

Chef secrets from S.F.'s Bar Tartine & 15 spooky plants for Halloween

Sunset

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SUPERIOR JUDGMENTS

When the best wine tasters in the West evaluate nearly 3,000 bottles, fascinating trends emerge—to say nothing of an extraordinary shopping list. *By Sara Schneider*

THERE'S SOMETHING you should know about the sea of medals in the marketplace from wine competitions: They're only as good as the judges who award them. The reliability of results varies widely among competitions, hinging entirely on the tasting experience of the judges.

I knew all that when we floated the idea of launching a *Sunset* wine competition, and I was ready to quash the plan unless we could sign the best judges in the West. We made a wish list—who would our ideal panel include? Master Sommeliers and Masters of Wine, seasoned wine journalists, experienced winemakers and retailers—in short, professionals who've tasted and evaluated wine on a constant basis for a very long time. When I invited my dream team, the overwhelming response was, "Absolutely, I'd love to be part of that!" And I knew our medals would mean something.



Scenes from the competition—flights of wine in every color; expert sippers (from top: Jim Blumling, Mark Chandler, Kimberlee Nicholls).

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"KNOWING HOW WILDLY POPULAR CHARDONNAY IS, OUR PANEL HAD GREAT FUN FINDING ONES THAT DELIVER BOTH SUBTLETY AND PLEASURE."

— KIMBERLY NOELLE CHARLES, WINE PUBLICITY AND MARKETING EXECUTIVE

