

Los Angeles Olive Oil Competition Picks Cobram, Sciabica

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Selected from an unprecedented number of entries, the winners of the 2011 Los Angeles International Extra Virgin Olive Oil Competition were announced Tuesday. Australia's Cobram Estate came away big, taking two Best of Show awards and three Best of Class, while California's Sciabica's olive oil earned two of its own Best of Show and Best of Class awards. Best of Show awards also went to Riebli Point Ranch's Quattro olive oil, and Oro Bailen from Spain.

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The competition received 599 extra virgin olive oils from 374 producers representing 23 countries, an increase from last year's 514 oils from 20 countries. The very first competition, in 2000, had a mere 27 domestic-only entries and 8 judges. "We have the prestige," said event organizer Mary Ellen Cole, "because it's one of the few competitions in the U.S. that has such an international presence."

Oils were judged blindly by 22 judges, both domestic and international. A 100-point scoring system was used to rate oils by aroma, taste, and harmony in the categories of domestic and international, divided by region and intensity. Scores of 94 and higher were awarded Best of Class and were then judged once more at the end of the competition for the Best of Show winners.

There was a surprising tie for Best of Show – Best Flavored olive oil between Sciabica’s Basil and Jalapeno oils. “That’s amazing because the judging was totally blind,” said Jonathan Sciabica. “I don’t know that it’s ever happened before from the same manufacturer.” Sciabica is happy to accept them both, a clear recognition of two exceptional olive oils. Sciabica’s olive oil hasn’t entered the L.A. competition in a couple years but “every year we’ve entered we’ve taken Best of Show for something,” said Sciabica.

In 2008 it was for the Jalapeno, which makes it a second-time winner this year. Nick Sciabica & Sons, family run and best known as Sciabica’s Olive Oil, has produced olive oil in California for 75 years. “We’re trying to carry on what he [Nick, his great grandfather] started,” said Sciabica, “Winnings like this make us feel like we’re accomplishing our goal.”

Best of Class and gold medal winning oils will be displayed at the L.A. County Fair’s Wine & Spirits Marketplace from September 3 until October 2. Along with daily tastings, winning olive oils will be available for purchase until they sell out, which they most always do. Olive oil is on a noticeable upswing in L.A. with shops and tasting rooms popping up frequently, but the County Fair remains a go-to source for many Angelenos. According to Cole, “People come to the fair just to buy olive oil.” Fairgoers have told her there’s no place like this event to find this international selection.