

2017 NORTH OF THE GATE WINE COMPETITION JUDGES

RICH COOK

Rich Cook has been writing about wine since 2008 and is currently a lead reviewer at the internationally renowned e-publication winereviewonline.com. Rich is the Founding Director of the Toast of The Coast Wine Competition at the San Diego County Fair, and also serves as Director of Robert Whitley's Challenge Series, Monterey International, and the San Diego County Fair's Distilled Spirits and Homemade Wine competitions. Rich judges several major competitions, and is also a panelist with the California Grapevine. When he's not swirling and spitting, he can be found teaching music or leading worship.



DEBRA DEL FIORENTINO



International Wine Judge, Sommelier, Certified Wine Professional and Certified Specialist of Wine, Debra Del Fiorentino is a consummate wine professional who brings a dynamic energy and expertise to every endeavor she undertakes. Debra is a familiar face at numerous prestigious wine competitions.

She also is President and Owner of Wine Competitions Management & Productions and Libation Logistics.

She is one of the Founders of Spirited Magazine, as well as the Food and Beverage Director. Debra also serves as an independent wine educator and partner in Russian River Vineyards.

VON HURSON

With 22 years in the wine industry, Von's career has taken her from wine sales and wine educator, to working harvest and making wine. She is a published photojournalist, wine columnist, holds an Advanced WSET certificate and has hosted a web-radio wine show – interviewing well-known personalities in the wine industry. Now on to her greatest challenge: producing her own wines as co-founder and co-owner of Valiance Wines, with profits going to assist America's wounded Veterans and their families. Having been a competition wine judge for many years, she sees it as a way to reward the efforts of talented winemakers and introduce the consumer to some excellent wines.



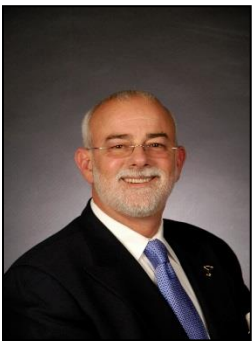
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BILL KNOX

An accomplished wine enthusiast, Bill Knox began his “judging career” in the early 90’s judging homemade wines at the Napa County Fair for a few years. From 1993/94-2008, he judged professionally at the Jerry D. Mead New World International Commercial Wine Competition in Ontario, California. Bill began his wine career in 1986 with Beringer Vineyards in St. Helena. Over the next eighteen years, he conducted tastings and wine presentations to various audiences, including the late Robert Lawrence Balzer’s Discovering Premium Wines of California wine appreciation classes in southern California. After retiring from Beringer in 2004, he opted to work part-time for smaller, family-run wineries, continuing his love of presenting good wines but to more intimate audiences, choosing Nicholson Ranch Winery in Sonoma.



TIM MCDONALD



Tim McDonald is the founder of a full service marketing communications consulting company in Napa, CA. As a 30-year wine industry veteran, Tim has held positions with E & J Gallo as Marketing Director Fine Wine Communications, Peak Wines as V.P. of Marketing and Communications, Director of Trade Relations with Trinchero Family Estates, Heublein Wines as Director of Trade, and Public Relations and sales assignments with Seagram and Heublein. Tim possesses one of the most highly experienced palates in the business, and participates on the judging panels of a number of major wine competitions, including serving as head judge at the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America Wine Competition. Tim is a certified specialist of wine, certified wine judge, and speaks frequently on assembled panels at many wine industry events.

BRIAN MILLER

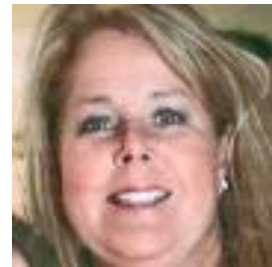
Brian Miller, Certified Specialist of Wine, is a wine Retailer and Wine Event Coordinator. Brian is the owner of Amador 360, a specialty wine retail shop in Plymouth, California. He is the creator and organizer of The Barbera Festival, and a coordinator of many other wine events. He has judged at wine competitions for several years.



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KRISTI MOHAR

Kristi Mohar started in the grocery business in 1982. She has been the wine buyer for family owned Pacific Markets in Sonoma County for the past 16 years. She is very passionate about wine and is always willing to help and learn. During her tenure in the wine industry Kristi has judged numerous wine competitions and served on esteemed panels. Some of Kristi's credentials include San Francisco Wine Competition, Sonoma County Harvest Fair, Press Democrat "wine of the week" panel member, wine consultant to local wineries and retailers, and coordinator of the Pacific Market Wine Tent at the Sebastopol Apple Blossom Festival.



LARRY VAN AALST



Retired sommelier, Equus Restaurant and Host of The Sonoma Report, CRN Digital Talk Radio the Equus Restaurant wine list was judged "Best of Show" in the 1995 and 1998 Sonoma County Harvest Fair. The Gallery of Sonoma County wines, nearly 300 bottles hand-picked by their winemakers, sets the tone – wine country splendor in a classic setting. Larry Van Aalst, Equus Sommelier, has been selecting wines for Equus for over a decade. Larry has been judging at the Cloverdale Citrus Fair/San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition for over a decade.

WILFRED WONG

Wilfred Wong, Chief Storyteller and in-house wine critic for Wine.com is a 40+ year veteran of the wine industry. Each year Wilfred tastes, scores, and reviews thousands of wines to help Wine.com customers choose their next bottle with confidence. He is an extreme researcher and a taster of wines and employs his photography and storytelling skills across the Wine.com site, blog, and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.). As a wine judge, Wilfred has participated domestically (Los Angeles International, San Francisco International, Sonoma County Harvest Fair and many others) and internationally (Spain, France, New Zealand and Australia). He lives in San Francisco with his wife Alice and dog Kaili.



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