Survey ☐ what Purple pagers want

23 Jun 2010 by Jancis Robinson

See Tasting notes search - one click away for how we have responded to some of the comments below.

Our various recent surveys left us with tens of thousands of answers to analyse, which explains why it has taken us some time to report back on your more open-ended responses and suggestions (although see Who are Purple pagers? for an analysis of the responses to the more quantifiable questions and Members' survey - the winners for some early comments). For obvious reasons, we are concentrating here on what Purple pagers said they liked least about our site, about which much more below.

It would be invidious to spend too long wallowing in **what Purple pagers like most** about it, and anyway you will have your own ideas. But certain very encouraging common themes were evident and could probably best be summarised thus:

Impartial/independent - fresh, balanced and opinionated

Good writing, straightforward language

Our taste and collective palate

Clear, unembellished tasting notes that are published relatively early

Oxford Companion to Wine *and the convenience of having it available online*

Personal involvement

Breadth of topics

Topicality and frequency of updates

Easy to use and navigate

The conviviality and competence of fellow members on the forum

No bullshit (the B-word itself - or, rather, lack of it - came up explicitly surprisingly often)

Intelligence of the writing in articles and on the forum

Giving younger writers a chance

As for what **Purple pagers like least**, there were, perhaps inevitably, far more internal contradictions. Some people complained that the site is a bit too technical whereas others craved more detailed coverage of the more arid aspects of wine appreciation. Some could not understand why we bothered with more marginal wine regions such as China, Russia and Mexico (to take three relatively recent examples) while for others our meanderings off the beaten track were one of the site's positive attributes. Certain general themes did emerge, however, and are listed below, with our own responses where appropriate.

Oxford Companion to Wine
You: While it was clear that the online version of this classic was viewed as a huge attribute of the site, some of you pointed out that some of the links didn't work and some of the headings could be more perfectly formatted. Also, accessing some of the entries is difficult.
Us: Since our major site redesign in Sep 2008, we have been frustrated by not being able to edit the *OCW.* Meanwhile we have been storing up a long list of updates and improvements we would like to make to the text. Spurred on by your comments in this survey, we have already made considerable changes so that - hooray! - we now have the ability to

change the *Oxford Companion*, and the version here online will become the definitive and most up-to-date version of this classic work of reference that is so popular with wine students.

How general search results are presented
*You:*There doesn't seem to be much logic to the order in which relevant articles are presented
Us: We have recently changed this so that results are presented not in date order but in declining order of relevance. These results now include tasting articles as well as more general articles, which at one stage they did not. We have also fixed the tag search so that now if you click on a tag (at the bottom of an article) you get only those articles with the same tag.

Your views
You: Several of you pointed out that this section, introduced with our redesign in Sep 2008, in which members are encouraged to share their own reviews of wines, restaurants, hotels and shops, is far from the liveliest and best-organised on the site. And several Purple pagers highlighted the overlap between it and our travel stuff forum.
Us: We agree. We could drop this section entirely but it seems rather a shame. We could redesign the tasting notes section to be more like those in our tasting notes database. We could concentrate on and refine the more successful parts of it - restaurants perhaps. I feel a new poll coming on...although please don't hesitate to comment on this issue in particular in the box below. I think for a start we could ensure that the date of submission of reports is more prominently shown.

FORUM-RELATED COMMENTS

Level of activity on Members' forum
You: It was notable that most of those who complained that too few members posted on the forum did not contribute themselves. Some said that they felt intimidated about doing so and felt that the topics they wanted to raise might be disdained by frequent posters. Others complained about the length of some threads (too long) or the quality of frequent posters (described by one member simply as 'Fools and flash gits').
Us: Funnily enough, activity on the forum, which has always seemed to fluctuate regularly, was rather light when the survey was conducted, but has become much less so since then. Perhaps a few members have realised that the amount of activity is in their hands. As I have said before, I am delighted that our threads are so meaty and well informed, and personally would not want to have to moderate endless exchanges of brief banter. Note, incidentally, that the majority of Purple pagers are against opening up the fora to non-members, as reported in Who are Purple pagers?.

The personal message system between posters on the forum
You: Those of you who had noticed this capability on our forum (a minority, I suspect) pointed out that it doesn't work very well.
Us: I hang my head here that I have been blissfully unaware of this function. Many apologies to those of you who sent me personal messages this way. The best way to communicate with me is via Contact/General enquiries. As you may have found.

21 Jul: See here for how to send messages to other members via the forum.

Please note that you can access Forum FAQs via the purple horizontal menu near the top of any forum page. They are divided into three sections and if you click on any section heading (eg General forum usage), you'll see the topics covered. See here for explanations of all the options within the forum (eg Tags, Contacting other members). We are still investigating the finer points of the system that allows members to subscribe to individual threads.

TASTING NOTES-RELATED COMMENTS

Not enough tasting notes on older wines
You: Although you are appreciative of all our tens of thousands of tasting notes on wines as they are presented for sale, you are understandably keen to have as many notes as possible on wines that are mature and maturing.
Us: I am the guilty one here. I have many wonderful opportunities to taste older wines and we now, at last, have the ability to add single tasting notes to our database even though they may not appear as part of a tasting article. The problem has been that I have been just so busy feeding this monster with its new articles every day that the task of adding these individual tasting notes to the database has often been sacrificed to more immediate demands on my time.

My plan is to encourage the rest of the team, notably Richard Hemming, who is not immersed in the detail of compiling our forthcoming definitive guide to grape varieties as Julia is, to help more with the daily additions to the site, the idea

being that I will then be freer to feed the database with notes on wines tasted recently. Nag me if I fail.

You can tell which notes have been added most recently by going to Tasting notes search, leaving all the fields in the panel on the right blank apart from Date of publication, which can be filled in with a pair of recent dates.

Difficulty of finding tasting notes
You: The many *cris de coeur* on this topic made me realise how poorly we have explained how best to access and use our tasting notes database. Here's a selection of comments:

'How hard it is to reach the tasting note search. It's two clicks when it could be one, and the second place to click in particular is hard to find on the page.'

'Tasting notes could be more accessible a la Parker.'

'Tasting notes search should be clickable on home page'

'The search system is not the best I've seen: the box on the right changes depending on the section we are (I think it should be stable), and the results are presented in an unpractical way.'

'I found it very difficult to find the wines I was looking for. So It would be preferable to make it simpler to search for certain wines.'

'Not being able to find ALL tasting notes for all vintages, BY vintage for a particular wine using one word in the search, e.g. Pavie'

'Unable to look at both vertical and horizontal notes. Not an easy function to explore one wine's (i.e. Petrus) performance over all of the years it has been covered by JR.'

'Very difficult to find well organized tasting notes on individual wines, vintages or regions. Robert Parker's is much better.'

'Suggest you add advanced search algorithms to account for mistypes'

Us: Obviously we must be making some mistakes if there are so many complaints and we are now planning to make it much easier to access the search of our database of 45,000+ tasting notes.

At the moment, the easiest (but not the only) way to find tasting notes is to use the general search box on top right of any page and choose 'Tasting notes' from the drop-down menu. *However it sounds as though people would prefer it if this were the default option rather than 'Rest of site' - right?* Then just key in the salient words, eg 'Coche Dury Corton 1998' for that specific wine or 'Talbot' for a set of tasting notes on that château over all vintages. Clicking on 'Go' or simply hitting the 'Enter' key will bring up all results, which can then be sorted as you wish (see below). NB if you search on 'Coche Dury Corton 1998', you will get the note(s) for that wine and also for any other Coche Dury Corton that mentions 1998 in the description.

If you choose tasting notes search from the search drop-down menu but then click on 'Advanced search' instead of 'Go', it will take you to the detailed options explained in the next paragraph.

Or, if you want to search for a narrower set of tasting notes, click on 'Tastings' and then 'Tasting notes search' on the horizontal menus along the top of any page. (*Point taken that it would be more convenient to have this within a single click. Maybe we should change the heading in the top horizontal menu to 'Tasting notes' and have 'Tasting notes search' as the default - that would do it.*) You will see lots of boxes in the right hand column and just fill them in to be as specific as you wish.

Most important point: When the results come up, *you can order them as you wish* by clicking on the headings. So if, for example, you want the most recent tasting note first, click on 'Date tasted'. If you want to order them by vintage, click on 'Vintage'. If you want to order them by score, guess what... And you can order them alphabetically by Producer, or Wine name. You can change which way they are ordered (for example, oldest to youngest or youngest to oldest) by clicking on the title again.

Using all permutations available, it is very easy to see tasting notes on a particular wine over lots of different vintages, or vice versa, or, say, all Bordeaux 1998 over a certain score, or all of them ready to drink from 2012, or all notes published in 2005. It's just a question of filling in the relevant fields, and then ordering the results as you wish. Honest.

At your suggestion, we are investigating the possibility of our system's recognising mistyped names. For the moment the system is quite happy to accommodate all variations on accents: with, without and incorrect.

One other aspect of the site on which we invited, and received, specific feedback was the **log in process**.

You: A typical comment was 'I find it [log in] cumbersome. I am in the computer industry so I am sensitive to what is standard and friendly to the user. After hitting Log in here, the cursor should automatically be placed in the e-mail field. After entering the PW, one should only have to hit the enter key to transmit the UN/PW. It is quite cumbersome to have to tab to the Go and hit enter.'
Us: Thank you so much for pointing this out. These comments alone made this survey worthwhile. We certainly plan to re-design the log in bit of the site, taking into account the comments you made and making the boxes much more prominent.

And finally we asked people to nominate **suggestions for improvements or new features**. These comments were overwhelmingly positive with virtually the only negative comment being the suggestions below.

Videos
You:. 'Can we upgrade the video equipment? The pictures and sound quality are poor. Video is being used as a substitute for the written word. Should not be overused.' Someone obviously in the restaurant business added on the same subject, 'I know they're easy to make but I find the videos a bit annoying, they're not searchable, they're very hard to access using mobile internet, I never watch them because I'm usually at work with the laptop out front of house in the restaurant. I know that you're all v busy, but a transcript of the interviews would be really really appreciated. Also get Nick to write more as I always thoroughly enjoy his pieces..... erm other than that, please keep up the good work.' And still on the subject of our videos, another, Bordeaux-based Purple pager wrote 'I would suggest that readers would prefer to see Jancis in videos, such as in the Berry Bros primeur video, rather than being behind the Flip. Don't be bashful, Jancis is the star here and people want to hear and see what she thinks, not some nice chap that no-one's heard of outside the trade.'
Us: Much food for thought here. Though I am very reluctant to have to carry any equipment more complicated and bulkier than a Flip video camera, I'm afraid. Laptop, Blackberry, handbag, mobile spittoon and notebook are already quite enough to juggle, I find.

Thank you all SO much for so many seriously useful comments. We are very touched that so many of you took the trouble to give such useful comment and for paying us so many much-appreciated compliments. I am fighting the urge to quote any of them....and have succeeded!

I think some of the re-designs mentioned above may take a bit of time to effect, but please nag us if there are still important outstanding matters by September.