

Tattle Tales

A casual chat with Christian Tatman



Wine made from chillies, cucumbers and even old leather: wine judge Elaine Hall-Foote has tasted more than the odd drop of the weird and the wonderful



Wine judge Elaine Hall-Foote.

Picture: TANYA FRY N08ML300

How did you become a wine judge?

I saw an item in the *Leader* for Frankston Amateur Winemakers Guild winemaking classes and I encouraged my then partner to go along and we both became passionate about winemaking. I have been a member since 1988. I was really interested in the whole process of winemaking and the process and criteria of judging, so I asked the current wine judge Chris Myers if he would mentor me. I have been an associate judge for four years with Chris and judging independently for the last two years.

What are the key criteria wine judges look at?

Presentation, bouquet and taste. For presentation it's three points, for bouquet it's out of seven points and taste it's out of 10 points. The most you can get is 20 points.

What's the most unusual wine you have tasted?

We have a winemaker that makes chilli wines. It's a hot, peppery wine. It's absolutely delicious. At the other end of the scale is zucchini and cucumber

wine, which is cool and crisp.

Year's ago someone made wine out of a 40-year-old piece of leather. He shaved it and fermented the leather and it was drinkable. It was an absolute hoot.

What makes a good wine?

Something that's very true to character — full-bodied fruit, it's well balanced with acids and tannin and alcohol and that leaves you thinking about savouring the wine; that leaves you thinking about the complexity of the wine.

When wine buffs talk about the body of the wine, what do they mean?

The body of the wine is the richness and fullness of the fruit and the roundness and balance on the palate.

What are some of the more unusual ingredients members of Frankston Amateur Winemakers Guild add to their wines to give them that something special?

One member made wine out of buffalo grass. It was surprisingly good (laughs) and he assured us that there were no dogs in the backyard.

Does wine tell a story?

It's already had a journey to the bottle and then when you open the bottle the wine tells a story and when we judge we assess the whole story before we give points. A good wine is like a good book — you don't want it to end and you remember it.

Why do wine judges spit out the wine after sampling it?

If we swallowed, we would not be able to assess the wine well. As we are judging so many wines, we have to be careful not to consume because the alcohol will cloud our judgment. They would all taste good if we swallowed the wines.

As a wine judge how do you avoid getting drunk?

After we judge the wines, we spend some time eating and we use a breathalyser before we leave the premises.

● Frankston Amateur Winemakers Guild will hold its annual wine show at the Briers in the barn, Mt Martha, with public tastings on Sunday, August 28, from 9am-3pm. Entry \$10 includes sampling of all wines presented. Details: fawg.org.au