How influential are wine writers?

13 Nov 2008 by Jancis Robinson

Is there any point in all the words and opinion we wine commentators churn out? Do wine buyers take a blind bit of notice? Wine Intelligence is a UK-based market research consultancy specialising in the wine business which regularly undertakes surveys to draw attention to their work. A press release this week publicising their recent trawl, provocatively entitled ‘Do wine critics really influence wine drinkers’ wine choices?’ was pounced on by the likes of decanter.com.

Much was made of the results of their first question, asking just over 1,500 regular wine drinkers in the UK which wine commentators they had read, heard or seen in the past six months. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was those with a strong television presence, my estimable colleagues Oz Clarke (pictured, whose new BBC series with James May on British drinks starts very soon) and Olly Smith of Richard & Judy, who were far more frequently cited than the rest of us who crawl around in print and online (see Table 1 below).

Much less publicised was Table 2 below, the result of asking these same regular wine drinkers which of the wine commentators they cited actually influenced their wine buying decisions. Wine Intelligence is anxious to point out that in some cases, the sample is too small to be really significant, but good for Robert Parker to be so faithfully followed by the Brits that do read him. And of course I have a highly vested interest in publicising my own rank in this second table.

The responses were collected last month and, as Wine Intelligence point out, show that ‘29% of regular wine drinkers in the UK are influenced by wine writers when making wine buying choices. This equates to almost 8 million people who are making their purchase decisions based in part on what they read in wine columns, see on television or find out about on the internet.’

Phew! I must say I was expecting an even lower proportion than this - though it does serve to put us all in our place and realise how relatively unimportant we are. In the same survey, respondents were asked which 'choice cues' were important or very important to them in their wine buying. The most significant were both promotional offer and varietal, each gaining a 64% rating, as opposed to, for example, 14% for a medal or an award (a finding that was not highlighted in the report on decanter.com).

Please forgive this wallow in minutiae - and a sample of 1 really is minute - but stories about the media in whatever field are always given more coverage than they strictly speaking deserve. Just think about the acres devoted in other publications to, say, the recent editorial soul-searching at *The New York Times* or the most modest pronouncement by Paul Dacre, editor of *The Daily Mail*.

Feel free to add any comments below.

Table 1

Base=All sample

Looking at the list of wine critics and wine writers below, which ones have you read in a newspaper, magazine or book, or heard on the radio, or seen on TV, in the past 6 months?
Please select all that apply

	Count	Column N %
Oz Clarke	275	0.18
Olly Smith (Richard & Judy)	131	0.09

Sarah Jane Evans (BBC Good Food)	105	0.07
Matthew Jukes (Daily Mail)	84	0.06
Malcolm Gluck	81	0.05
Jancis Robinson (Financial Times)	65	0.04
Susy Atkins (Sunday Telegraph)	66	0.04
Jane MacQuitty (Times)	63	0.04
Joanna Simon (Sunday Times)	61	0.04
Peter Grogan (Daily Telegraph)	54	0.04
Jonathan Ray (Daily Telegraph)	52	0.04
Hugh Johnson	48	0.03
Jamie Goode (Sunday Express/Wine Anorak)	46	0.03
Anthony Rose (Independent)	44	0.03
Victoria Moore (Guardian)	42	0.03
Tim Atkin (Observer)	42	0.03
Matt Skinner	41	0.03
Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)	31	0.02
James Suckling (Wine Spectator)	28	0.02
Michael Broadbent (Decanter/Christies)	19	0.01
Clive Coates	19	0.01
Andrew Jefford (Decanter)	15	0.01
Steven Spurrier (Decanter)	12	0.01
Steven Brook	13	0.01
Robert Joseph	10	0.01
I have not heard/seen/read anything from these people in the past 6 months	996	0.66

Table 2

Base=All those aware of each wine writer

Thinking about those people you have selected in the previous question, please select the ones whose views you take into account when choosing wine to buy

Please select all that apply

	Count	Column N %
Robert Parker (Wine Advocate)	23	0.75
Jancis Robinson (Financial Times)	35	0.54
Andrew Jefford (Decanter)	7	0.47
Jane MacQuitty (Times)	29	0.46
Joanna Simon (Sunday Times)	26	0.43
Sarah Jane Evans (BBC Good Food)	43	0.42

James Suckling (Wine Spectator)	11	0.41
Victoria Moore (Guardian)	17	0.4
Peter Grogan (Daily Telegraph)	21	0.39
Oz Clarke	102	0.37
Matt Skinner	15	0.36
Hugh Johnson	16	0.34
Anthony Rose (Independent)	15	0.34
Jamie Goode (Sunday Express/Wine Anorak)	15	0.34
Olly Smith (Richard & Judy)	43	0.33
Clive Coates	6	0.32
Malcolm Gluck	24	0.3
Susy Atkins (Sunday Telegraph)	19	0.29
Matthew Jukes (Daily Mail)	23	0.28
Michael Broadbent (Decanter/Christies)	5	0.26
Robert Joseph	3	0.25
Jonathan Ray (Daily Telegraph)	12	0.23
Tim Atkin (Observer)	9	0.21
Steven Brook	1	0.1
Steven Spurrier (Decanter)	1	0.1
None of these	218	0.42