Wine writing - UK v US

1 Jun 2008 by JR

British wine writers are in introspective mode. Many of the handful who enjoy established reputations and a perch in the national press seem to be being squeezed, in terms of both space and subject matter (editorial pressure is adduced by some to explain why so many column inches are devoted to supermarket wines).

The great majority of the almost literally incredible number (more than 250) of members of the UK-based Circle of Wine Writers, however, do not have a regular column and are finding it increasingly difficult to find paid work – not least because wine book publishing seems to withering on the vine in Britain.

The only genuinely new wine books expected this autumn that have been originated by British publishers that I can see are **Monty Waldin**'s *Château Monty* (£16.99 Anova, Sep), a tie-in for his forthcoming Channel 4 tv series, **Ned Halley** 's *Absolute Corkers – Legends, lies and laughter from the world of wine (*Constable, Oct) and a longer-than-usual book from **Matt Skinner** with the longer-than-usual title *Heard it Through the Grapevine – a few things you should know about wine* (£18.99 Mitchell Beazley). *1001 wines you must try before you die* by **Neil Beckett** (£20 Cassell), expected this month, is a wine version of an already established series (the titles being particularly difficult to translate for the French apparently who are not comfortable with the concept of mortality as a book title). The rest are new editions of old titles, mainly the established annual pocket books. (I'm delighted to see that we will have another *Wine Report* for 2009 and hope that editor **Tom Stevenson** has managed to shorten the deadlines to make the texts more topical.)

On the other side of the Atlantic, on the other hand, wine book publishing seems to be more than flourishing. The University of California press is so vibrant in fact that such established British wine authors as **Clive Coates** and **John Livingstone-Learmonth** are now being published in Berkeley. The following, in order of publication date, are just some of the truly original wine titles written by American authors and either already out or expected from American publishers in 2008:

Neal I Rosenthal's *Reflections of a Wine Merchant* ($24 Farrar, Straus and Giroux) A piqued professional memoir by New York's most avid terroirist.

Sergio Esposito's *Passion on the Vine* ($24.95 Broadway) Ditto but more *simpatico* from the founder of Italian Wine Merchants in New York.

Alice Feiring's *The Battle for Wine and Love: or How I Saved the World from Parkerization* ($23 Harcourt) Another highly personal, often tendentious, love letter to wine, a sort of vinous *Eat, Pray, Love* - though I fear sales may be of a rather different order from Elizabeth Gilbert's.

Benjamin Wallace's *The Billionaire's Vinegar – The Mystery of the World's Most Expensive Bottle of Wine* ($24.95 Crown) The cracking and diligently researched tale of that Rodenstock bottle of 1787 Lafite which I discuss in more detail here.

Tyler Colman's *Wine Politics: How Governments. Environmentalists, Mobsters, and Critics Influence the Wines We Drink* ($27.50 University of California) Something to look forward to in July from Dr Vino.

And that is to discount other books published in the US that are translations such as *Bordeaux/Burgundy - A Vintage Rivalry*.

In the UK it's the younger wine writers I feel particularly concerned about. I know that they feel very frustrated by the fact that the wine writers in the national press seem so unwilling to move out of our comfortable nests to make way for them. Online publishing is one possible way forward and, initially anyway, does not require huge capital outlay. But another very obvious way for an aspiring British wine writer to get attention is by entering the annual **Young Wine Writer Award** under the auspices of the Circle of Wine Writers. Our very own Richard Hemming was runner-up in the 2007 competition. Past winners include author and Chile expert Peter Richards and Stuart George of the *World of Fine Wine*.

The conditions of the **Young Wine Writer Award 2008** have just been announced. All entrants have to do is write 1,500 words about any aspect of wine. Writer of the winning article wins £1,000 plus an expenses-paid, two-week trip to the wine regions of Australia.

The award is open to anyone aged 30 or under by the end of 2008 who is based in the UK. Applicants should not yet have had a wine book published nor yet be an established wine columnist or regular contributor to a magazine. The judges are looking for wine-writing potential and commitment to popular consumer wine-writing rather than extensive knowledge or experience.

The £1,000 prize is sponsored by Pavilion Books, publishers of **Oz Clarke** and **Michael Broadbent**, to enable the winner to travel to a wine region of his or her choice to gain firsthand experience and to develop a book or article based on that experience.

Wine Australia and Qantas sponsor the 14-day, expenses-paid trip to the wine regions of Australia. The trip will include a tour of the key wine growing areas, opportunities to meet the growers themselves and one-on-one tastings with leading producers. The winner will also get the chance to write articles about the trip for the Wine Australia website. (Terms and conditions apply).

The deadline for applications is 26 Sep 2008.

For further information on how to apply contact Fiona Holman at Pavilion Books, The Old Magistrates Court, 10 Southcombe Street, London W14 0RA

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