A roomful of wine educators

31 Jul 2009 by Jancis Robinson

Yesterday I gave an extremely condensed version of my talk Wine communicators – endangered species? as keynote address at the annual conference of the American Society of Wine Educators in Sacramento. The programme for the nearly 300 delegates was so crammed with exams, tastings and presentations that there was hardly a spare minute. They also very kindly gave me a very thoughtful award, a purple glass goblet engraved with, inter alia, my signature. Below is the view from the podium at the Double Tree Inn's Grand Ballroom.

One big difference in wine education between the US and the UK is how common is it for large companies to have substantial education divisions of their own. I met Ira Norof, for example, director of education for Southern Wine & Spirits, the dominant US distributor. He reeled off the number of educators in his division, spread all over the US with multiple qualifications apiece. I was also struck by how many different training systems are used in the US. Some teach according to the Wine & Spirit Education Trust courses that are used so widely in the UK and in many other countries around the world. Others use systems devised by one of (at least two) Sommelier programs that are prevalent in North America, while others, as educator Harriet Lembeck ruefully observed, use her notes to set up departments to teach others. (More information in Resources/Learn about wine/Courses.)