

Winter Olympic Gold Medal Wines



The 2014 Winter Olympics, also known as the XXII Olympic Winter Games, is THE major winter-themed international multi-sport event, held every four years and usually hosted by a different country each time. This year, the games are being held in Sochi, Russia. Sochi was selected as the host city in July 2007, during the 119th IOC Session and is the first Olympics to be hosted by Russia since the breakup of the USSR in 1991.

A total of 98 events in 15 winter sport disciplines are being held during the Games. A number of new competitions, including biathlon mixed relay, women's ski jumping, mixed-team figure skating, mixed-team luge, half-pipe skiing, ski and snowboard slopestyle, and snowboard parallel slalom, are being held during the Games.

So far, the USA has a fair number of medals, and while not all of them are gold, I am confident that the total medal count will continue to climb.

And while I am not actually *in* Sochi, I can get into the spirit of the games by watching the exciting events while enjoying a few gold medal wines, as judged by - and awarded at - the 34th annual San Francisco International Wine Competition.

Unlike the Olympics, the San Francisco competition takes place each year when wines from each corner of the world are entered into the industry's most influential wine competition in America.

The contest is judged by multiple panels of judges and is done on a blind, consensual procedure, meaning that the three-judge panel tasting a particular set of varietals has to come to agreement on each wine tasted. For a wine to be awarded a Double Gold, it had to receive a Gold score from all three judges.

But like the Olympics, competition is fierce. This year, 4,539 wines from 1,400 wineries, from 30 countries were submitted to the competition. And out of all of those wines, there were only a handful of double gold medals awarded. And the majority of them went to wineries in the USA.

So in the spirit of the Olympic games, here are a few Gold Medal Wines from the U-S-A to enjoy during the final week of competition in Sochi.

BEST CHARDONNAY

The **2011 D & L Carinalli Vineyards Estate Chardonnay** from the Russian River Valley in California delivers a lot of wine for the money, starting with a nose that features aromas of ripe apple, pear and buttered toast. Flavors of apple, pear and Myer lemon are supported by a creamy mouthfeel. The medium-bodied finish boasts enough acidity to stand up to richer shellfish and seafood. **\$20**

BEST WHITE RHÔNE

The **2012 Hearthstone Winery Estate Grown Roussanne** from Paso Robles, California is just a lovely wine with magnificent aromas of tropical fruit and floral scents. In the mouth, the wine has a wonderful complexity of sweet white fruit, pears and honeydew melon. The finish is nice and long with hints of buttered toast. I would serve this wine with roasted butternut squash soup. **\$24**

BEST CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Mary Rocca and her husband, Eric Grigsby, are the owners of Rocca Family Vineyards, located just outside the city of Napa, in Yountville California, and are the proud producers of the **2009 Rocca Family Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Grigsby Vineyard**. Aromas of blackberry, cassis and cedar dominate the fragrant bouquet. Ripe black fruit – black plums and blackberries – sit on a well-balanced frame, with smooth tannins and pitch-perfect acidity. Notes of cedar, cocoa and roasted coffee lingers on the supple finish. Give me a steak! **\$85**

BEST SYRAH / SHIRAZ

A roaring fire and glass of the **2010 Martin Ranch Winery Syrah Therese Vineyards** from the Santa Cruz Mountains of California is all I need on a cold winters night. The warm aromas of dark plum, black cherry, spicy white pepper and black olives on the nose lead to beautifully layered flavors of black cherry, cassis, blackberry and cocoa in the mouth. Just a touch of melted licorice rounds out the long, lush finish. **\$35**

BEST PINOT NOIR

The **2011 Hawley Winery Dehman Vineyard Pinot Noir** from the Russian River Valley in California was a delightful surprise in the competition. The wine hits you in the face with aromas of coffee, black cherries and orange peel, followed nicely on the palate with plush and elegant flavors of saturated dark fruit and a touch of toasty oak. The supple finish is accented by notes of mushroom and forest floor. A perfect accompaniment with wild mushroom tart. **\$30**