

Area wineries draw national attention

BY TOM CARR
Record-Eagle staff writer

Area wines, popular for years throughout the Great Lakes region, have become increasingly renowned throughout the country and even the world.

Last year, the 2002 Semi-Dry Riesling and Select Riesling from Peninsula Cellars won top awards at international competitions on both coasts.

At the San Francisco International Wine Competition, where the winery's 2002 Select Riesling won double gold medals, the 2002 Late Harvest Riesling from Chateau Grand Traverse also won double gold.

Double gold medals are only awarded when two sets of judges unanimously vote that the wine deserves a gold medal.

"That's where I really got a kick out of it," said Bryan Ulbrich, winemaker at Peninsula Cellars. "As they pulled the bags off of them, three out of the 40 wines winning the double gold were from Old Mission Peninsula."

After Peninsula Cellars won the award, the winery was inundated with calls, Ulbrich said.

"The demands downstate and out of state were much higher," he said.

Awards mostly help sell the wines to the connoisseurs, said Chris Parrish, assistant winemaker at Bel Lago Winery in Cedar.

Bel Lago wines won 10 awards recently at Tasters Guild International's 17th Annual International Wine Judging in Grand Rapids, including a gold for its 2002 Gewurztraminer.

Several other wineries from this area also took away awards from the event.



Record-Eagle/Doug Tesner

Owner David Kroupa and winemaker Bryan Ulbrich do a taste test at Peninsula Cellars just outside of Traverse City on Old Mission Peninsula.

Northwest Lower Michigan wineries with award-winning entries also included Black Star Farms, Chateau Chantal, Ciccone Vineyards, Chateau Fontaine, Gill's Pier, Good Harbor, Leelanau Wine Cellars, Peninsula Cellars and Shady Lane Cellars.

Parrish said the recognition is significant, but not the most important thing for a winemaker.

"It makes a nice display," he said. "You can hang the medals and a nice article in your tasting room. But it's primarily the connoisseur who looks at it and reads it."

The winery has been doing an increasing business with both connoisseurs and "people learning to love wines," Parrish said.

And with about 20 or more wineries in the area, there are plenty of places to sample wines and find out what tastes good.

Touring the tasting rooms

takes visitors through some of the most scenic parts of the area, since vineyards tend to be in the rolling hills near the water that keep the area's climate milder than that of many

other regions this far north.

Winery tours comprise an important part of the vacation activities offered in the area, though it's not known how many people actually come for the vineyards.

For most tourists, wine tasting is just one of the things they do while here, said Deb Knudsen.

"It's a wonderful amenity for people when they're

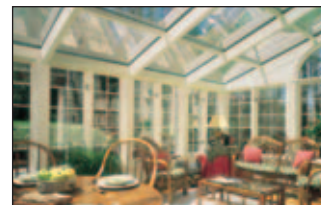
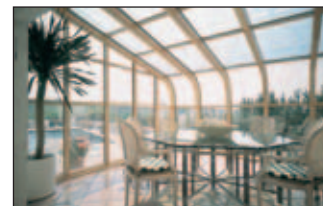
here," said Knudsen, president of the Traverse City Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Most wineries are happy to cater to both the serious and casual wine drinker.

"A lot of people who come to taste the wines buy a bottle or two," Parrish said.

"The more serious wine drinker is more likely to buy a case or more."

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