

Aptos Resident Savors Award For Winemaking

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What started out as a wine making hobby in college has turned into something much bigger for Josef Sekon of Aptos. His biggest days may yet to come.

Sekon, a music composer when he isn't playing winemaker, came away with not only the best red wine at this year's Santa Cruz County Fair, but the grand sweepstakes award as well in his first-ever wine competition.

He won with his 1977 Petit Sirah. It beat out 35 other wines and garnered 18 out of 20 points from the six judges.

The award was a tasty one for Sekon, who has been in the competition for six years now. It reinforces what he and many of his friends have been telling him for years — that his wine is excellent.

"Privately, I knew it was good," he explained. "I couldn't resist the temptation of entering it and letting it walk by itself."

It not only walked, but even ran. Sekon is now toying with the idea of opening, what he calls, "a winery boutique." It would be a very small store, of sorts, and feature quality rather than quantity.

Today Sekon makes some 150 gallons of wine a year. He specializes in Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Petit Sirah. The reason is a good one.

"I like them," he said, smiling.

He drives to the Napa-Sonoma area each year to pick up about one ton of grapes. He recently made that trip, waiting until the grapes hit its perfect sugar content of 24 brix, he added.

That is only the beginning for what has turned into a very scientific approach to wine making. The fermentation process normally takes one to two months, with the racking and natural filtering period of four to six months following. A balance of stages is also needed, he noted, such as the sugar factor converted to alcohol (12 to 14 percent), the PH factor (3.3 to 3.5 for red wines) and the acidity factor (.75 to .85).

Sekon leaves 75 percent of the grape stems on during the fermentation period. This gets a maximum of tannin acid, he explained, which is a natural preservative.

He also has his own American oak barrels, as well as the finest French oak barrels that are made. "The French barrels actually smooths and finishes the wine during the aging process," he said. Since he makes such a small quantity, he can afford to use the best, he added.

The wines are celled at a friend's farm in the country which keeps the wines at the critical 55 to 60 degree mark.

Sekon laughs when thinking about those first wines he made over six years ago. He was a student completing his doctorate in musical composition at the University of Illinois at the time. Surprisingly, they used grapes that were shipped out on train all the way from Lodi.

From that "exotic start," he noted, he's gotten to the point he's at today. He particularly enjoys discussing wine making and sharing with others his

expertise. So much so, in fact, that he is currently teaching a wine making class at Cabrillo College.

One other advantage of making his own wine, he concluded, is the fact that he gets 150 gallons of finished wine each year "at a very practical price."

REFERENCE

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Josef Sekon put preservative on French oak wood barrel.