

Globally yours... Red or White?

JUST BEFORE the beginning of the new year, a famous wine journalist writing in one of the most respected and authoritative magazines around the world wrote that he was going to spend New Year's Eve in Rome and that since around this time he always feels like Claret he will be looking for *Ornellaia 1997*.

Ornellaia is one of the so-called Super Tuscan wines made from grape varieties that are not typical of Tuscany, vinified by a Frenchman, aged in French oak barriques and most importantly made with French ideology.

Whether this journalist intended to compliment *Ornellaia*, or whether he was indirectly complimenting Bordeaux, I cannot tell, but quite possibly he summarised the current chaos that currently exists in the wine world.

That *Ornellaia* drinks very well no one can argue. That it is not value for money many can argue. That the wine has character, some would argue, but what character, Tuscan or Bordeaux? On the same line of thought, a very influential American wine magazine recently scored and reviewed the great

by Michael Tabone

Tuscan vintage of 1997 and commented: "Reminding me of great Bordeaux... finesse to rival the best of Bordeaux."

The success of the super, hand-crafted wine, whether it is from Tuscany or anywhere else, was until recently described as a phenomenon. The innovation backed by the hype that these wines attracted brought with it huge prices based solely on speculation which in turn has encouraged every Piero, Gerard or Miguel to look after their own interests rather than the interests of the collective character of their respective regions. It is no longer Robert Parker or Michel Rolland who have the magic wand but those with enough clout and marketing skills to influence greedy speculators.

I suppose this is what modernists call progress and the traditionalists call the end of the wine world as we know it. I personally call it greed, going to extremes. If wine has a message for all of us to value, it is surely, to be balanced

and cautious. We must move ahead with progress and technology, slowly and surely, but at the same time we must not forget the fundamental meaning of wine.

Wine is and should always be a reflection of a specific piece of land with its micro climate, its grape varieties and its wine grower. All of this within local traditions and micro cultures. Technical values are obvious, but wine's only measure of quality must be based on character and breed.

Some may argue that what counts is the liquid in the glass and the market who drinks it. That statement is as inspiring as saying human beings must breathe to live. I ask, will we soon be adding *Brunello* to *Barolo*, to add elegance? *Hermitage* to spice up *St-Emilion*? How about *Margaux* stopping its replanting programme to produce less? Maybe in the future we will start seeing wine lists offering Red, White and Rosé, simply at Lm2, Lm4.50, Lm10! Consumers requesting Lm5 worth of Red and 50c worth of Rosé!

Many generations of wine growers and wine drinkers from all over the world have built up a good will for wine that stretches from the glass of wine in a *taverna* on a Greek island to the grandeur of a *chateau* in France. Both have acclaimed passion status on their own individual merits and it is up to us and our contemporary wine growers to respect this and remember that in the final analysis Tuscany made *Antinori* famous. Catalunya gave *Torres* its identity and *Saint-Emilion* that he now possesses... not the other way round.

It is not so much the planting or the use of grape varieties, neither is it the exchange of knowledge between wine technicians (after all, the ever important soil and climate remain the same), but more the fact that by giving up the regional and traditional style and character, producing wines that are standardised according to what the market wants we are taking away from the good will mentioned above. The beauty of wine is in its diversity and just like us human beings we can only be great if we reflect our cultural, historical and temperamental character.

Individuality, based on those criteria, is a virtue but a wine made in

TIGNANELLO and Solaia, two of the pioneers of the Super Tuscan wines



Tignanello

Solaia

GROWN in the vineyard named *Tignanello* on the Santa Cristina estate located on the Chianti Classico region, the wine is a combination of *Sangiovese* (80 per cent), *Cabernet Sauvignon* (15 per cent) and *Cabernet Franc* (five per cent).

After approximately 14 months of aging in the *barriques* of 225 litres, the wine remains in the bottle for about another year.

COMING from the vineyard of the same name which is situated next to the *Tignanello* vineyard, *Solaia* is a combination of *Cabernet Sauvignon* (75 per cent), *Cabernet Franc* (five per cent), *Sangiovese* (20 per cent).

The personality and aging potential of the wine comes from the *Cabernet*, while the *Sangiovese* grape gives the wine elegance and *finesse*. After about 14 months of aging in the *barriques* of 225 litres, the wine remains in the bottle for another year before release.

Tuscany from Merlot, aged in French oak barriques, made by a Frenchman specifically with the US market in mind is like a five-star hotel running a *tapas* bar.

On a recent visit to Sicily, we were discussing wine at a winery on the Etna when the owners told me that they were thinking of ripping up their *Nerello Mascalese* to plant Merlot. When I asked why, the answer was that the situation is such that no one wants to drink our wines anymore.

Whether in five or ten years time

people will be drinking Merlot or whatever from the Etna I don't know, but one thing I am convinced of - and that is that when I get an urge for a taste of Sicily I shall stick to *Nero d'Avola* and *Cerasuolo di Vittoria*.

Likewise when I feel like a Claret I shall spend my money with our friends from Bordeaux.

Incidentally, I also felt like Claret this Christmas, so I opened *Carteau Côtes Daugay 1990 (St-Emilion)*, while for New Year's Day we enjoyed a very typical *Cerasuolo* by COS at some Sicilian friends.

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