

A wine of her own

What do women like to drink? First-ever wine competition judged solely by women tastes 1,800 wines to find out.

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In a quiet hotel conference room in Santa Rosa, tables of women are sipping wine with the intensity of air traffic controllers.

Aside from the constant clink of glasses, there's almost no sound as they swirl, sniff, sip and spit flight after flight. With hundreds of bottles ahead of them there's little time for small talk.

Their mission: To determine what wine women want. Over three days, a panel of 31 female wine judges at the first National Women's Wine Competition will taste more than 1,800 wines. The idea, says wine industry specialist and event coordinator Judith Oppenheimer, is to create a women-to-woman road map to the wine marketplace.

"The industry is so male dominated and women are the number one buyers of wine. Women intuitively seek opinions from other women," she says. Hence, the decision to create the competition.

But, wait. Is there really that much difference between what women like to drink and what men drink?

Head judge Rebecca Murphy, of the Dallas Wine Competition says that, in fact, there are some differences. In general, she says, women tend to prefer wines that are more delicate and food-friendly--wines that complement cooking, rather than overpower it. And, as the primary purchasers of wine in the marketplace, she says it's time for some female voices to be heard.

Winning wines in each category will be given the opportunity to place the NWWC logo on their bottles, letting consumers know that the wines have been judged to be a 'Wine Women Want'.

Results of the wine judging will be posted on the National Women's Wine Competition web site (www.nwwc.info) soon after the competition ends on March 15, according to Oppenheimer. A public tasting of the winning wines will be held in San Francisco on June 23. The tasting benefits Women for Winesense, a non-profit organization that promotes women's understanding of wine, and is a co-organizer of the event.