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## **Unique Northern California Varietals Steal the Show in North of the Gate Wine Competition**

***North of the Gate award winning wines to be poured during the Sonoma-Marin Fair from June 19-23, 2019.***

PETALUMA, CA – April 10, 2019 – The judges of the 2019 North of the Gate Wine Competition have spoken, and this year’s wines debuting at the Sonoma-Marin Fair will be as complex and unique as the regions they come from.

This annual competition, now in its 19<sup>th</sup> year, has grown to represent unique, world-class wineries of Northern California, spanning from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Oregon Border. Each year, winemakers submit their best wine to a panel of industry-leading critics and judges. The winning wines will, in turn, be showcased at the Sonoma-Marin Fair Wine Garden this June 19-23, allowing fairgoers from all over the chance to experience the best that Northern California winemaking has to offer.

The 2019 competition took a unique turn, as more obscure varietals gave way to traditional California wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, and Chardonnay. Instead, the field blend of international varietals, which were originally planted in California, stole the show. Varietals among the Best in Class wines were grapes such as Carignane, Albarino, Barbera, Graciano, Montepulciano, Grenache and beyond. This refreshing success brings new life to the competition and opens opportunities for winemakers to expand the palates of their consumers, giving them an opportunity to taste something they might not have grabbed off the shelf themselves.

Known as the “Queen of Zin,” winemaker Carol Shelton was awarded this year’s Winemaker of the Fair. Shelton’s wines swept the show, winning multiple awards across categories. From Best of Class, Best of Show, and Double Gold awards, it was clear that Shelton’s passion and craft in winemaking in the North Bay showed up to play this year. The Carol Shelton Wines 2016 Oat Valley Carignane took both Best of Show and Best of Show Red, while her Late Harvest 2017 Zinfandel Black Magic won Best of Show Dessert Wine.

Imagery Estates showcased their *2018 Albarino*, which took Best of Show White across the competition. Winemaker Jamie Benziger carries with her a legacy of Sonoma winemaking from Benziger Estates, though it's clear that she has made her mark on Imagery Estates with her own style and talent.

Idle Hour Winery took home the Best of Show Sparkling Wine. Winemaker, Anna Marie Dos Remedios, incredible talent impressed this year's judges with her beautifully crafted Sparkling Blanc de Blanc.

Competition judge and professional wine writer Bill McNabb noted the trend of more unusual grapes being planted and flourishing at the hands of talented women winemakers. "The Albarino that just won Best White is a very unusual grape that normally does not win," says McNabb. "It is refreshing to see these grapes win."

This bodes well for Northern California winemakers who are looking to entice their audience to get outside their comfort zone. The vintages presented in the competition are indicative of another spectacular year in California winemaking, despite challenges from the fires of 2017 that potentially threatened some of this year's submissions. In terms of balance, the wines presented were holding their own beyond expectation. "This year's wines are less acidic than years prior. The wines this year are deeper and have more earthy notes," noted competition judge Yvonne Hurson. For a complete list of award-winning wines, please visit [www.sonoma-marinfair.org/portfolio-item/wine/#](http://www.sonoma-marinfair.org/portfolio-item/wine/#).

The incredible wines were not the only thing to be celebrated. In an industry historically dominated by men, female judges, winemakers, and even the North of the Gate Wine Competition Director, Valery Uhl, carry distinct representation across the competition. There was no shortage of Women In Wine at the North of The Gate competition this year.

The winning wines will be displayed at the Sonoma-Marín County Fair in the Wine Garden this June 19<sup>th</sup>-23, 2019. Fair-goers can taste and mingle with the winemakers, as each wine who won their category are featured in a display for all 5 days of the Fair. A separate ticket is required to visit the Wine Garden and will be available for purchase at the gate the day of and in advance online at [Sonoma-marinfair.org](http://Sonoma-marinfair.org).

Mark your calendars for a summer to remember during "Eight Decades of Fun" at the Sonoma-Marín Fair, June 19-23, 2019. With new competitions and contests, FREE concerts, unlimited carnival rides, and delicious fair food you will want to come all 5 fun-filled days. Enjoy heart-warming entertainment during the World's Ugliest Dog® Contest, the thrill of Sprint Car Racing, and the joy of connecting with our local agricultural community. For details, visit [sonoma-marinfair.org](http://sonoma-marinfair.org) or call (707) 283-3247. Be the first to know about all of the fun by following us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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