

THINGS TO DO

Napa Valley Cabernet takes top prize at record-setting North Coast Wine Challenge



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A voluptuous 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley's family-owned Fortunati Vineyards took home the top prize at the [13th annual North Coast Wine Challenge](#), which concluded Wednesday morning at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa.

It was a record-setting year for the wine competition presented by The Press Democrat, which brought together 34 judges, and three associate judges, to taste and assess a record 1,147 wine entries. Comprising winemakers, sommeliers, wine buyers, media and other industry professionals, this year's

It's the first time a Cabernet Sauvignon has won the Best of the Best award, in a final sweepstakes round that chief judge Daryl Groom called "tense and exciting."

"The sweepstakes round had the most wines I can remember in recent years, with the judges only having one vote to decide which wine will win," he said. "We've had Pinot Noirs, Chardonnay and Zinfandels win — but never a Cabernet Sauvignon."



Groom was also thrilled to see a dry Sonoma Coast Riesling from Deodora Estate Vineyards in the Petaluma Gap take home Best of Show White — another varietal first.

"It was really nice to see the judges jump out of their comfort zone and unanimously choose this orphan variety," he said. "Riesling has been getting a lot of attention lately as consumers trend to crisper, lighter styles."

Eligibility was limited to wines produced with grapes grown primarily in California's North Coast AVA (American Viticulture Area), which encompasses Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Marin, Lake and Solano counties.

This year, a total of 223 wineries entered the competition, including 98 that had never entered before.

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Here are the top winners from the 2025 North Coast Wine Challenge:

Best of the Best: Fortunati Vineyards 2021 Signature Cabernet Sauvignon, Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley

Best of Show Sparkling: Chandon (NV) Etoile Brut, Los Carneros

Best of Show White: Deodora Estate Vineyards 2019 Riesling, Sonoma Coast

Best of Show Rosé: Dot 2024 Rosé of Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

Best of Show Red: Fortunati 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley

Best of Show Dessert Wine: Sonoma-Cutrer 2023 Miel Late Harvest Chardonnay, Russian River Valley

Best of Sonoma County: Deodora Estate Vineyards 2019 Riesling, Sonoma Coast

Best of Napa County: Fortunati Vineyards 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

Best of Mendocino County: Graziano 2023 Chenin Blanc, Mendocino County

Best of Lake County: R Vineyards 2023 Viognier, Lake County

Best of Solano County: Vezér Family Vineyard 2023 Franci Verdelho, Suisun

The full competition results will appear in The Press Democrat's Feast & Wine section on April 16, along with a detailed profile of the Best of the Best winner. In coming weeks, The Press Democrat also will feature the Best of the Best and Best of Show winners in a new Zoom webinar series in which they'll talk about their wines. Chefs will join those webinars to discuss how those wines pair with various foods.

To sample this year's gold and double-gold winning wines, don't miss the [North Coast Wine & Food Festival](#) on June 14 at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa. Hosted by The Press Democrat, the event will offer plenty of food to accompany the winning wines, including plates from Lo & Behold, Goldfinch, Slanted Door, Arandas, Wit & Wisdom and other local restaurants.

For tickets and information, visit northcoastwineandfood.com.

PD Staff Writer Sarah Doyle was one of the 34 judges in the North Coast Wine Challenge. You can reach her at 707-521-5478 or sarah.doyle@pressdemocrat.com. Follow Sarah on Instagram at [@whiskymuse](#).

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