

Sacramento Home Winemakers Club

THE PERFECT CLUB FOR MAKING WINE AND MAKING FRIENDS

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I have a neighbor who lives just down the street from me. He and his wife walk their dog past my house once a day. We often stop and talk about what's going on in the neighborhood or travel plans or general chit chat. What I didn't know about my neighbor was that for the past 3 years he has been making award winning wines right at his home, right in my neighborhood. In fact, he belongs to a club here in Sacramento that is dedicated to home wine making.

The Sacramento Home Winemakers (SHW) Club is a volunteer nonprofit organization. The mission of the Club is to promote the art and science of winemaking through education, competition, and social meetings. The SHW incorporated in 1973 and is the oldest continuously operating home winemaking club west of the Rockies, dedicated to preserving the art of home winemaking. However, the philosophy of the club is more of a welcoming sentiment that seeks to encourage experimentation and collaboration amongst members. While attending a recent meeting of the SHW, I asked a member what motivates home winemakers especially since they can't sell their products for profit. Her response was for the sheer creative enjoyment of doing something yourself. "Have you ever made your own spaghetti sauce?", she countered.

Although the club encourages members to be their own independent producers, the actual dynamic includes mentoring, information sharing and formalized education programs focusing on the scientific technology of home wine making. The club is supported, in part, by partnerships with UC Davis and commercial wine makers. A visit to their website clearly shows this group's enthusiasm for all things related to wine. There you can find listings of events, newsletters, the history and award winning wines.

The Club currently has about 170 paid household memberships and approximately 360 members. The annual membership fee is a reasonable \$50.00 per household, renewable each year. The membership meets

monthly and is an eclectic group of retirees, working people and just regular folks interested in learning about wine and wine making.

The monthly club meetings are well organized, informative, and fun. At one recent meeting, all members were invited to taste five Bordeaux-style wines made, of course, by club members. These Bordeaux wines, in line with the French tradition, were all red blends primarily of six different varietals. Two professional evaluators with seasoned sommelier-like expertise led the wine tasting, discussing the characteristics of the various wines tasted using information supplied by the home wine maker and their own sight, smell and taste to distinguish subtleties in each pouring. Sharing their knowledge about these wines helped everyone present learn more about the art and science of both grape growing and wine making as they provided detailed, analytical assessments of the step by step vinification process for making the best possible homemade wine. You could readily sense that these club members appreciated the evaluator's comments as they are more a group of passionate technicians than just casual hobbyists.

Wine makes friends as you might know if you have ever gone wine tasting. Similarly, if you are a home wine maker, club members tell me, you'll have more friends than you ever expected, once the word gets out to your neighbors. However, friends, comradery, and family-close relationships are not the only benefit to being a club member. Members enjoy classroom like learning with half day workshops like Wine 101 or 201. Monthly meetings may include a speaker series featuring wine specialists and/or local vintners. Wine evaluations, tastings, and winery tours are also part of the educational focus sometimes sponsored and supported by the wine industry itself.

The club includes people with considerable wine making expertise and enough experience to warrant some award winning wines in both the California State Fair Home Wine Makers

competition and the Jubilee, which is the SHW Club's own annual competition. As you can imagine, a friendly rivalry exists among club members to make the best wines. This is a club full of knowledgeable people with a sincere interest, if not love, of wine, especially making it. All work together to support one another's wine making interests and endeavors. Although the club has

been together for 43 years with some members in long standing, new members are always welcome.

So, if you are a wine lover and curious about making your own wine at home, check out the next meeting. Details can be found at SacHomeWine.com. Who knows? You might just be the next gold medal winner at the California State Fair's Home Wine Makers Competition.

