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## WINE OF THE MONTH!



**JRE Zinfandel Sonoma County 2007 - \$14.99 cash**  
Aged 14 months in a mix of French and American Oak barrels, this wine stains the glass with its deep purple color. Dry, full bodied with balanced acidity highlighting the chunky black raspberry, blueberry, and red cherry flavors. Cedar, tobacco, and savory spice & bacon fat with a very long finish wrap up this delicious wine.

**If you enjoyed this selection try some other tasty Zinfandels!**

- JRE Zinfandel Paso Robles 2006 - \$18.99 cash
- Talty Estate Zinfandel 2005 - \$32.99 cash
- Bramblewood Old Vine Zinfandel 2006 - \$14.99 cash
- Canyon Oaks Zinfandel 2006 - \$4.99 cash



## SADDLE UP: The Five Saddle Award Winners From the 2010 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo International Wine Competition

by Charles M. Bear Dalton

A lot has changed since I last wrote about the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's International Wine Competition winners. After three years as executive vice-chairman and three more years as chairman of the show's Wine Competition Committee, I am not either anymore. Although I am still involved and active on the committee, I now have only one full-time job and that is working as the fine wine buyer for Spec's.

Before I get to this year's top award winners, I'd like to address three things: 2010, the unique nature of the International Wine Competition, and the meaning of these awards.

We call this competition "the 2010 International Wine Competition" because it relates to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's 2010 show year with the livestock show, rodeo, horse show, trailrides, auctions, and most other associated events taking place in February and March of 2010. Awards event for the Competition, called the Rodeo Uncorked Round Up and Best Bites Competition, will be on Sunday February 21, 2010 and the Champion Wine Auction and Dinner will be held on Saturday March 6, 2010. (For information on tickets or tables for either, you may email me at BearDalton@specsonline.com.) As this year's competition, even though it was held in November of 2009, ties in with the 2010 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, it is the 2010 International Wine Competition.

So what makes the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo International Wine Competition unique? In the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo International Wine Competition the five members of each judging panel taste the wines in each class in blind peer group flights and give each of them a score of no medal, bronze, silver, or gold. "Blind" means that, although the panelists know they are tasting through, say, forty-five Cabernet Sauvignons in the same general retail price range, they don't know which ones they're tasting. "In a peer group" means that all the wines in each flight are of the same class in the competition so that each of the judges on that panel has ten glasses of Cabernet (and only Cabernet) lined up in front of them at any given time. If a wine gets at least four bronze medal votes, it earns a bronze medal. If a wine gets at least three silver medal votes, or a combination of at least three votes for silver and gold (and no more than one "no medal" vote), it earns a silver medal. If a wine gets at least three gold medal votes (and no more than one "no medal" vote), it earns a gold medal. If a wine gets five gold medal votes, it earns a "double gold" medal. All of that is pretty standard wine competition stuff.

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Inside This Issue: Collin's Column, Zachery's Column, Deli Specials, Delicious Mischief, The 12, Wine and Cheese of the Week & more!

SADDLE UP *from page 1*

A key difference is that in addition to the standard medals, the Show awards Champion and Reserve Champion rodeo belt buckles to the top two wines (silver medal or above) in each class. The top Champion Buckle winners (those with either five gold votes or four-gold-votes-and-one-silver-vote) are then considered for nine of the Show's "top" awards. The big four - Grand Champion Best of Show, Reserve Grand Champion Best of Show, Top Texas Wine, and new for 2010, Top Argentine Wine - each earn Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo trophy saddles with the award engraved into the stirrup leathers. The next five - Top Red Wine, Top White Wine, Top Sweet Wine, Top Value Wine, and Top Sparkling Wine - each earn trophy chaps with the award won branded into the leg of the chap. A saddle is also awarded to the Top All Around Winery - think Top All Around Cowboy in traditional rodeo terms - recognizes the winery (one "label") that enters at least six wines and has the highest entry-adjusted award point total. Is that cool or what?

As the Texas Department of Agriculture says - and any cowboy knows - a medal may look nice but it won't hold your pants up. And you can't ride a trophy into town. As we have come to find out, a lot of these grape growers and winemakers grew up in agriculture as members of 4H or FFA. They are proud of the buckles they win and they know the value of a real saddle. As to the significance of these awards, this is OUR wine competition. The awards are decided by consumers, wine industry professionals (suppliers, wholesalers, retailers, and restaurateurs), and press mostly from Texas. In fact, of the 75 judges in the 2010 competition, only 5 came from out of state. Each of the fifteen five-member panels is a mix of consumers and trade with no more than one press member. The endorsement implied by these awards is from our peers here in Texas insuring that these are wines that will have broad acceptance in THIS area.

Instead of being the endorsement of one reviewer, medals earned in wine competitions reflect the endorsement of a panel. No one panelist may think that his panel's "Double Gold" medal winner is the "best wine in the class" but all of the panelists agree that the wine is excellent. The panels' endorsement is therefore not reflective of one person's taste or bias. Rather, the panel's endorsement in the form of a medal is reflective of a consensus across the panel on the quality of the wine. And the competition's endorsement in the awarding of a buckle or chaps or a saddle amplifies the endorsement implied by the medal.

All of these awards offer an assurance that a certain wine reveals its quality across a range of preferred styles and tastes. It is important to note that some excellent wines will not score as well in panel tastings and so may win silver or bronze medals rather than gold or double gold medals. Nevertheless, a tasting panel's endorsement with a gold or double gold medal or the competition's award of a buckle, chaps, or a saddle, indicates a wine that will appeal to most all wine drinkers.

Here's a round up (it's a Rodeo thing) of the saddle winners for 2010.

**GRAND CHAMPION BEST OF SHOW**

This award is for the best wine of the show and, every year, it has gone to a red wine from California. Past winners have been Vina Robles Suendero (2009), Stags' Leap Cabernet Sauvignon (2008), Clos du Bois Marlstone (2007), Raymond Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (2006), Hang Time Pinot Noir (2005), and Alexander Valley Vineyards "Cyrus" (2004). All but one of these wines featured Cabernet Sauvignon as its primary grape variety and this year's winner is no exception. Davis Family Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 2005 bested all comers to take the 2010 Grand Champion Best of Show saddle. (Somewhere in there, there must be a statement about what people in Texas like to drink.)



The Davis Family Vineyards winery is located in Healdsburg in northern Sonoma County and most of the grapes for their various wines come from that same area. Winemaker/owner Guy Davis made this 2005 Cabernet from grapes purchased from two vineyards in the warmer Napa Valley: the Lewelling/Wight Vineyard in the western foothills near the Rutherford/St. Helena border and the Stagecoach Vineyard 2000 feet above the valley floor on the east side of Napa County. The grapes from each vineyard are crushed, fermented, and aged separately through the first year in barrel. The blend was then assembled and aged another 10 months in wood before bottling.

**DAVIS Family Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 2005**

12x750ml \$42.25 \$475.80

Tech: 14.3% Alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon fermented using pump-over and aged 22 months in all oak barrels (all French; 45% new). Deep purple-black-red in color, and with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity; chewy phenolics. Juicy, lively, spicy, ripe mostly black fruit offering blackberry, black cherry, and black raspberry with some cassis-mure perfume, gravelly dusty terroir, spicy-dusty somewhat Bourbon oak, and accents of tobacco, black pepper, chocolate, and a hint of pencil shavings. Very long finish. Satisfying, complete, integrated but still a bit rustic; robust and alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 94. (in stock)

**RESERVE GRAND CHAMPION BEST OF SHOW**

This award is for the runner-up - which is no slouch when you beat out almost 1800 other wines for that honor. The winner is Nadia Red, Arroyo Grande Valley, 2005. Nadia is a separate label owned by and made at the Laetitia winery in California's Central Coast. The Laetitia label focuses on Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and bubbly. Nadia makes this red Bordeaux style blend and a lovely dry white from Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, and Viognier. The secret to the Nadia red is the cool (for Cabernet and the other Bordeaux varieties) climate in which the grapes are grown.

**NADIA Red, Arroyo Grande Valley (California), 2005**

6x750ml \$27.95 \$157.38

Tech: 14.4% Alcohol. A cooler-climate blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc aged 20 months in oak barrels (all French; 65% new). Purple-deep red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity; moderately chewy phenolics. Dusty, lively, spicy, red & black cherry berry fruit with mineral terroir, well integrated oak, and accents of black pepper, tobacco, cedar, subtle cocoa, and sweet spice. Really long finish; alive-in-the-mouth; delicious, elegant, exciting, and complete. Classic cooler climate Cabernet. Gains richness as it opens in the glass. Excellent. BS: 94+.

**TOP TEXAS WINE**

Each year of the competition, the Show has awarded a saddle to the Top Texas wine. Messina Hof won the first four Top Texas Saddles with a different wine each year. The fifth year, little Brennan Vineyards in Comanche, Texas won with a stunningly good Viognier. Last year, the next-to-impossible happened: tiny Piney Woods winery from Orange in East Texas won with their "Texas Moon Magnolia White" - a non-vintage, non-vinifera white wine that was shockingly good. This year Rick Naber won with his Flat Creek Estate "Mistella" made somewhat in the style of a Muscat Beaumes de Venise: estate grown Muscat juice is blended with neutral grape brandy.

**FLAT CREEK Estate "Mistella", Texas, NV**

12x500ml \$32.18 \$362.34

While I have not had a chance to get a formal note on the Mistella, I did taste it at the competition. I remember classic Muscat flavors showing citrus (lemon, lemon drop, and orange) along with peach, apricot, honey, and honeysuckle. It is sweet and rich but finishes fresh and clean. Suffice to say I liked it a lot. It should be available in a limited number of Spec's stores by the time you read this. (arriving soon)

Continues on page 4

*SADDLE UP from page 3***TOP ARGENTINE WINE**

New for the 2010 Show, the International Wine Competition is offering a country-focused competition in the same way that there is a competition-within-the-competition for Texas wines. The country will change from year to year. The 2010 Show focused on Argentina so, as there is a saddle award for the Top Texas Wine, there is also a saddle award for the Top Argentine Wine. The winner is Ca' de Calle Reserva, Mendoza, 2008, a Malbec-based blend that up to this point had not been sold in Texas.

**Ca' de CALLE Reserva, Mendoza, 2008**

12x750ml \$14.56 \$163.97

Tech: 13.9% Alcohol. A blend of 75% Malbec, 20% Tempranillo, and 5% Syrah fermented using pump-over and aged 12 months in all oak barrels (all French; 33% new) (Production: 500 cases).

Purple-red-black in color with well formed legs - stains the glass. Dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Dusty, dark, dense, black & red fruit with mineral earth; dusty with hint of coffee grounds along with dusty, spicy oak and accents of cocoa, coffee, black pepper, dark spice; a bit meaty. Very long finish.

Focused and ripe; alive-in-the-mouth. Still very tight and young but opens nicely with lots of swirling. Fresher level of acidity than you'd expect from a Malbec blend. Would benefit from a rough decanting. Excellent. BS: 91+. (in stock)

**TOP ALL AROUND WINERY**

This award goes to the winery that puts on the best show in terms of winning awards in the competition. To really understand it, think Top All Around Cowboy in traditional rodeo terms. It recognizes the winery (one "label" or name) that enters at least six wines and has the highest entry-adjusted award point total. For the third year in a row, that winery is d'Arenberg.

Located in McLaren Vale in Australia, d'Arenberg is the home of d'Arry (father) and Chester (son) Osborne. D'Arry got the winery going on the right track and Chester has taken it to the next level. With all the clever (and sometimes cutesy) names for the all wines – Stump Jump, Love Grass, Money Spider, Galvo Garage, the Derelict, and the like – it could be easy to lose track of just how good the wines are. For the 2010 Show, d'Arenberg entered 19 wines that won medals (one double Gold, three Golds, nine Silvers, and six bronzes) along with two Class Champion buckle awards. So d'Arenberg will be taking home 19 medals, two buckles, and the Top All Around Winery saddle – which will look nice sandwiched between the two Top All Around Winery saddles they have taken home the two previous years.

I have said many times that Chester Osborne is as good a red wine maker as is working in Australia today. His Dead Arm Shiraz, Ironstone Pressings, Sticks and Stones, Custodian Grenache, and d'Arry's Original are some of my vintage-to-vintage favorites. With his still growing number of Champion buckles and top medals for

dessert wines, you have to acknowledge that he's a pretty fair hand at the stickies as well.

Chester, once again, good on ya, mate. Now that you have so many of those saddles, we'll have to go for a ride.



*d'Arenberg winemaker Chester Osborne and Spec's Bear Dalton arm wrestling over the 2008 Top All Around Winery Saddle.*

Here's a list of d'Arenberg's winning wines and the awards they won ...

- d'Arenberg Noble Mud Pie, South Australia, 2008  
(*Double Gold & Class Champion*)
- d'Arenberg d'Arry's Original Shiraz/Grenache, McLaren Vale, 2006  
(*Gold & Class Champion*)
- d'Arenberg Stump Jump Sticky Chardonnay, South Australia, 2008 (*Gold*)
- d'Arenberg Cadenzia Grenache/Shiraz/Mourvedre,  
McLaren Vale, 2006 (*Gold*)
- d'Arenberg Custodian Grenache, McLaren Vale, South Australia, 2007 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg d'Arry's Original Shiraz/Grenache, McLaren Vale, South  
Australia, 2007 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Footbolt Shiraz, McLaren Vale, South Australia, 2007 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Olive Grove Chardonnay, South Australia, 2008 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Derelict Vineyards Grenache, McLaren Vale, 2007 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Ironstone Pressings Grenache/Shiraz/Mourvedre,  
McLaren Vale, 2007 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Stump Jump Shiraz, McLaren Vale, 2008 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Noble Wrinkled Riesling, McLaren Vale, 2008 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg Noble Prankster Chardonnay/Semillon, Adelaide  
Hills, 2008 (*Silver*)
- d'Arenberg High Trellis Cabernet Sauvignon, McLaren Vale, 2007 (*Bronze*)
- d'Arenberg Galvo Garage, McLaren Vale, South Australia, 2006 (*Bronze*)
- d'Arenberg Sticks & Stones Tempranillo, McLaren Vale, 2006 (*Bronze*)
- d'Arenberg Dead Arm Shiraz, McLaren Vale, 2007 (*Bronze*)
- d'Arenberg Stump Jump Verdelho, McLaren Vale, 2008 (*Bronze*)
- d'Arenberg Stump Jump White, McLaren Vale, 2008 (*Bronze*)



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