get into our judging. Thus, the lowest medal they could earn was a gold. Here's how wines are rated in our competition:

Best of the Best

These are the top-rated wines in the judging. They should be considered extremely collectible and highly coveted. This year, two wines tied with the top score, and both were Double Platinums.

Double Platinum

The judges unanimously decided these were Platinums. Again, these should be considered highly coveted.

Platinum

Great wines, among the best in the Great Northwest.

Double Gold

Superb wines that rise above. They should be highly sought after.

Gold

Our judges confirmed the gold medals they earned elsewhere. They should not be overlooked.

Best Buy

Any that is \$15 and under.

Prices are suggested retail and should be used as guidelines. Prices are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise noted as CDN which is Canadian dollars.

Competitions

We track more than 30 competitions each year, sifting through the results for winners from the Pacific Northwest. We include the three peer-group judgments we do each year at Wine Press Northwest. This year's judgments included: Pinot Noir, Riesling and Italian red varieties. The names of the competitions and the award earned are listed at the end of each review.

grapes whose ancestral home is in northwestern Italy. It opens with aromas of strawberries in cream and huckleberries, followed by flavors of huckleberries, boysenberries and other sweet dark fruit. A luscious midpalate leads to silky yet firm tannins and a memorable farewell. This is a perfect wine to pair with venison or other game meats. *Northwest Wine Summit (gold). (330 cases, 14.5% alc.)*

Terra Blanca Winery \$20
2003 Estate Vineyard Syrah, Red Mountain Owner/winemaker Keith Pilgrim began work on this Red Mountain winery in the early '90s, opening it later in the decade, then building one of the Northwest's most beautiful buildings in the past two