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**First Arkansas Quality Wine competition shows breadth of styles, grapes**

By Mary Hightower

U of A System Division of Agriculture

**Fast facts**

* First Arkansas Quality Wine competition draws 52 entries
* Tasting is first step to certification
* Gold, silver medalists eligible to carry AQW seal

(898 words)

(Newsrooms: with art at <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmVRNUG3>

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — If there’s a phrase to sum up the first Arkansas Quality Wine competition, it would be “our cup runneth over.”

The May 19 wine competition, held in the food science facilities at the Milo J. Shult Agricultural Research and Extension Center, drew 52 entries from eight of the state’s 16 commercial wineries. In this phase, expert wine judges from Arkansas and Texas evaluated sensory attributes such as color, aroma, flavor and mouth feel. The wines will also undergo further l analysis, to look at characteristics such as alcohol, volatile acidity and sulfur dioxide levels. After analysis, wines that earned gold or silver medals in the wine competition will be eligible to carry the Arkansas Quality Wine seal.

“My goal for this first annual wine competition was to have 30-50 commercial wines entered, so this exceeded my expectations for the number of wines, especially considering the constraint that the wine had to be made with 90 percent Arkansas-grown grapes,” said Renee Threlfall, director of the Arkansas Quality Wine program. Threlfall, a Ph.D., is also a research scientist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. “There were more red wines than I expected but a good representation of grape varieties and styles of wine, typical for a competition.

“More than 60 percent of the wines that were submitted to the wine competition earned a medal, showing us that the Arkansas wine industry has quality wines for our wine consumers,” she said.

Her work is part of research done by division’s Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station.

**Working to improve Arkansas wines**

The competition is part of AQW’s efforts to set quality standards for Arkansas-made wine, provide professional development for growers and winemakers and entice consumers to taste the fruit of the state’s vines and their unique flavors. The program was established last year as part of a project funded by a specialty crop block grant from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture. (See story about AWQ here: <https://bit.ly/2MkIQPQ>)

Threlfall invited in three judges, Justin Scheiner, Ph.D., assistant professor and viticulture specialist from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Michael Cook, viticulture program specialist for north Texas with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, and Lorri Hambuchen, author and owner of The Wine Center in Little Rock.

Scheiner said he continued “to be impressed with the breadth and quality of wines coming out of Arkansas. The judges were presented with high quality muscadine, hybrid, and vinifera wines produced in a wide range of styles.”

Cook said he and the other “judges evaluated a substantial number of entered wines, which made our jobs even tougher as there were many well-made wines to score.

“To my surprise, there was a wide range of wine styles submitted, from dessert to dry, fruity to rustic, deep purple to orange to pink to amber,” he said. “Simply put, there was lots of variety. I was also pleased to see such diversity with the types of varietal and wine blends. Wines were made from muscadines, hybrids, European varieties, or a blend of one or more.

“You never know what you are going to find when evaluating wines submitted to a brand-new wine competition,” Cook said. “I was impressed with the quality and in some cases, individuality of some wines.

**The competition**

The wines were scored on a variation of the 20-point system created by the University of California at Davis. Wines earning 17-20 points earned gold medals, 15-16 points earned a silver medal, and 13-14 points earned a bronze medal.

**The winners**

* Best of Show —Post Winery, Prophecy
* Best White Wine — Mount Bethel Winery Viognier
* Best Red Wine — Post Winery, Prophecy
* Best Rose/Blush — Post Winery, Pink Muscadine
* Best dessert/fortified wine — Keel’s Creek Winery, 2014 port, Big C

Double gold medal winners. To earn a double gold, a wine must earn a gold medal vote from every judge. Two wines earned that honor:

* Post Winery Blue Parachute
* Mount Bethel Winery Viognier

Single gold medal winners

* Keel’s Creek Winery, 2014 port, Big C
* Mount Bethel Winery, Vignoles
* Post Winery, Prophecy
* Post Winery, Pink Muscadine

Silver medal winners

* Chateau Aux Arc, 2018 Cynthiana
* Chateau Aux Arc, 2018 Dahlem’s Red
* Keel’s Creek Winery, Sweet Spring
* Keel’s Creek Winery, 2018 Chardonel
* Post Winery, 2018 Chambourcin
* Post Winery, Ives Noir
* Post Winery, White Muscadine
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards, Enchantment
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards, Valvin Muscat
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards, Vignoles
* Wiederkehr Wine Cellars Cynthiana
* Wiederkehr Wine Cellars white muscadine

Bronze medal winners

* Chateau Aux Arc, 2015 Cynthiana
* Chateau Aux Arc, 2016 Cynthiana
* Chateau Aux Arc, 2016 Splinters
* Chateau Aux Arc, 2016 Dragonfly Red
* Chateau Aux Arc, 2016 Altage
* Mount Bethel Winery Red Blend
* Mount Bethel Winery White Muscadine
* Post Winery Red Muscadine
* Post Winery Sherry
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards Chambourcin
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards 2019 Cynthiana
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards Traminette
* Rusty Tractor Vineyards Muscadine
* Wiederkehr Wine Cellars Red Muscadine

**Post-script**

Threlfall said all the wines, medal or not, will get a thorough analysis by her graduate student, Amanda Fleming.

“This is part of her master’s thesis research and will help us determine what’s going on in the wines that did not earn a medal,” Threlfall said.

“Here we will be looking at color attributes like red color, browning and turbidity, as well as acidity, alcohol, residual sugar, dissolved oxygen, stability, volatile acidity alcohol and sulfur dioxide levels,” Threlfall said.

To learn more about the Arkansas Quality Wine program visit [www.facebook.com/arkansasqualitywine](http://www.facebook.com/arkansasqualitywine) or the Arkansas Association of Grape Growers [www.argrapegrowers.org](http://www.argrapegrowers.org).

To learn about extension programs in Arkansas, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service agent or visit [www.uaex.uada.edu](http://www.uaex.uada.edu/). To learn more about Division of Agriculture research, visit the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station website: <https://aaes.uark.edu>. To learn more about the Division of Agriculture, visit <https://uada.edu/>

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The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture’s mission is to strengthen agriculture, communities, and families by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices. Through the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service, the Division of Agriculture conducts research and extension work within the nation’s historic land grant education system.

The Division of Agriculture is one of 20 entities within the University of Arkansas System. It has offices in all 75 counties in Arkansas and faculty on five system campuses.

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