What you want - results of our survey

3 Dec 2007 by JR

Now that we have had a chance to study so many of your nearly 1,000 responses to our recent survey, I am even more grateful than ever for this community of thoughtful, intelligent and well-equipped wine lovers we seem to have built here. Thank you to everyone who took the trouble to respond. The tenor and detail of the responses is hugely helpful and I promise you will result in dramatically improved site design and navigation just as soon as this can be achieved - not overnight, more's the pity, but we now have the bit firmly between our teeth and will endeavour to follow as many of your often ingenious suggestions as possible.

And yes, you have certainly made the point that the general site search is hopeless, and should be treated to major surgery as soon as humanly possible. More worrying were some of your comments about the tasting notes search. It too was in a parlous state a few months ago but several of its shortcomings, described by some of you as current (for instance, not remembering what you had keyed in previously or calling up all wines with any one of the terms entered rather than just those with all the terms entered in the wine name) have actually been fixed. Of course we will continue to improve the tasting notes search, and I'm deeply grateful to the people who pointed out in considerable detail its current idiosyncrasies, which we will also endeavour to fix but *the tasting notes search is a lot better now than it was in, say, August.* Do please revisit it.

Similarly, some members have complained that their logins aren't 'sticky' when they should be now. We will look in to this.

The pre-release DVDs of the best of our two *Vintners' Tales* BBC tv series go to the following 10 respondents whose replies were particularly helpful. In choosing these individuals I did of course concentrate on the answers to what you like least about the site rather than simply rewarding those who said such nice things when describing what you like most about it.

From among current members, DVDs and donations of £100 to Wine Relief in their names (see Comic Relief for a response to these donations) will be going to these people whose responses were so useful:

Guiliana Cavazza, UK, who took a great deal of trouble with her responses and was one of many urging me to put more video interviews of wine people on the site, which I am dying to do – just waiting for FlipVideo to arrive in the UK.

Donald Dibbern, US, who was one of many of you who asked for more maps (Julia agrees with you) and had some very interesting specific suggestions

Hugh Gledhill, UK, who made the good point that we should give more coverage to tasting notes of mature and maturing wines rather than just primeur selections

Nick Nobilo, New Zealand (producer of Vinoptima Gewurztraminer), who made a useful suggestion about encouraging wine producers to supply current images, both moving and still, which would provide a contemporary record of what's going on in the world of wine

Christian Torok, US, whose extremely detailed responses represented some of the most constructive criticism.

Of course in a way the opinions of both lapsed members and non-member visitors were particularly valuable as we wanted to know particularly how the site had failed them. DVDs and donations of £100 to Wine Relief in their names will be going to these people whose responses were particularly useful:

Sam Brannigan, Northern Ireland, is a temporarily lapsed member who made several interesting suggestions including allowing comments from non members on all free articles, thereby establishing "a nice point of contact between purple pagers and browsers". (I hope he can guarantee to keep those Italian porn site promoters off our pages if we do this.)

Barbara Burlingame, Italy, made no fewer than five specific suggestions about what could be added to the site, all of them worth considering. She advocated more outside specialist contributors, for example.

Glenn Jones, Canada, was not the only person to point out that travel tips could be much improved but made some particularly constructive observations.

Ben Ng, Singapore, supplied a particularly detailed response with all sorts of detailed suggestions, particularly as to how navigation and finding material in older articles could be improved. This of course very high up our list of priorities.

R K O'Connor, US, was one of several lapsed members who complained that, unlike others, we don't send out nearly enough emails to remind you of what's going on on the site. He put it in a particularly vivid way: "Simply put, out of sight, out of mind."

Overall I could sum up the negative reactions (the positive ones are extremely gratifying but there is no need to go over them) as:

- Freshen up the design (possibly do away with purple altogether?)

- The searches and navigation need a dramatic overhaul (I agree)
- You'd like more newsletteremails (remember that all members can opt out of these altogether)
- It's annoying to have to click twice to get into the members' forum (I agree although there is a reason)
- Some people feel topics in the forum are too sophisticated or cliquey
- More videos, podcasts and interviews
- More images and especially maps (although you do seem to like the words, I'm happy to report)
- More information on vintages too – a chart or something
- Wines surveyed may in general be too French, too expensive and too young (although one Portuguese member intriguingly requested "less on Portuguese wines please")
- More tasting notes on less expensive wines please
- Although some non member visitors objected to the idea of our having any subscription at all, an overwhelming majority of you I'm delighted to say preferred to continue our policy of having no commercial involvement in terms of advertising or sponsorship (however attractive our community of members of whom 25% spend more than £2,000 a year on wine might be to advertisers). Since this site eats up the majority of my and Julia's working time (and much of our supposed leisure time), I'm afraid this leaves the subscription model as inevitable, even if we will certainly look at additional alternative options to a whole 12 months' membership.

These improvements will have to be prioritised and will take a little time, but I can assure you we have already started some of this work and will continue all efforts to make the site increasingly sophisticated, easy to use and what you want it to be.

Feel free to add comments below.