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NEWS

All the medallists from the Global Orange Wine Masters 2026

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By Patrick Schmitt

Is orange wine growing up? This year's competition yielded a selection of wines that exhibited no technical faults – and the best examples were truly great, reports *Patrick Schmitt MW*.

AMONG WINE professionals, there are established ways to assess wine quality. One is complexity – the number of flavours you can taste, which is a positive only if they are delicious and complementary. Another is intensity: are those flavours not just good, but piercing on the palate? Then comes length, a measure of how long those appealing characters persist – Robert Parker famously used to time how long flavours lasted. But perhaps the most important element of all is balance: are the components in a wine harmonious?

It's with balance in mind that I turn to orange wine. The difference between an orange and a white wine comes down to more than colour – it's a matter of texture. The amber hue, in its varying shades, comes from leaving white grape skins in contact with the juice after crushing, before, during and sometimes after fermentation. From those skins come not just colour but phenolics – known as tannins in red wine, which is made the same way, but from red grapes, with longer and less gentle extraction.

These phenolics can be pleasingly apparent in full-bodied white wines, such as high-end Viognier, bringing a subtle bitterness and a gentle drying effect that makes the mouth water – an extra note of refreshment. This is especially true of red wines, where lower acidity means the tannins do the work of making you salivate and want to keep sipping – provided they are ripe and not too dominant.

In reds, tannic structure gets plenty of attention, as it supports the fruit. The same is true of orange wines, and as the category matures, we are starting to assess that influence more critically. As with reds, the tannins should sit in balance with the rest of the wine, so the finish doesn't turn unpleasantly drying. Among the orange wines we sampled this year, some leaned grainy and bitter – a fault reflected in their scores. The top wines, by contrast, showed real balance: phenolics in step with everything else, from flavonoids to fruit flesh, acidity to oak influence, where present.

NO TECHNICAL FAULTS

Fellow judge Jonathan Pedley MW summed up the field: there were no technical faults this year – not even unwanted oxidation. His one reservation was that several winemakers are letting their wines become excessively astringent. Phenolics are part of orange wine's flavour profile, he noted, but there's a point at which the taste becomes simply mouth-puckering. As he put it, no wine should be dominated by a single component – oak, acidity, alcohol, sweetness – so why should orange wine be allowed to be dominated by its own "orange-ness"?

That very question has driven this year's stand-out producer: Gérard Bertrand, who picked up three Golds in The Orange Wine Masters, and was named Grand Master for the competition's best wine – for the third year running. Speaking to *db* during a discussion about orange winemaking back in 2024, Bertrand estimated that around two-thirds of the orange wines he had tasted showed "too much bitterness, dryness and tannin". His own aim, he said, was to move "from strong to light bitterness, and from tannin to structure". Grenache Blanc, he added, works well for orange wine, as does Viognier, since its skins colour easily; Chardonnay, too, is "very interesting".

For his top wine, Bertrand uses Viognier, Roussanne and Vermentino from his biodynamically farmed Château l'Hospitalet in La Clape. The grapes go into vat as whole bunches for carbonic maceration at 21°C–25°C, with the skins left in contact with the must and wine for three to four weeks; the wine is pressed roughly halfway through fermentation, then aged for eight months across terracotta amphorae, glass globes and oak barrels.

Bertrand wasn't the only master of orange wine this year. The other was one of South Africa's biggest names, Bruce Jack, whose Marmalade Invader – a skin-contact Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay blend – showed the right light orange-gold colour alongside the rich, barrel-influenced character of a fine white wine, plenty of natural acidity and just a touch more tannin than usual, but mouth-watering rather than puckering.

A delicious addition to this exciting, maturing category. These two may have been the pinnacle expressions of 2026, but they were closely followed by Golds from an equally exciting range of sources – Austria, Spain and Argentina.

Oaked Still Orange

Winery	Name of Wine	Region	Country	Vint.	Medal
£10-£15					
Siegel Wines	Naranjo Viognier	Colchagua	Chile	2024	Silver
£15-£20					
Bodega Valdecuevas	Valdecuevas Orange	Valladolid	Spain	2024	Silver
Habersack	Gewürztraminer Rohdiamant	Österreich	Austria	2024	Silver
£20-£30					
Ancre Hill	Orange Wine	Wales	UK	2023	Silver
B58 Winery	Beaulieu Orange	Hampshire	UK	2024	Silver
£30-£50					
The Drift Estate	Marmalade Invader	Western Cape	South Africa	2024	Master
£70-£100					
Susana Balbo Wines	Limited Edition Blanco de Raíz Skin Contact	Valle de Uco	Argentina	2023	Gold
£100+					
Gérard Bertrand	Villa Soleilla	Languedoc-Roussillon	France	2024	Grand Master

About the competition

With high-quality judges and a unique sampling process, The Global Orange Wine Masters provides a chance for your wines to shine. The 2026 competition was judged on 15 July at House of Decant in London, employing experienced judges. The top entries were awarded Gold, Silver or Bronze medals according to their result, and those expressions that stood out as being outstanding received the ultimate accolades – the titles of Global Orange Wine Master or Grand Master. This report features medal winners only. Please visit the Global Masters website for more information or, to enter future competitions, with a chance to appear in print and online, call: +44 (0) 20 7803 2420 or email Sophie Aston at: sophie@thedrinksbusiness.com