

December 10, 2004
Independent Administration Institution
National Research Institute of Brewing (NRIB)

The Result of the 42nd Whisky, liquor and wines Awards

The occasion of these awards includes a sensory examination and chemical analysis of fruit wine, sweet fruit wine, whiskey, brandy, spirits and various other alcoholic varieties voluntarily exhibited by domestic liquor/fruit wine suppliers, aiming to gain a concrete picture of current manufacturing technology and trends in alcohol quality from a nationwide perspective, and also to provide contributions helpful to manufacturers in reference terms.

The examination committee was held at the NRIB over two days on November 16 & 17, 2004. The examination was conducted by a team of 58 jury members, all experienced and expert individuals, including relevant manufacturing and sales staff, technical staff from the National Tax Agency and Regional Tax Bureaus as well as those from our own institute. (Table 1)

[Exhibition overview and evaluation method]

This year, a total of 203 varieties were exhibited (Table 2), a figure almost equivalent to the previous year (202 varieties). While categories of liquor, spirits and whiskey saw increases of 3, 2, and 2 varieties respectively, that of fruit wine declined by 6 varieties.

The exhibits were categorized by standard retail price, raw material / origin, manufacturing process and ingredients such as the alcoholic proof, and were evaluated in a manner aiming to maximize the positive aspects of each exhibit. As for whiskey and brandy, aroma characteristics were evaluated in accordance with the Profile Act (shown in Charts 1 and 2) just as in an ordinary year. Since we received feedback in the exhibition last year, stating that the evaluation of malt whiskey to be difficult using the current examination paper, this year we wrote down any extra comments in the margin. Evaluation of the fruit wine, spirits and liquor groups was done using a scoring system (5 points) alongside short comments recorded in the examination paper of table 3.

[Exhibition Overview and Evaluation Results]

1. Fruit wine group

- (1) Fruit Wine (fruit wine made from grapes (including white, red and rose wines) and fruit wine made from raw materials other than grapes)

83 varieties of grape-based fruit wine were exhibited (a decline of 9 on the previous awards), alongside 23 varieties of other fruit wine (an increase of 5).

The category of fruit wine made from grapes was further sub-categorized into new wine and cost-based groups, namely under 1,200 yen, between 1,200 and 2,500 yen and over 2,500 yen based on the retail pre-tax price of a 720ml bottle. They were examined with such information as the variety of grape, vintage year (if clarified) and, if necessary, features of the vintage process specified. Wine without antioxidants (sulfurous acid) were examined without showing the above information.

Other varieties of fruit wine were examined by indicating the raw materials, alcoholic proof and extract essence.

a) White wine

Among 39 exhibits in this category, popular single grape cultivars were Koshu (13 varieties), Chardonnay (5 varieties), Riesling and hybrids (4 varieties), Delaware (3 varieties) and Seibel 9110 (3 varieties). Others included Muscat of Alexandria, Muller Thurgau and Niagara. Meanwhile, 6 varieties were blends of multiple cultivars while 2 varieties did not specify any cultivar. In addition, Surlie, wines fermented or aged in barrels, as well as sparkling new wine were also on show.

Many commented on the overall upturn in quality, with most wines justifying their price, although this was previously not the case among some premium wines. Some also commented that, with the Japanese wine and domestic wine markets in mind, manufacturers should use exclusive cultivars and thereby target comparative quality with wines made in major western production bases, while fruity wine using grape cultivars from the USA, which were not many among exhibits this time, would also be important. Although wines made from domestic grapes tend to lack acidity, most of the Koshu wines in the mid to high price category did display a significant acidity and clear taste on this occasion. Although the Chardonnay exhibits had not quite reached the benchmark standards of the imported wines, there still were some with high

quality. Previously, many Chardonnay wines were noted to be suffering from an overly-strong 'barrel' aroma. Although this problem still exists to some extent, many commented that things had improved overall on this occasion.

New wine: This category featured 8 varieties on show, a decrease of 4 varieties compared to the previous year. The main grape cultivars featured were Koshu (4 varieties) and Seibel 9110 (Vert Dore; 2 varieties), and 2 varieties were using multiple cultivars. In certain varieties, the lack of freshness which should be present in new wine as well as oxidization were pointed out. On the other hand, there were some excellent varieties among those without sulfurous acid which used to be subject to criticisms, and therefore improvements of manufacturing technology were generally acknowledged. Sparkling new wine also obtained a high score.

Under 1,200yen: There were 9 varieties in this category, increasing on the previous year's number by 2. The exhibits included 3 Delaware varieties, single varieties of Koshu, Chardonnay and Riesling hybrids respectively, and 1 blend variety, with 2 other varieties without the specification of cultivar.

Although some wines suffered from the presence of rotted fruit or a corklike odor, most received positive assessment when the price was taken into consideration, particularly the Delaware and Riesling hybrid varieties.

Between 1,200 and 2,500 yen: There were 16 varieties in this category, down by 4 compared to the previous year. They included 6 varieties of Koshu, 2 of Chardonnay, 3 of Riesling including hybrids and others. The assessment found almost no flaws to highlight, with particularly high scores awarded to certain Koshu Surlie, Riesling and Chardonnay varieties. Koshu wine brewed in a jar was also exhibited.

Over 2,500yen: There were 6 varieties on show, a decrease of 6 on the previous year's total. The exhibits included 2 varieties of Koshu and Chardonnay respectively, as well as various others. Many were generally of high quality, and high scores were awarded to wines fermented and stored in barrel among the Chardonnay or Koshu categories.

b) Red wine

Among 34 exhibits, the most popular single cultivars were Wild Grape, including 7 hybrid varieties, Muscat Berry A with 6 varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon and its hybrids numbering 4 varieties, and Merlot with the same

number. Other exhibits included one of Zweigeltrebe, Dornfelder, Black Queen and Kiyomi, respectively. There were 7 blends of multiple cultivars, and finally further two wines without the information of cultivars.

The efforts of the manufacturers were clearly apparent in the varied range of exhibits. Some Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot varieties were assessed as of international standard, and there were also barrel-stored wine made from Muscat Berry A, new fruity wine of USA origin and sparkling new red wine, and so on.

New wine: There were 9 varieties on show, an increase of 5 on the previous year's figure. The exhibits included 3 varieties of Muscat Berry A, 3 of Merlot, 2 of wild grape hybrids and others. Relatively positive scores were given to moderately sweet sparkling wines, as well as to some blends with Campbell and also wild grape hybrids. Some commented that, since freshness are preferred in new wines, quality designing for those type with body would be difficult.

Under 1,200yen: There were 4 varieties for exhibits in this category, an increase of 2 over the previous year. They were single varieties of Muscat Berry A and blend respectively, plus two other wines of unknown origin. Although certain people felt the level of the inexpensive wine had improved, others countered saying that more effort was necessary, given the importance of this price range vis-à-vis domestic wine.

Between 1,200 and 2,500yen: There were 11 varieties exhibited, one less than the previous year. The main breeds were four varieties of wild grape hybrid and two of Muscat Berry A. Although some tasters complained of an overly strong barrel odor, this did not represent a significant problem overall. Meanwhile, among Zweigeltrebe and blends of multiple cultivars, there were some which obtained a high evaluation, as did also Muscat Berry A, which was barrel-ripened.

Over 2,500 yen: There were 10 varieties on show, again one less than the previous year's figure. These included 4 varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon and its hybrids, 2 blends of multiple breeds, and so on. There were many ripened exhibits, prompting some to highlight problems associated with the ripening process, such as that involving the vice of the barrel. However, some of the Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and their blends demonstrated the characteristics of their raw material constituents and were evaluated as at least the equal of

the benchmark imported wines. There was the opinion that the importance of this price range should be highlighted domestically, taking the price of grapes as a raw material into consideration. However, at the same time, some also pointed out the importance of cost performance due to the marketability.

c) Rose Wine

Here, 10 varieties were featured, down by two on the previous year's figure. These ten included single varieties of Wild Grape and its hybrid respectively, one each of Campbell, Muscat Berry A, Kyoho and Pione and finally, four varieties of blended wine. Sparking wine, having undergone a second fermentation process within the bottle, was also exhibited. Some of the colors appeared close to red or white, and many pointed out that aesthetic qualities of color were important for rose wine. High scores were awarded to some of the sparkling new wines and those blends featuring fruity tastes.

d) Fruit wine made from raw materials other than grapes

23 varieties including 5 of blueberry, 4 of apple, 3 each of plum and mandarin orange varieties and various others were exhibited, surpassing last year's total by 5. Even though many of these raw materials appear prone to oxidization and it should not be easy to fully bring out their characteristics in wine, some still noted the importance of producing the product of which the taster can recognize the raw material even in a blind tasting. Certain varieties in the apple, passion fruit, blueberry, plum and mandarin orange categories earned high praise.

(2) Sweet fruit wine

Only 1 variety of port type wine was exhibited, and it was evaluated as Ruby Port like.

2. Whiskey group

(1) Whiskey

The total of exhibits numbered 27 varieties, an increase of 3 varieties over the previous year. Exhibits were categorized into groups of under 2,000 yen, between 2,000 and 4,000 yen and over 4,000 yen based on the retail price for a 720ml bottle. As grain whiskey was exhibited this year, assessment was made in three categories, namely

grain whiskey, blended whiskey and malt whiskey. The alcoholic proof was also displayed and subsequently, for assessment purposes, both straight and watered down samples with an alcoholic percentage of 20% were supplied and an overall evaluation was performed using both.

Generally, the benchmark scotch taste had a characteristic rich aroma and strong smoky flavor, but it was somewhat immature with a coarse taste. However, evaluation of domestic whiskey showed a matured touch, and a whiskey featuring delicate aroma, effective balance and smoothness in the palate. In most cases, the usage of barrel and blend technology appeared to be superior, and some commented that even a whiskey of characteristic flavor possessed good harmony and ripeness. Other commented that the smell of the sherry barrel has lessened compared to before.

Under 2,000 yen: 9 varieties on show. Exhibits were evaluated as having relatively fewer characteristics, but easily drinkable and well balanced.

Between 2,000 and 4,000 yen: There were 8 varieties exhibited. Effective barrel ripening was apparent, as was the effective expression of characteristic features of Japanese whiskey. Overall verdict was of balanced quality and a cost performance that remained high on the whole.

Over 4,000yen: There were 10 varieties, of which most had an aroma showing a concrete ripeness and strong character. There were also more varieties of malt whiskey on this occasion, which expressed various types of character in a positive manner, resulting in considerable assessment work on the part of the jury to evaluate the characteristics. The well-ripened aspects were also apparent in the varieties of grain whiskey assessed.

(2) Brandy

Exhibits were categorized into brandies made from grapes and others. The former category, comprising those made from grapes, was further sub-categorized into groups priced under and over 4,000 yen respectively, based on the retail price for 720ml. The alcoholic percentage was also displayed, and both straight and watered down samples, the latter with an alcoholic percentage of 20%, were supplied and subjected to the overall evaluation.

There were four brandy exhibits made from grapes, a reduction of two on the previous year's figure. As for exhibits of brandy made from materials other than grapes, single varieties of apple and pear brandy respectively were exhibited. Some commented that the quality matched the price level and there was no overall weak point, however the

brightness of the aroma was considered insufficient compared with the benchmark cognac. The scores for apple and pear brandy were comparatively split.

3. Spirits group

The exhibits saw an increase by 2 varieties from the previous year, amounting to 6 varieties in total, including 2 each for vodka and gin, and one each for oolong and green tea-hi. Many commented that the vodka and gin varieties had a “complete” taste, while as regards the tea-flavored spirits, the bitter and complex flavor was said to be well harmonized.

4. Liquor group

The total number of exhibits was 57, an increase of 3 varieties on the previous year, and were categorized into plum wine, seasoning wine and others. The third category, ‘others’, was further sub-categorized into sparkling wine (sour), liquors drunk straight (including watered and hot watered) and those used for cocktails, and examined on an as-is basis. The raw materials, alcoholic percentage and extracted essence were also displayed.

(1) Plum wine

The exhibits in this category numbered 20, an increase of 3 varieties on the previous year. As well as orthodox plum wine, those which used brandy, sake, and otsu-type Shochu as a base were also exhibited. Many of orthodox plum wines were evaluated as having a highly complete taste. Evaluation of the plum wine which was partially brandy-based, revealed a mixed bag, including some high praise and other verdicts highlighting the problems of non-harmonized aromas. Those varieties using sake or otsu-type Shochu as a base have always received criticisms such as an overly pervasive aroma, however this time around, the general quality has improved and the number of wines with relatively high scores was seen to increase.

(2) Seasoning Wine

There were two varieties on show, the same as in the previous year. The assessment of orthodox seasoning wine showed a positive evaluation for the feature, while that of the seasoning wine using arborescent aloe was rather split due to its citrus smell.

(3) Other liquors

There were 35 varieties, the same figure as the previous year. Among the liquors drunk

straight, as for the sparkling liquor with low alcohol, some highlighted the positive market reputation for those with a firm taste and strong acidity. Others also emphasized the importance of color harmonization. Among the still liquors, those based on fruits such as citrus, loquat or quinces etc. were generally positively assessed. Meanwhile, liquors made from tomato juice, maca, and rose hip were also exhibited, however that from tomato juice was considered atypical and received differing verdicts. The difficulty of quality designing in the case of sake and otsu-type shochu was pointed out as usual. Liquors for cocktails generally obtained a positive score thanks to the majority having a high rate of completion, with the green tea varieties etc. attracting particular attention.