



MEDIA RELEASE

22 October 2004

FRENCH CHAMPAGNE STEALS SHOW AT INTERNATIONAL CHARDONNAY CHALLENGE

A French Blanc de Blanc style champagne has taken the top prize at the fifth International Chardonnay Challenge.

Judges at the event – which is staged in Gisborne each October – awarded the top trophy to Champagne Deutz Blanc de Blancs 1996.

Chairman of judges, Larry McKenna, said the Deutz Blanc de Blancs was a wine of “rare elegance and great depth of character”. It is made exclusively from Chardonnay grapes that come from three French villages: Le Mesnil sur Oger (40%), Avize (50%), and Villers Marmery (10%).

Distributed in New Zealand by Allied Domecq Wines NZ, the winning champagne is perfectly balanced and yet quite forward. It shows the airy touch of fine Chardonnay grapes vinified in the house style of Deutz.

Villa Maria Estates Reserve Gisborne Chardonnay 2002 took second place, winning a gold medal for Reserve Wine of the show. The same wine gained a gold for Top Regional Chardonnay in the North Island, while the South Island medal was awarded to Lawson’s Dry Hills Chardonnay 2001.

Now a significant competition, the International Chardonnay Challenge boasted 355 entries in 2004, compared to the 265 chardonnays received so far for the Air New Zealand Wine Show. The Challenge focuses worldwide attention on the single varietal Chardonnay over 2 days of judging, an industry forum and a number of

public events.

The 10 person judging panel awarded 15 gold medals this year, as well as 53 silvers (14.9% of total entries) and 136 bronzes (38.3%).

While the 4.2% gold medals awarded are on track with the approximately 5% given at most other international wine events, Larry McKenna said there were also very good quality wines amongst the non-award entries.

“In a competition like this, you’d often expect to see what we’d call ‘failed’ wines... but they just weren’t there this year. That’s consistent with the high – 57 percent - medal count awarded overall. The drinking public can be confident they don’t have to be buying medal winners to be enjoying quality Chardonnay.”

But McKenna went on to say consumers could value the results of the competition highly. “This is now truly an international competition. Its strength is that it’s not just New Zealand Chardonnays, it includes wines from all over the world. That encourages us – as winemakers – to benchmark ourselves against the global situation.”

McKenna added that a “real New Zealand” style shone through for judges. “Powerful fruit, complex malolactic influence and the use of quality oak, combine for a distinctive New Zealand style – that showed up very clearly in the lineups.”

McKenna said his own feedback from the public was that wine drinkers are now looking for cleaner, simpler wines. “I believe that local winemakers can afford to use less new oak and still make Chardonnays of equal quality,” he said.

The international Chardonnay Challenge’s focus on a single varietal could very well be “the future of wine judging”, according to McKenna, who noted at the completion of the second day’s judging: “This seems to me to be a very intelligent way to judge wines. It seems far easier to put together top panels of Chardonnay experts, as opposed to experts across a number of different styles. And as a judge this format really allows you to get focused.”

Best Value Wine under \$15

Sponsor – Advintage Ltd

Respective of the quoted RRP given at the time of entry, highest award medal winner under \$15

Nobilo Wine Group, Banrock Station Chardonnay 2004

Recommended Top 6 selection

Sponsor – Gisborne Winegrowers

From highest awarded medal winners the best six wines accessible to the consumer representing a good cross reference of wine styles

Mission Estate Winery Chardonnay 2004

Nobilo Wine Group, Banrock Station Chardonnay 2004

Seifried Estate Chardonnay 2003

Allied Domecq Wines Huntaway Reserve Gisborne Chardonnay 2002

Westbrook Unoaked Chardonnay 2004

Allied Domecq Wines NZ Lindauer Special Reserve Blanc de Blanc NV

Bill Irwin Trophy

Sponsor - Harveys

Highest scoring Gisborne fruit sourced chardonnay – award goes to the winery with acknowledgement to the grape grower

Villa Maria Estate – Reserve Gisborne Chardonnay 2002

Top Oaked Chardonnay

Highest awarded medal wine across this class

Villa Maria Estate – Reserve Gisborne Chardonnay 2002

Top Unoaked Chardonnay

Highest awarded medal wine across this class

Shaw and Smith Unoaked Chardonnay 2003

Top Methode Traditionnelle Chardonnay

Highest awarded medal wine across this class

Allied Domecq Wines NZ Champagne Deutz Blanc de Blancs 1996

Top Dessert Chardonnay

Highest awarded medal wine across this class

TW Wines, Botrytis Chardonnay 2003

ENDS

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