

Wines of the Year 2020: white wines

An eclectic line-up led to an exciting tasting for our Wines of the Year expert panel, and the results offer plenty of reasons to venture into lesser-known white wine territory.



Tina Gellie
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Now in its fourth consecutive iteration, our **Wines of the Year** is an exciting and eye-opening exercise in which we ask **Decanter World Wine Awards** Regional Chairs, key contributors and staff to nominate the wines they most enjoyed in the years that was. The nominations are categorised under Classic (a premium, textbook wine style), Offbeat (unusual grape, winemaking method, region or unearthed gem) and Value (£25 or under).

Unlike the reds and sparklings which, in general, were very classic examples, more than 40% of the nominated white wines fell under the Offbeat category. This made for a very exciting and eclectic tasting for the experts – Andy Howard MW, Ronan Sayburn MS and Beth Willard – to taste and score unprejudiced by preferences.

‘A tasting of wines chosen by wine experts could end up a little geeky, with people choosing niche wines that only their trade peers would like,’ said Willard. ‘But what I really enjoyed about all these wines is that, with a couple of exceptions, all have fairly broad appeal.’

Their assessment will, they hope, encourage people to venture outside of their comfort zones and try new wines, styles, grapes and regions. Especially when the unfamiliarity might not necessarily be reflected in flavour profile and that a given, unknown, label might surprise you with unexpected elegance and poise.

Willard and Andy Howard MW singled out the skin-contact Malvasia from Colares in Portugal, which Howard described as ‘a real eye-opener’. They also praised the Sartarelli Verdicchio. ‘It was a very individualistic, late-harvest but dry style, which is not what you normally expect from that grape variety.’

Ronan Sayburn MS highlighted the ‘intriguing and complex’ white blend from Friuli, the ‘fantastic’ Vidiano-Assyrtiko blend from Greece and the ‘amazing’ Trousseau Gris from California. ‘There are so many less-familiar grapes out there that people might not have tried – or think they don’t like,’ he said. ‘Give them a go!’

However, it was a very classic style that took the crown for top white – the Flametree Chardonnay from Margaret River in Western Australia. ‘It was my wine of the day,’ asserted Sayburn, who compared it to Meursault’s most-lauded producer, Domaine Coche-Dury.

‘It was a benchmark example of top-quality Chardonnay, with that very reductive, struck-match character on the nose, beautifully elegant fruit purity on the palate and a very saline, limestone minerality.’

Howard admitted he had been hoping for a ‘benchmark Sancerre or Bordeaux Blanc’, but came away fascinated by the array of memorable wines from ‘less obvious’ corners of the globe. ‘It did make me think that while there are some great wines in classic regions, there are also some really intriguing wines from places more off the beaten track.’

Speaking for all three judges, he said not knowing the prices (and the categories in which wines were entered) was complicated in many ways – particularly with such an eclectic range of styles – but there was a silver lining. ‘It means you judge solely on taste, quality and the “do I want another glass of this?” factor.’ And shouldn’t that be the ultimate criteria?!

Decanter’s White Wines of the Year 2020



Dog Point, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand, 2019

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Herbaceous on the nose with bell pepper and pea shoots along with lime, guava and passion fruit. Some spice and exotic fruits on the palate and a smokey character that adds roundness. Elegant and balanced wi...

Points 93