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Wine

# Oregon cidery takes silver at international competition in Spain

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Son of Man Sagardo



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**By Michael Alberty | For The Oregonian/OregonLive**

An Oregon cidery recently shook the apple cider world to its core. [Son of Man](#)'s upset silver medal victory at Spain's most acclaimed international cider competition serves notice to the world that Oregon's cider culture is on the rise.

After [making Basque-style ciders](#) in Cascade Locks since 2018, Jasper Smith measured his progress by entering his 2020 Son of Man Sagardo in the annual [Sagardo Forum](#) competition held Nov. 18-21 in San Sebastián, Spain. [Sagardo](#) is the Basque word for "cider."

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Smith's sagardo won a silver medal in the "natural Basque cider" category. Was he surprised by winning a medal in his first-ever competition? "We weren't expecting to medal. We were just excited to get honest feedback from people who live and breathe Basque cider," Smith said.

Smith was up against world-class competition in Spain. This year's Sagardo Forum attracted over 200 entrants from nearly 30 countries, with seasoned competitors from Newport, Vermont, to Õuna, Estonia, pursuing medals. In the "Natural Basque Cider" category, Smith faced 25 local Basque sagardo producers.

Defeating all but one of them on their own autonomous Basque Country turf is an impressive feat. "Cider in Basque Country is more important than water. It is a pillar of culture and identity that helps to make them Basque first and Spanish second," Smith said.

Smith's silver medal is reminiscent of a wine competition held 41 years ago in Beaune, France. That's where a 1975 The Eyrie Vineyards South Block Reserve Pinot Noir finished second to the 1959 Joseph Drouhin Chambolle-Musigny by the narrowest of margins. That single event put the Willamette Valley on the map. Smith hopes his silver medal will focus similar attention on Oregon's cider scene.

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Smith thinks his medal will make it easier for American producers to make ciders naturally, without adding any extra ingredients. “For American cidermakers generally, I think it is a good omen regarding where our cider culture is going. Medals at competitions like this help to mold the direction of the U.S. cider culture and will hopefully spur producers to continue to make honest and soulful cider, like our counterparts in Europe do,” Smith said.

Following the natural approach of Basque cidermakers means Smith presses Oregon cider apples in the fall, lets natural yeasts trigger fermentation, and then allows the cider to age until it is bottled without added sulfites the following spring. “Receiving this medal is a cherry on top after five years of working our butts off to create a cider in the image of the ones we love so much from Basque Country,” Smith said.

While Smith said Spanish cider makers are used to Americans succeeding in “modern” or “flavored” categories at cider competitions, they were surprised an American medaled in a more traditional category like “natural Basque cider.” According to Smith, “Americans make up the lion’s share of folks pumping out gimmicky, sweet and adjunct-heavy ciders. No one in Spain makes habanero-blueberry sagardo.”

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This is why trying a sagardo for the first time might be a bit of a shock if you are used to drinking the sweet and flavored ciders found on grocery store shelves. Instead of getting what Smith describes as a “sweet alco-pop,” a Son of Man sagardo is dry, and slightly tart, with a nice amount of tropical fruit, acidity and a trace of earthiness.

At a mere 6% alcohol by volume, the 2020 Son of Man Sagardo is a refreshingly light treat. Smith recommends serving it with funky cheeses, [oysters](#) on the half-shell and meat grilled to rare over a wood fire. It is also quite a value at \$15 for a 750 ml. bottle. The striking image of [Basajaun](#), the Basque “wild man of the forest” on the label is a nifty bonus.

Energized by this year’s performance, Smith will return to the Sagardo Forum next November to go for a gold medal. “The 2021 vintage is the best cider we’ve made. I can’t wait to get back to Spain,” Smith said.

For more information, visit [sonofman.co](#) or email [hello@sonofman.co](#).

— *Michael Alberty writes about wine for The Oregonian/OregonLive. He can be reached at [malberty0@gmail.com](#). To read more of his coverage, go to [oregonlive.com/wine](#).*

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