

2011 PACIFIC COAST OYSTER WINE COMPETITION

Judging instructions for Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle Finals

Taylor Shellfish Farms in Shelton, Washington thanks Kings Seafood and The Water Grill, Sutro's at the Cliff House and Anthony's for their longstanding support of the Competition and seamless execution. Taylor also thanks the 37 food and wine experts serving as finals judges in the three cities. The judges look forward to this event all year.

*In the three-city judging of 20 finalist wines, each wine is tasted blind with at least one Kumamoto oyster. There is a different random service order in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. The scores from the three cities will be combined to determine 10 equal winners of the 2011 "Oyster Award".

*In a two-tier preliminary judging, five veteran judges in Seattle spent a week blind tasting each of 119 entries with over 1200 Kumamoto oysters in selecting the 20 finalists.

*Each wine is tasted with at least one Kumamoto oyster. The judge smells and tastes the oyster, chewing it well so that it goes to all parts of the palate, then smells and tastes the wine rating what we call the "bliss factor" keeping in mind it's not about the wine; it's about the next oyster. The wine should exalt the next oyster by not getting in the way. (It has taken 17 years of doing this to come up with that insight, which was much appreciated by the Preliminary Judges.)

*We ask the judges not to smell the wine before tasting the oyster so as not to form an impression of the wine before experiencing the oyster. Imagine being out on a chilly oyster bed during a minus low tide in the winter; you pick up an oyster, breathe in the smell of the sea and exposed seaweed, open the oyster and slurp it down. Now you reach for the cold, dry, crisp clean-finishing wine you've brought for the occasion. Now smell the wine. The aromatic qualities of a good "oyster wine" are with the smells of that oyster bed at low tide and the oyster glistening in its juices just before being slurped off the shell. Once you've finished the oyster, smell and taste the wine. A few wines are meant for that oyster bed. The aromatic consonance with the oyster can be just as important as the taste.

*Judges are asked not to talk while judging so as to be fair to the wines being judged and to be fair to the other judges. The exercise requires intense (but pleasant) concentration as judges look for that knife's edge of style that exalts the oyster.

*Going back to that winter beach at low tide, the oysters and wine are served at the same cold temperature. Oysters are iced an hour before shucking; the wines are served out of an ice bath so they are poured at the same temperature in each city. There is nice textural affinity when wines and oysters are the same cold temperature.

*Wines are served in flights of five so the temperatures are the same in each glass of each flight. When finished with a glass, judges move it to the side, signaling to the waiter it is ready for pick up.

*Judges are urged to think about the next oyster in evaluating a wine and to go with their first impressions and not spend too much time with a wine. Remember it's not about the wine; it's about the next oyster.

*Taylor Shellfish Farms supplies 60 dozen Kumamotos for each judging. Judges receive a dozen on an iced platter to start with and platters are replaced as needed. Each wine is preceded by at least one oyster. Why Kumamotos? Because they are small. This competition would be physically impossible if we used larger oysters.

*After scoring all of the wines, judges **rank ten wines in order of preference**, a first place rank earns a wine 10 points, a second place rank earns 9 points etc. Scores from the three cities' judgments are combined to determine the ten equal 2011 "Oyster Award" winners.

*The Competition was open to West Coast wines. 80 CA, 17 OR and 22 WA wines were entered this year.

What is an "oyster wine"? Please read the Hemingway quote below and the attached comments from judges in past competitions. <http://www.oysterwine.com/what-is-an-oyster-wine>

Here is a flickr link to images from the 2009 competition.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/98857801@N00/sets/72157617445293544/>

Jon Rowley
www.oysterwine.com

*"Oysters are a celebration...romantic, sexy, luminous.
The right wine makes them even more so"*

Sheila Lukins

"As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans."

A Moveable Feast, Ernest Hemingway