

Big Wins at Academy Awards of Water in Berkeley Springs

The 27th Annual Berkeley Springs International Water Tasting event was held February 23-26 in Berkeley Springs, WV. Considered the world's most prestigious water awards, winners from three continents received the highest honors. Eleven media judges, which included representatives from various regional and national media, including television and online magazines, were instructed by perennial Watermaster, Arthur von Wiesenberger to look, sniff and taste each water under guidelines similar to those in a wine tasting.



The waters were rated for each attribute including appearance (it should be clear - or slightly opaque for glacial waters), aroma (there should be none), taste (it should taste clean), mouth feel (it should feel light), aftertaste (it should leave you thirsty for more). Waters were tasted in four separate flights over two days. "The judges job is crucial and so is their training," said event organizer Jeanne Mozier. "We present all our judges with a diploma designating them as a Certified Water Taster."

The municipal water category was a battle of champions. The top five water winners, all American waters, were former gold medalists at Berkeley Springs. Village of Montpelier, OH's water came in first, judged as the Best Municipal Water in the World. Emporia, KS took second place, while the City of Hamilton, OH won bronze. Metropolitan Water District of Southern California placed fourth, followed by Independence, MO in fifth place.

"The consistency in winners from year to year with different panels of judges validates the choices," remarked von Wiesenberger. "It also speaks to the impressively high caliber of the waters entered. It was another wonderful year for the longest running and largest water tasting in the world. Berkeley Springs is the Academy Awards of water."

The Best Bottled Water title was so competitive that there were ties recorded for the gold and the silver. The two gold medal winners were Zaros Natural Water from Crete and an American water, AlphaPure Springs Water, Ocala, FL. The tie for the silver medal was a pair of artesian waters: Artesia, Crystal Falls, MI and Canadian Gold Artesian Water, Marchand MB, Canada. Svalbaroi Polar Iceberg Water from Norway placed third while another artesian water, Planet H2O Natural Artesian Water of Knoxville, TN placed fourth. Fifth place winner was Whistler Water, Burnaby, BC, Canada.

The audience was filled with water enthusiasts coming from as far as New Zealand and Norway. The media judges spent hours tasting and selecting from waters sourced in 19 states, five Canadian provinces and 12 foreign countries. "There were waters from two new countries this year, Costa Rica and Fiji. They joined waters from Italy, Bosnia, Greece and Australia," said Mozier.

Sparkling waters are sourced from eight countries. The best sparkling water in the world was last year's winner, Tesanjki Kiseljak (Tesanj, Bosnia), which tied with 2016's silver medalist Touch Sparkling Mineral Water, Marchand, MB. Winning silver this year was Otakiri Reserve from New Zealand. Third place was Aqua Nobel Carbonated Water from Sweden with a fourth-place finish for Oro Luxury Water from Macedonia. Another New Zealand water, Antipodes Sparkling Water placed fifth.

Purified waters are a relatively new addition to the water world, often comprised of municipal systems who bottle their own water. This year's winners – three of the top five – were something different. They are sourced in Toronto, Canada and based on a process that oxygenates standard water. GP8 Oxygen Water won the gold medal, while Thermodyx Thirst Oxygen Water and Thermodyx Thirst Alkaline Water won third and fourth respectively. Winning the silver was hometown Berkeley Springs Purified Water while fifth-place honors went to Rain Fresh Bottled Water from Garland, TX

As usual, the crowd took great interest in the peoples' choice packaging competition, where it was their votes that chose which of the seven entrants was the most alluring. By an overwhelming margin, they voted for Svalbaroi Polar Iceberg Water from Longyearbyen, Norway as the gold medal winner. A pair of New Zealand waters won silver and bronze -- Waiheke Imperial was second and Antipodes, third.

Conclusion of the daylong water tasting is the famed water rush, in which the audience is invited to take home hundreds of bottles of water sent as part of the judging. "I spent about six hours arranging all the waters in a display," said Mozier. "The crowd spent less than ten minutes making it all disappear. It's like a Tibetan sand mandala," she laughed. "I was pleased to see our favorite couple from Brooklyn in the rush. Peter and Cynthia Lloyd come every year especially for the water tasting – and the rush."

The event seminar on Friday and Saturday's award ceremony were live-streamed on the Berkeley Springs' Facebook page, operated by the Morgan Arts Council's Digital Media Center. For more information on Berkeley Springs or its water tasting, call (800) 447-8797 or check the website. Those who are planning for next year should mark their calendars now. The 28th annual event is scheduled for February 24, 2018.