

# **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

“That’s a Good Glass of Wine!”

By Greta Hurst, Tabula Rasa Gallery  
Promoting art and agri-tourism in Southwest Michigan  
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On February 7, 2012 the Michigan Grape Society held their 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Southwest Michigan Wine Evaluation at Lake Michigan College, Mendel Center, Benton Harbor, MI.

The day long event consisted of a panel of three sommeliers and an audience of forty participants comprised of winemakers, chefs, restaurateurs, wine growers and enthusiasts tasting 59 different wines grouped into ten varietals comprised of Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Bordeaux Blend and Cabernet Sauvignon. Within each category there was at least one wine from outside the region held as the benchmark within that particular varietal. A brief tutorial was given prior to the tasting of each varietal with the exception being Bordeaux Blend on the characteristics and synonyms of each for a more consistent evaluation of that varietal’s accuracy and balance. Traditionally, Bordeaux blends are Merlot driven but in contemporary winemaking it is too hard to characterize the varietal description because it depends on “what is driving the bus”.

The three panelists are from an exclusive group of only 186 individuals worldwide, (118 (17 women) in North America) to have passed the rigorous Court of Master Sommeliers (“MS”) Master Level Exam to achieve top accreditation in the wine and service industry. Ron Edwards co-founded The Grapevine School of Wine, distills the complexity of wine on Wine Talk Radio and created The Global Wine Pavilion as part of the National Cherry Festival. Kathryn Morgan, runs her own consulting firm, is an instructor at the Capital Wine School and a member of Les Dames d’Escoffier. Matthew Citriglia is Director of Education for Vintage Wine Distributor and serves on the Board of Directors for the Court of Master Sommeliers where he has helped create and implement the new “Certified Sommelier” exam.

The panel’s purpose in this blind tasting is to evaluate these wines without the winemaker’s emotion of how much effort it took to get their wine this far. The panel strives to give consistent feedback on the basic tasting components using the trilling process to roll the wine across the palate for sweetness, acid and tannin levels, finish and complexity from the palate to our brain to determine varietal accuracy and balance even offering old world versus new world characteristics. For example, the winemaker should decide what style she is going to offer within each varietal, off-dry or not so the consumer doesn’t have to open the wine to know what he is going to get each and every time. This evaluation is about a regional effort to improve the quality of our wine beyond “that’s good for Michigan wine” to achieve “that’s a good glass of wine”. We only have one opportunity for a first impression and a short one at that, with the average life span of a bottle of wine off the shelf before being enjoyed by a consumer at two hours.

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Other than the benchmark wines within each varietal, all the wines were from eleven wineries within the Lake Michigan Shore, Federally approved American Viticulture Area (“AVA”). Most notably the panel outscored a Michigan wine(s) over the benchmark wines in ten out of ten flights. The following wineries received the most votes within each of the varietals: Pinot Gris – St. Julian 2010, Chardonnay tie between– Hickory Creek 2009 Zero Oak Chardonnay; Round Barn 2010 Chardonnay and Tabor Hill 2009, Gewurztraminer – Free Run Dry 2010, Pinot Noir – Karma Vista Stone Temple 2010, Riesling – Free Run Dry 2010, Merlot – Karma Vista Reserve 2009, Syrah – St. Julian, Braganini Reserve 2010, Cabernet Franc – Lemon Creek 2008, Bordeaux Blend – Lawton Ridge Meritage 2010 and Cabernet Sauvignon – Domaine Berrien Cellars 2010. Congratulations winemakers!

Panelist Ron Edwards, judges not only the varietal accuracy but how much does he enjoy the wine and is encouraged by the growth of Southwest Michigan wines. Especially the Syrah wines have vastly improved. Edwards suggests that winemakers seriously consider the “closure” issue to transition from cork to screw caps. One can ruin a very high quality wine out of the barrel by using contaminated corks.

Kathryn Morgan, coming from another emerging market in Virginia admits this evaluation experience was much more pleasant than she expected and predicts a growing market for sweet reds. Matthew Citriglia applauds Michigan’s efforts to continue to grow and strive for higher quality. He cautions these Michigan winemakers in becoming too provincial in their tasting. You risk developing a “cellar palate” by only tasting your own wine or that within your own appellation. He suggests we taste beyond our borders, reaching out to each coast and abroad to taste wine from Spain, Chile and Greece.

The Michigan Grape Society was established to promote the welfare of all Michigan grape industries and related services through encouraging and supporting research, accumulating and disseminating information which would promote the grape industry, promote production, quality and sales of Michigan grapes and grape products while representing Michigan’s grape industry’s interests in matters of local, state and national concerns. You may contact President Mike deSchaaf at [Mich.GrapeSociety@gmail.com](mailto:Mich.GrapeSociety@gmail.com) or on Facebook.

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