

Coppola dazzles at critics challenge

By Robert Whitley - Creators.com

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The Critics Challenge is judged by highly regarded wine journalists such as Ed McCarthy and Master of Wine Mary Ewing-Mulligan; authors of "Wine for Dummies"; former San Francisco Chronicle wine editor Linda Murphy; international wine journalist Panos Kakaviatos, from Strasbourg, France; and acclaimed wine blogger Joe Roberts. The complete list of winners and judges can be found on the Critics Challenge website.

Two other California wineries were nearly as impressive. The Napa Valley's V. Sattui Winery captured 19 medals overall, with four platinum awards and five golds. Navarro Vineyards, a small family-run winery from Mendocino County's remote Anderson Valley, took 11 medals, including three platinum and four gold.

V. Sattui also racked up best dessert wine, best pinot noir and best zinfandel from the directors, while Navarro also took top honors for best rose and best pinot grigio. Moet & Chandon's 2008 Grand Vintage Brut (\$65) was chosen as best sparkling wine, and Santa Barbara Winery's 2014 Chardonnay Reserve (\$25) was named best white wine. Of course, as wine of the year, Archimedes was also best red wine.

The following were other notable performances:

Brys Estate Vineyard and Winery from Michigan entered four wines and went four for four, with three golds and a platinum for its estate-grown 2016 Dry Riesling from Old Mission Peninsula (\$22).

Virginia's Barboursville Vineyards took gold for its 2014 Nebbiolo Reserve (\$35), 2015 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (\$20) and 2014 "Octagon" (\$50).

Jean-Charles Boisset entered four wines from his Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma and four wines from DeLoach Vineyards in the Russian River Valley. All eight wines received gold medals. Boisset also took gold for his nonvintage Cremant de Bourgogne from France (\$25) and his 2016 No. 5 Rose from the Cotes de Provence AOC in France (\$25).

J. Lohr Vineyards of Paso Robles had seven wines with gold or better, including a platinum award for a positively brilliant 2015 Mourvedre (\$30) under its Gesture label.

Lafond Winery of Santa Barbara entered four wines and won four golds, including a knockout 2014 Pinot Noir SRH (for Santa Rita Hills) at the beautiful price of \$27.

Italy's Tuscan powerhouse, Banfi Wines, racked up four golds and a platinum (and 95 points) for its value super Tuscan Centine Rosso (\$12).

Australia's Jacob's Creek checked in with three golds and a platinum (and 95 points) for its 2016 Classic Merlot at the amazing price of \$8. Another Aussie producer, Wakefield Winery, took six medals at gold or better, including a platinum (95 points) for its 2015 Reserve Parcel Shiraz from the Clare Valley (\$25).

Sodaro Estate Winery, a relatively new player on the wine competition circuit, shared the honor (with Coppola's Eleanor) for second-highest scoring wine of the Critics Challenge. Sodaro's 2010 Estate Blend (\$100) for its vineyard in the Coombsville sub-appellation of the Napa Valley rang up a score of 97 points. Sodaro also had gold medals for two different cabernet sauvignons.

And, finally, another relatively new player on the wine competition circuit, Sonoma County's Westwood Estate, took seven medals of gold or better, with a platinum for its 2016 Roussanne-Vignier-Chardonnay blend at \$36.