

The Lost World of Wine Flavour

Andrew Smith is right (WIJ letters Sept.-Oct. 06) that high alcohol reds are a legitimate style and have a place in the market. Just like vintage ports used to have.

What is less palatable is the praising of high alcohol, over extracted, perhaps bled, red wines as models of dry styles that we are meant to enjoy socially with food. Such has been the legacy of Robert Parker and his imitators in Australia.

My thesis is that these wines are low in perceived flavour, that the length and intensity of a wine's flavour is a necessary condition for quality and that mouthfeel/structure has overly dominated our thinking.

Ian Hollick wrote in the same issue(WIJ Opinion) of the value of training cellar door staff in winery and vineyard operations. Conversely there is value in giving enologists* cellar door experience in listening and observing customers.

It is there that I regularly observe people tasting too fast - wine being rushed through the mouth and quickly swallowed. This gives a bias toward mouthfeel in wines but flavours are missed. My suggestion to such people is to place the wine at the FRONT of the mouth, gently chew and refrain from swallowing- their eyes light up with the discovery of how much more there is to the wine!.

Perhaps this is the explanation for conflicts between Australian and European Wine Judges, or even the oft repeated complaint of Australian tourists of "wimpish, gutless" European wines.

There appears an Old World/New World divide in their modes of "seeing" wine. I remember the Belgian/Australian couple; she described only the wine's structure (as Australians invariably do) and he spoke of the aromas/flavours. Not surprisingly they often argued about wine!

Both mouthfeel and flavour are distinct parts of the wine experience.

An awareness of how they operate and interrelate will lead to more interesting wines for a new generation of wine drinkers.

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*Winemaking is the business of making wine. Enology is the craft.