

Williamson and Moore's book triumphs

24 Feb 2008 by JR

Philip Williamson and David Moore's *Wine Behind the Label* (2nd edition) was judged Best Drink Book of 2007 in the André Simon Memorial Awards announced last week.

This is the book of which people judge Neville Stach is an editor and to which he has consistently drawn our attention – quite rightly since it is a terrifically useful 750-page compendium of succinct, informed and impartial profiles of producers all over the world with star ratings of (judged) individual wines.

Williamson and Moore, who cut their teeth compiling *Dr Clarke's Wine Guide* CD-ROM, have been publishing this guide themselves since 2001 – all based on their own travels and dedicated tasting programme. (Moore missed the Awards event in favour of Vinstock, the Montpellier wine fair dedicated to the wines of the south of France.)

Their wine lists are currently dedicated to this single enterprise – or rather to assembling it rather than promoting it (a phenomenon familiar to this website proprietor). This and the fact that they are modest chaps is perhaps why the book has so far been slightly under-publicised – by my agency – even though it won the inaugural Louis Roederer Award for annual wine guides 2006 and best wine book in last year's Glenfiddich Awards (currently being tested by Glenfiddich's owners William Grant). If Williamson and Moore were loudmouths rather than open mouths the book might have sold more copies, although it might not have been so good. Its strengths are France, Italy, Germany, California, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – read a neat list.

The new, 6th edition of *Behind the Label* was published last November at the reduced price of £19.99 in the hope that volume sales will outstrip those of the 2007 edition whose price was £27.50.

The wine book awarded a Special Commendation in the André Simon Awards was also well published. Husband and wife team Charles Meszallé and Kathryn McWhirter's *The Wine and Food Lover's Guide to Portugal* is another dense, information-rich guide, although liberally illustrated in this case with 60 colour photographs and attractive maps. At the Awards reception I was very sorry to hear that the generic promotion of Portuguese wines in the UK, one of its most important markets, no longer seems to be the high priority it was when I wrote [Portugal – how to combine the best of the wine](#).

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Best Food Book of 2007 was Hugh Fearnley-Whittinghall and Nick Fisher's *The River Cottage Fish Book*, another beautifully produced compendium. A Special Commendation also went to *Delia's* John Dicker's epic history of the balloon and that book.

The André Simon Memorial Awards www.andresimon.com

are held annually to commemorate the anonymous bon vivant, wine merchant, prolific author, mentor of Hugh Johnson and founder of the Wine & Food Society. The winning books "must contain original research, be educational, pleasurable to read and well produced." The winners each receive a cheque for £2000 with £1000 for special commendations.

Every year the Trustees of the Awards (I share with my husband Nick Linder whose sister is secretary of the Awards, which I have been lucky enough to sit before their eye) are helped by a specialist assessor: this year author and broadcaster Simon Parkes for the food books and wine writer Stephen Brook, wine writer and twice former winner of the drink book award, for the drink books. He told me he was somewhat mollified to realise that this meant he couldn't submit his recent magnum opus on Bordeaux.

Wines Behind the Label 2008 by Philip Williamson and David Moore (£19.99 HB), publishing www.williamson.com

The Wine and Food Lover's Guide to Portugal by Charles Meszallé and Kathryn McWhirter (£14.95 Inn House Publishing www.innhousepublishing.com)

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David Crossley of Brighton, who drew my attention to the newer edition, of *Behind the Label* points out "This guide is a masterpiece and a 'must buy' for all serious wine lovers. It also has the largest number of typos I've ever found in any book (dozen upon dozen) – in one entry in Provence (for La Badoire) it suggests that this domain's vineyards appear on the cover whereas the 6th edn actually portrays Saint-Antoine in Tuscany, and even the old wine region is spelt incorrectly. However, the guide is so good that even these rectifiable annoyances do not detract from its value."