Calling all young wine writers!

21 Jun 2010 by Richard Hemming

Applications are invited for the annual Young Wine Writer Award competition, open to all ambitious UK-based under 30 year olds. As we learnt from the recent subscriber survey, that category may account for only 5.4% of Purple pages members, but perhaps the other 94.6% can help spread the word!

As a sage 31 year old, I am sadly ineligible, but as a previous runner-up (twice, in 2007 and 2008, the 2008 near miss being described here and pictured above), I can offer some perspective on its impact. For a start, it is the only competition I am aware of aimed specifically at young talent - although having said that, the 2010 Louis Roederer International Writers' Awards includes an 'emerging wine writer' category for the first time. Results will be announced, for both competitions, in September.

The Young Wine Writer Award represents a unique opportunity to garner some recognition. Wine writing has always been a challenging career option, and while the web gives everyone the opportunity to be read, writing of any sort is hardly a guaranteed path to riches. A very in-depth discussion of such matters can be read in Jancis' speech Wine journalists - endangered species?, given in Australia last year.

So the Young Wine Writer Award is a real chance to ensure that new writers are fostered and encouraged, and it certainly helped me even though I didn't actually win. After I heard that I had narrowly missed out, I decided to strike while the iron was hot, and so contacted Jancis out of the blue to see what she thought of my entry. As I was working a vintage in McLaren Vale at the time, she asked me to pitch something about life as a cellar rat, which led to my first article on Purple pages, over two years ago.

Last year's winner was **Nicola Cornelius**, who works for UK importer Liberty Wines. Since winning, she has been enjoying the benefits of a year's membership of the Circle of Wine Writers, and the opportunities for tastings and travel that brings, whilst keeping the all-important day job.

The winner in 2007 was **Ray O'Connor**, who now works for the International Wine Challenge, writing their annual *World's Best Wines* guide and their blog, as well as a monthly column in *Scan* magazine, and features in *Harpers*, *The Irish Times* and *Drinks International*. 'Winning the award really opened up doors', he says, 'and I definitely got opportunities that I wouldn't have otherwise enjoyed'.

Rebecca Gibb won in 2006, and she speaks also of doors, telling me 'the Young Wine Writer award opened the door to a wine-writing career, but it's all about pushing those doors open - and that's up to the individual. I took the opportunity to do a two-week work placement at *Harpers* after meeting the then editor, Christian Davis, at the awards. I was then offered a full-time (paid!) role, which meant moving to London, writing about wine every day, and interviewing the movers and shakers of the industry. It did change my life and can be the stepping stone to a career writing about wine.' She now writes freelance from New Zealand, as well as writing her own blog and studying for the Master of Wine qualification.

Stuart George won in 2003 and is now a freelancer, after a very successful stint with *The World of Fine Wine* magazine. He told essentialwriters.com that winning the award had a big influence on his life. 'I doubt very much that I would have become a writer if I hadn't won the award. I was destined to continue my career in the wine trade and had no thoughts of becoming a wine writer. It was a big boost to win and introduced me to many influential people and a different career.'

Perhaps most successful of all prior winners, though, is the 2001 victor **Peter Richards**, who has become a well-known author, educator and broadcaster with a particular specialism in Chile. Amongst his many other activities, Peter runs the Winchester Wine School with his wife, Susie Barrie MW.

It is a rite of passage, then, for many a young, aspiring writer. Plus, the winner gets a two-week trip to Australia and £1,000 as their prize! All the details about the competition can be found here on the website of sponsors Anova Books who publish Oz Clarke.

Good luck to all those who enter!