



ARRINGTON VINEYARDS

Arrington Vineyards of Nashville, Tennessee adds netting to their vines. The winery won a dozen medals at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition this year.

Competition winners highlight lesser known U.S. wine regions

By Carey Sweet

When you're evaluating nearly 5,700 wines from more than 1,000 U.S. and Mexico wineries, it might be easy to think that most of the winning labels come from climate- and soil-blessed California. Washington State and Oregon, too. And certainly those well-known, top producing regions get their share of accolades.

But there are many other U.S. states producing stellar wines, and as shown in this year's San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, they're piling up the awards, too.

For 2021, wineries from 31 states sent in their best bottles.

Drum roll, please. After all the scores were counted, one of the two top spar-

How to order wines

Gruet Vineyards:
www.gruetwinery.com

Cellardoor Winery:
www.mainewine.com

Arrington Vineyards:
www.arringtonvineyards.com

Leelanau Wine Cellars:
www.lwc.wine

ling wines in the country came from Gruet Vineyards of Albuquerque, New Mexico, according to the four dozen San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition judges. The other winner was the 2015 Blanc de Noir Monticello from Trump Winery in Virginia.

Cellardoor Winery of Lincolnville, Maine paraded home with two Best of Class honors, two Double Gold

medals and eight Gold medals. Arrington Vineyards of Nashville, Tennessee marched away with one Best of Class designation, three Double Gold, three Gold and five Silver medals. And Leelanau Wine Cellars of Omena, Michigan triumphed with one Best of Class, one Double Gold and two gold medals.

"This is by far the most awards we've won in a single year from this competition," said Gruet winemaker Laurent Gruet, noting that the winery has entered the competition for the past seven years. "We were so absolutely ecstatic when the results came back, that the team sabered some bottles of sparkling to celebrate."

And if people are

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Wineries throughout the U.S. enter annual competition

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surprised by the number of awards an Albuquerque winery snatched up, Gruet said he is not. “New Mexico is often overlooked as a wine growing region, so it feels really great to shine a light on what we can produce out here,” he said. “I hope it encourages other underdog growing regions to feel the same and start submitting more of their wines to competitions. All boats rise on a tide.”

The Sparkling Sweepstakes winner, the Gruet 2012 Blanc de Blancs (\$46), is made in the French Champagne style and aged for a minimum of three years en tirage to allow the flavor of digested yeast to develop in the wine (The French call this highly prized flavor “gout de Champagne”).

The style is a tribute to the winery’s founder, Gilbert Gruet, who was born in the Champagne region of Bethon, France in 1931.

By 1952, he was creating fine Champagne in his hometown, and in 1983, he traveled to New Mexico on a whim.

By chance, he met a group of European winemakers who had successfully planted vineyards in Engle, near the town of Truth or Consequences, 170 miles south of Albuquerque. One year later, he planted his first experimental Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vineyards there.

The American company still follows the French tradition of producing premium sparklings only after the grape growing conditions have been perfect.

“Any of our vintage sparklers are considered my baby,” Gruet said. “Mainly because we only produce a vintage sparkler if that growing season was exceptional. We go into every new season with the hopes of crafting a vintage sparkler, but sometimes Mother Nature has other plans for us.”

Cellardoor Winery took home one of its Best of Class honors for



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Arrington Vineyards of Nashville, Tennessee grows hybrid grapes and also sources grapes from the West Coast.

its 2016 Iron Gate Cabernet Sauvignon Red Blend (\$30).

“Our inspiration for Iron Gate stems from a famous 100-point

Bordeaux wine that Bettina Doulton, the owner of Cellardoor, gave to us over a decade ago,” said Aaron Peet, winemaker for the

Maine property. “While touring Bordeaux, one of our barrel coopers snapped a photo of my wife and assistant winemaker CC and I in front of the large imposing gates of a Chateau. Knowing we would need an elaborate appointment to see inside, we mused about the possibility of crafting a more obtainable premier Bordeaux blend — one that guests could enjoy without the locked iron gates.”

It’s one of his personal favorites to drink, he added.

“I love the wine because it gives you the feel of classic Left Bank Bordeaux elegance,” he said. “But it has an unmistakable boldness and New World flair.”

Arrington Vineyards boasts San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition awards dating back to 2014 when the Nashville winery took Double Gold medals for its Cabernet Reserve and Red Fox Red. This year, its 2019 Firefly Rosé (\$19.99) went home wearing a Best of Class medal, celebrated



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GRUET VINEYARDS

Above: Gruet Vineyards of Albuquerque, New Mexico won the Sparkling Sweepstake category for its 2012 Blanc de Blancs. Below: Cellardoor Winery of Lincolnville, Maine employees sort grapes during the crush season.

for its dry but fruity blend of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Chambourcin grapes.

"The name comes from the endless amount of fireflies lighting up the nights at the vineyards," Arrington winemaker Chase Vienneau said.

Taking home a dozen medals was a first for the winery, he noted, which has participated with the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition for the past 12 years.

"There is great wine being made in Tennessee, imagine that!" Vienneau said. "Being able to send wine to the West Coast competitions with the grapes being Tennessee grown is a big deal to us and having it win medals is even better."

The winery, which is co-owned by country music artist Kix Brooks, grows hybrid grapes and also sources grapes off the West Coast from Washington State to California's Central Coast.

For its Best of Class award, Leelanau Wine Cellars swooped in at an impressive price point — just \$7 for its red sangria. The Michigan winery —



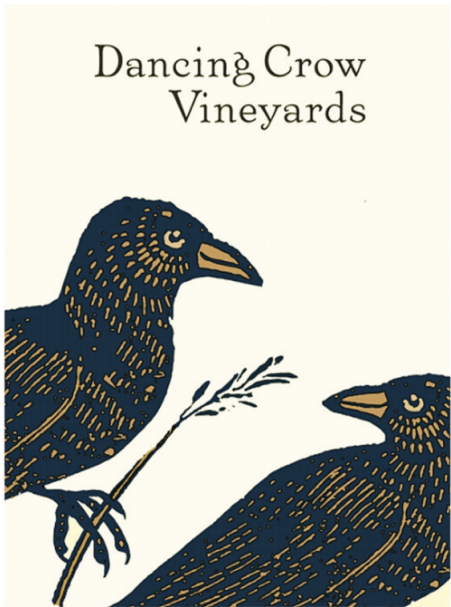
CELLARDOR WINERY

some call the state the "Napa of the Midwest" — was founded in 1974 by the Jacobson family, and now distributes 200,000 cases annually.

The semi-sweet sangria

is blended with natural citrus flavors and spices; the winery also produces signatures like apple wine, blackberry Moscato, blackberry wine and blueberry Moscato.

Dancing Crows Vineyard Wins Big at the SF Chronicle Wine Competition



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