



Fashion in a Glass

THE WINE MARKETING CHALLENGE OF IDENTIFYING SHIFTING TRENDS

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IT MIGHT NOT BE immediately apparent, but 'fashion' has almost as strong an impact on the wine industry as the clothing industry. The wine world has lived and will continue to live on trends for the foreseeable future. We can call it 'fashion' if you prefer, but whether trend or fashion it certainly adds a bit of colour and excitement to the wine scene.

So I've decided to take a look at the trends of the past 12 months and speculate on what lies ahead. Just like clothing designers such as Versace, Armani and Valentino, who create trends that impact continuously around the globe, the wine world has equally fickle fashions, also influenced from both inside and outside the industry.

It's been impressive to see how movies and documentaries such as *Mondovino*, *Sideways* and *Bottle Shock* have been powerful enough to instantly affect general mass wine consumption. For example, the significant rise in the consumption of pinot noir in the United States can be directly attributed to the 2004 movie *Sideways* with this simple dialogue:

Jack: Man! That's tasty!

Miles: That's 100 per cent pinot noir. Single-vineyard. They don't even make it any more.

Jack: Pinot noir?

Miles: Hmm-hmm.

Jack: Then how come it's white?

Miles [laughs]: Oh, Jesus. Don't ask questions like that up in wine country. They'll think you're some kind of dumbshit, OK?

This wave of interest went on to shape a chain reaction in all the New World wine producing countries, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile and Argentina.

This is, of course, all determined by the natural human disposition - wine lovers are people and, by nature, people mimic other people, therefore wine lovers follow other wine lovers, and before you know it you've got a trend!

Last year, for example, consumers suddenly began to seek alternatives to the 'globetrotter variety', sauvignon blanc - so called because it is grown and consumed globally and has been one of the strongest recent trends. As a result there was a noticeable increase in the consumption of the pinot family:

grigio/gris/blanc, certainly adding a lot more versatility to the available wine styles of the white varieties in the general marketplace.

One of the potential impacts of these shifts is economic. For example, typically, producing a red wine is costly because it is necessary for the vines to be 'stressed' enough to create low yields. This means the resulting fruit receives the maximum potential nutrients since it isn't competing with too much fruit on the vine, which ultimately creates a better concentration of flavour in the pulp. Sauvignon blanc, on the other hand, can produce a reasonable wine with high-yield vines, making it much more attractive as a potentially profitable crop. However, if the demand for this variety continues to wane there is potential for overproduction and therefore a significant drop in price. This means that, for growers, being aware of trends and their potential consequences is extremely important.

Sometimes I get to the stage where I've talked about wine so much it seems that I'm only left with myself to discuss it with, which is why I really enjoy discovering and sharing stories with people who are as passionate about wine as I am. ▶

So I often find myself swirling a glass in St Elmo, Byron Bay, with sommelier Marcus Corcoran. We discuss what we perceive to be the trends at the moment and we agree that there has been a noticeable boom in Italian and Spanish wines - which can most likely be attributed to a resurgence in interest in foods from these regions, as well as the ongoing steady growth in interest in the 'great value for money' South American wines. Marcus considers that consumers have been changing their vision about these wines radically and he really enjoys introducing his customers to them.

He also noted the continuing rise in demand for organic and biodynamic wines. I have noticed that many restaurants are putting more effort into defining the origins of the wines they have on offer, which is really helping to educate the average consumer. This in turn is pushing the wineries into introducing more 'green/eco' wines into their portfolios. There is definitely a market out there and it will continue to rise.

Then, of course, there is the internet and social media - forceful global trends in themselves. Communication networks such as FaceBook, Twitter and YouTube have undoubtedly affected the wine world. They have contributed to speeding up the market dramatically, empowering customers to express their preferences freely and allowing producers to respond directly and instantly. It is also breaking down borders and allowing discussion to occur 24/7 around the globe. Sales of wine online are also an enormous growth area, and this is pushing producers and retailers alike into seriously rethinking their marketing on an ongoing basis.

Some trends are created strategically, as opposed to emerging organically. One such example within Australia is the very effective campaign spearheaded by De Bortoli wines, 'The Rosé Revolution'. They successfully set out to convince us and the retailers to embrace the dry style of rosé

this summer instead of the previously more expected and generally less attractive sweet style of this fresh, summery drink. Pretty impressive stuff.

There is also the well-established and seemingly unrelenting trend aimed at seducing the female market, which is rapidly becoming the leading force globally as wine purchasers and consumers. What with wine label creation by artists or designers, wines with low calorie content, sparkling wines complete with strawberry pulp, low-alcohol sparkling moscato - all combined with clever

marketing - who knows what other ingenious concepts will be targeting women in the next few years? But the fact remains that, for now, the sauvignon blanc from New Zealand and the semillon-sauvignon from Australia will continue to dominate for a night out with the girls.

I should also mention the ongoing creativity from Australian wineries and particularly the so-called 'flying winemakers' - the professionals within the industry who work overseas regularly, and then bring back their new-found knowledge and expertise

and combine it with the great material they have to work with here. Thanks to them there is always something new and exciting to try in the Australian marketplace.

So, to Australians who currently drink only shiraz, or have equally safe and uninspiring habits, I invite you to join the fashionable world of wine. I challenge you try on a 'new suit' and allow yourself to go with the flow, to discover new pleasures, and allow yourself to be surprised. Because at the end of the day there's a lot to be said for fashionable inspiration. 



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Stevens-Castro is a sommelier, wine expert and agricultural scientist from Chile. Born into a family deeply involved with wine, he inherited an incredible passion for wine from a young age. He completed an honours degree in agricultural science, majoring in oenology and fructiculture at the internationally renowned Pontifical Catholic University, Santiago, Chile. He has participated in several vintages in

Chile, including one at the prestigious De Martino Vineyards in the Maipo Valley.

In Australia he is an independent wine expert who regularly writes, presents and interacts with the wine world and through his website www.latinocellar.com. He has lived and worked in Byron Bay for four years and currently represents the wholesale portfolios of Wines of Chile and Argentina and Douglas Lamb Wines in Queensland and Northern NSW.