

A new wine magazine for Britain, and one less in German

9 Dec 2005 by JR

There have recently been great ructions and uncertainties in the drinks publishing business in the UK. The consumer magazine *Decanter's* rival *Wine International*, along with the trade mags *Drinks International* and *Wine & Spirit International* (on which I cut my wine writing teeth 30 years ago) were recently acquired by William Reed, publishers of the weekly trade paper *OLN/ Off Licence News* and the publican's daily *Morning Advertiser* from Wilmington. *Wine International* was probably best-known for its annual International Wine Challenge, the brainchild of journalists Robert Joseph and Charles Metcalfe but owned by the magazine.

There followed a period when no-one quite knew what would happen next, but William Reed have just announced that they will be rolling *Wine International* and the blessed *Wine & Spirit International* into one title, *Wine & Spirit* (so glad that the 150 year-old title so dear to my heart remains) that is aimed at both interested amateurs and professionals.

Here's how William Reed puts it: *After a period of independent research involving readers and advertisers, and consultations with Wilmington staff, it has been confirmed that a new-look UK-facing [all non Brits, stop reading now - JR] magazine, Wine & Spirit, will appear in February 2006. This magazine will follow on from WI and WSI and be a groundbreaking title reflecting the energy, imagination and personality of the drinks world.*

Like fellow William Reed title Restaurant [the one that comes up with an annual list of the world's best restaurants, most of which are in the UK because voted for by Brits], Wine & Spirit is aimed at the "professional and the passionate" [shades of the new Tory leader here]. It will have strong consumer appeal but will also be required reading for anyone with a career in wines, spirits and beer.

The publisher will be Lee Sharkey, reporting to publishing director Russell Dodd. Graham Holter, currently editor of Off Licence News, will assume a group editor role spanning OLN, W&S and DI and will have day-to-day editorial control of W&S [got all those initials?].

William Reed is delighted to confirm that Catharine Lowe [mother of Noah Joseph, born on my birthday, sure to be a wine writer when he grows up], formerly editor of Wine International, is part of the team and joins as consulting editor. Other roles are being confirmed in the coming weeks.

The new structure gives William Reed by far the broadest spread of any publisher in the sector, with publications aimed at all areas of the drinks trade. This competitive advantage will be leveraged to give greater publicity to the International Wine Challenge and International Spirits Challenge – both events that will be managed by the company's Events & Exhibitions division. Consumer marketing will also be a priority.

Holter said: "We are confident that the new Wine & Spirit will have an appeal that spans the entire drinks sector. We're not thinking of it as either a trade magazine or a consumer magazine – it will inform, entertain and stimulate readers with any level of interest in wine, spirits and beers.

"In WSI and Wine International we have an impeccable pedigree. But we are determined that W&S will be even greater than the sum of its parts and bring something new to the table."

Wine & Spirit will have a better targeted circulation than any other drinks trade title, backed by an ABC figure.

Patience Gould continues to be editor of Drinks International, which relocates to Crawley [no mention of whether W&S staff will be able to continue to commute to central London tastings easily]. Off Licence News will appoint a managing editor in due course.

And now a word from the new boss of Reed's drinks publishing division, Graham Holter:

Having written about industry consolidation for the past 11 years it's a strange feeling to suddenly be caught up in it personally. It has taken a surprisingly long time for the drinks trade press to emulate the behaviour of the companies whose businesses we all report – in fact the number of titles in the market has grown, rather than contracted – but few have claimed that this position was sustainable.

Our company has taken a long, hard look at the Wilmington titles and this process obviously started long before the eventual deal was struck. We see huge potential in what we have acquired – both commercially and in terms of what we can offer the wine trade and drinks industry at large. You will start to see evidence of this in the coming months.

Let me explain the rationale for our new launch, Wine & Spirit. It is the natural successor for Wine International and Wine & Spirit International, though it would be wrong to assume the new title is simply an amalgam of the two. Wine magazine occupied a small but crowded niche and, in its current form, had little room for manoeuvre. WSI faced an online onslaught and its positioning, according to the independent research we commissioned, was confused – at least in the minds of its readers and advertisers.

We saw the potential for a magazine that brought together the best elements of WI and WSI, but also went further: we all know that WI was a consumer magazine but it also had a large trade following. This is interesting ground for a magazine to occupy and it's the point where we have started to build the foundations for Wine & Spirit.

The magazine will capture the spirit of the drinks world in a way we feel has not been achieved so far by its rivals. We're not segregating it into "trade" and "consumer" zones – we feel there is enough common ground to make this unnecessary.

Both camps care about drinks pricing (though perhaps for different reasons); both are interested in this year's Bordeaux vintage; both want to read tasting notes. Do they want to read an interview with an obscure winemaker with a good PR team but not much to say beyond "our approach to wine begins in the vineyard"? Do they fret about how much an 80-year-old wine fetched at auction? I don't think they do. So we won't give this sort of stuff to our readers.

We're hoping to break the mould with this launch and we hope there are freelance wine writers out there who will share our vision. I'm not keen on over-burdening the magazine with columnists but I do want us to make a genuine claim that "W&S does things differently".

I haven't touched on the International Wine Challenge as it won't be part of my remit, but suffice to say it will still have a harbour in the form of Wine & Spirit. We're working on ideas that will take the competition into new territory and expand the way it interacts with the trade and consumers.

David Schildkecht, German wine specialist, adds:

You might note that *Alles Über Wein*, Germany's longest-running (for 23 years) and best known journal devoted solely to wine, has been absorbed by *Vinum* [the Swiss-based wine magazine]. Some of the best-known features of *Alles Über Wein* – notably the reports and tasting notes of Armin Diel and Joel Payne (closely related to their *Gault Millau German Wine Guide*) – will appear as supplemental material in the German language edition of *Vinum*. (*Vinum* also appears in French, Italian and Spanish versions.)