

All Wined Up

The Promise of Virginia Wine

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Guest post by Jean Case

“In blind tasting you get to see what your palate says, not what your head is telling you.”

While the nation’s attention was focused on Denver this week and the first debate between the two Presidential candidates, another toe-to-toe drama played out in Virginia, in a battle of the upstart versus the established leader. Only this time, the competitors were wines from across Virginia versus those from well-respected, established wine regions around the world, including France, Italy and Portugal.

The inaugural Virginia Wine Summit, hosted by Governor Bob McDonnell and Virginia’s First Lady Maureen McDonnell, took place earlier this week. The Summit’s featured guest was world-renowned wine expert Steven Spurrier, who is best known for his role in the 1976 “Judgment of Paris” in which - for the first time ever - California shocked the world by when its wines beat out prestigious wines from France in what turned out to be perhaps the most significant blind tasting competition ever held.

A similar blind tasting was staged at the Virginia Wine Summit. Four celebrated wine writers and critics (including Spurrier) served as the expert panel. Sixteen wines were tasted in 8 categories, as Virginia wines went head to head with a comparable varietal/blend from a well-established wine region. Virginia wines won in 6 of the 8 categories in the blind tasting. Time and time again, the judges remarked at how similar the wines were in each category –a

confirmation that some of the best wines from our region can stand with other celebrated wines from better known regions. For many of us who believe in the promise of Virginia wine, it was a remarkable moment.

The Governor and First Lady deserve tremendous credit for their fearless championing of Virginia's wines. Who would have predicted that renowned experts would say yes when asked to come to this emerging wine region's first official Summit, and lend such credibility and spotlight? How fearless it was to pit Virginia wines against some truly beautiful, celebrated wines from some of the world's most beloved wine regions.

In his keynote address, Spurrier reminded us that as a New World region, we can embrace the fact that we don't have to be shackled or derailed by habits of the past. We can take forward all that has been learned from old world traditions, but also innovate and try new things in the passionate pursuit of great wines. I think Spurrier had it just right when he reminded us that yes, Bordeaux blends will likely do well in Virginia, but we should boldly proclaim our style to ... "be Virginia." I like that. A style all our own with all the beautiful elements that this beautiful and rich land can provide.

I offer a nod to the wines from Virginia – and other regions – that were selected in the blind tasting this week. While it's not likely to become famously known as the "Judgment of Richmond," I do think it was an important moment for Virginia - and for the promise of Virginia wine.

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