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Announcement of the final winner for the Press Democrat North Coast Wine Challenge. More here: https://www.pressdemocrat.com/.../north-coast-wine-challenge.../

Steve Falk
Publisher, CEO at The Press Democrat

North Coast Wine Challenge winners announced

For the Press Democrat's 2020 North Coast Wine Challenge's top prize, two classic Sonoma County varietals — a Sonoma Coast chardonnay and a Russian River Valley pinot noir — battled it out as the contest narrowed from a total of 1,064 entries down to just two wines.

In the end, the Sangiacomo 2018 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast slipped ahead of the Papapietro Perry 2017 pinot by two votes, winning the Best of the Best award along with the Best of Show White and Best of Sonoma County.

The judging was held Monday through Wednesday, July 13-15, at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds, with a total of 24 judges from all over the Bay Area and the state. The contest was originally scheduled for April 7 and 8 but was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A chardonnay has only won the top award once before in the competition, which is now in its eighth year. Roche won for a 2013 chardonnay made from grapes grown in the cool, windswept Carneros region.

This year, judges gave the Best of the Best wine 98 out of 100 points, praising the chardonnay's balance between crisp acidity and integrated oak as well as its long finish. The wine narrowly beat out the Dry Creek Vineyard 2019 Sauvignon Blanc for Best of Show White by just two votes.

"It wasn't a slam-dunk, but I know the judges loved it," said Daryl Groom, chief judge of the contest. "It was a stylish, rich, cool-climate chardonnay that just seemed to have everything in perfect balance."

The venerable Sangiacomo family is well known in Sonoma County for growing and supplying high-quality chardonnay to many wineries. The family launched its own wine brand, Sangiacomo Family Wines, in 2018.

Although the winnning wine sources grapes from one of their vineyards in the Carneros, it also sources from a vineyard off Lakeville Highway in the Petaluma Gap. Both vineyards are located within the sprawling Sonoma Coast American Viticultural Area (AVA).

The winemaker for the winning chardonnay is James MacPhail, who sold his own brand, MacPhail Wines, to Hess Collection in 2011. He kept his small Healdsburg winery, where he launched a new brand, Tongue Dancer Wines, and makes wine for the Sangiacomo Family among other clients.

Here are the top winners in the annual wine contest, which was held with a safety protocol in place, including masks, social distancing and a 30% reduction in judges and staff:

Best of the Best

Sangiacomo 2018 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast

Best of Show Sparkling

Domaine Chandon California NV Reserve Pinot Noir Rosé, Méthode Traditionelle, Sonoma/Napa counties

Best of Show White

Sangiacomo 2018 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast

Best of Show Rosé

Rodney Strong Vineyards 2019 Rosé of Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

Best of Show Red

Papapietro Perry Winery 2017 777 Clones Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

Best of Show Dessert Wine

Navarro Vineyards 2019 Gewurztraminer Cluster Select Late Harvest, Anderson Valley

Best of Sonoma County

Sangiacomo 2018 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast

Best of Napa County

Okapi 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley

Best of Mendocino County

Navarro Vineyards 2019 Gewurztraminer Cluster Select Late Harvest, Anderson Valley

Best of Lake County

Boatique 2019 Rosé of Malbec, Red Hills Lake County

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