

New Technologies to meet Consumer Demands ?

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Abstract

By looking at the international supply of wines all over the world consumers these days can feel as if they are in paradise. Depending on trend or personal taste high quality wines in a wide variety of different styles can be purchased any time and anywhere. The customer rules the world and asks for custom-made wines.

The world looks a little bit darker on the production side. Higher consumer demands, increased globalisation in wine offers and a more international customer taste are a fact and have to be considered to be able to stay in the market place.

In order to react to changing consumer attitudes many wine producers compare their ways of production with the international competition. In particular, techniques coming from very successful wine producing countries are the centre of attention. As a result we can see a very controversial discussion on the importance and admission of new oenological practices (i.e. alcohol adjustments, must or wine concentration, removal of volatile acidity...) going on worldwide. Principles of "wine ethics" meet economical questions, the wish to continue national traditions fights the wish for equal opportunities in a global wine production and very often national wine laws are in danger. Often these emotional conflicts result in an arbitrary "classification" of wines as "agricultural" or "industrial" products. The customer is misused as an alibi for or against new techniques, depending on which of the conflicting parties is running out of arguments.

It is a fact that all these discussions are more of economical than of oenological importance. But it is also a fact that the global wine world will have to make up its mind if new oenological practices are to be treated in the same way as traditional techniques. If this decision is a negative one, the very successful "New Wine World" will challenge the traditional "Old Wine World". The already existing conflict also caused by the USA in leaving the OIV can easily turn into a political disaster.

Das internationale Weinangebot in allen Regalen der Welt hat sich in den letzten Jahren zu einem wahren Schlaraffenland für alle Verbraucher entwickelt. Je nach Trend, oder auch persönlichem Geschmack des Kunden, sind qualitativ gute Weine in allen Variationen jederzeit und ohne Probleme erhältlich. Der Kunde ist König und kauft daher Weine, maßgeschneidert für seinen Geschmack.

Auf der Produzentenseite sieht die Situation dagegen etwas problematischer aus. Auf gesteigerte Kundenerwartungen, eine zunehmende Globalisierung im Angebot aber auch eine Internationalisierung im Kundengeschmack muss reagiert werden, um weiterhin im Markt präsent zu sein.

Um diesem geänderten Verbraucherverhalten gerecht zu werden, vergleichen viele Weinerzeuger ihre Produktionsmöglichkeiten mit denen ihrer internationalen Konkurrenz. Insbesondere Verfahren die aus sehr erfolgreichen Weinbauländern kommen, stoßen auf erhöhtes Interesse. Diese weltweite Diskussion um die Bedeutung und Zulassung neuer önologischer Verfahren (z.B. Alkoholreduzierungen, Most- und Weinkonzentrierung, die Entfernung flüchtiger Säure etc.) wird sehr intensiv und zum Teil äußerst kontrovers geführt.

Weinethische Grundsätze prallen auf marktwirtschaftliche Fragen, der Wunsch nach Chancengleichheit in der globalen Weinproduktion ringt mit dem Fortbestand der nationalen Traditionen, und nicht zuletzt stehen auch nationale Weingesetze auf dem Prüfstand.

Diese oft emotionalen Auseinandersetzungen münden vielfach in einer willkürlichen Einstufung der Weine als „Agrarprodukte“ oder als „Industrieprodukte“. Dabei wird der Kunde häufig als Alibi für oder gegen neue Verfahren missbraucht, je nach dem welche Seite keine Argumente mehr hat.

Festzustellen bleibt, dass diese Diskussionen eher einen ökonomischen Hintergrund haben, als dass sie önologische oder qualitative Fragen behandeln. Die globale Weinwirtschaft wird aber eine Grundsatzentscheidung treffen müssen, ob neue Verfahren gleichberechtigt neben den traditionellen stehen. Sollte diese Entscheidung negativ sein, könnten die durch den Austritt der Vereinigten Staaten aus dem Internationalen Weinamt (OIV) bereits verhärteten Fronten zwischen der alten, traditionellen und der neuen, erfolgreichen Weinwelt sich zu einem politischen Desaster entwickeln.

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The world looks a little bit darker on the production side. Consumer demand for more quality, increased globalisation in wine offers and a more international customer taste are a fact and have to be considered to be able to stay in the market place.

In order to react to changing consumer attitudes many wine producers compare their ways of production with the international competition. In particular, techniques coming from very successful wine producing countries are in the centre of attention. As a result we can see a very controversial discussion on the importance and admission of new enological practices (i.e. alcohol adjustments, must or wine concentration, removal of volatile acidity...) going on worldwide. Principles of "wine ethics" meet economical questions, the wish to continue national traditions fights the wish for equal opportunities in global wine production and very often national wine laws are in danger. Often these emotional conflicts result in an arbitrary "classification" of wines as "agricultural" or "industrial" products. The customer is misused as an alibi for or against new techniques, depending on which of the conflicting parties is running out of arguments.

It is a fact that all these discussions are more of economical than of enological importance. But it is also a fact that the global wine world will have to make up its mind if new enological practices are to be treated in the same way as traditional techniques. If this decision will be a negative one, the very successful "New Wine World" will challenge the traditional "Old Wine World". The already existing conflict also caused by the USA in leaving the International Office for Vine and Wine (OIV) can easily turn into a political disaster. The reasons are as follows:

Due to the ongoing globalisation in all markets, members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have decided to reduce trade barriers. In the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as of 1.1.1996 the harmonisation of technical regulations as well as a mutual recognition of domestic practices was agreed on.

This shows a very strong impact on the wine industry worldwide. Bilateral agreement such as the one between the EU and Australia are under consideration and other member countries of the WTO (i.e. South Africa)) want to be able to use the same techniques.

But even in the case of permitting new practices, for example in the European Union a few hurdles have to be crossed first. In the first step the new technology needs to be approved by the General Assembly of the International Office of Vine and Wine. This approval, which can only serve as a guideline, can be adopted for European and domestic legislation and become part of a country's wine laws.

In addition to the legal situation "we do have to deal with the most important players in the wine industry – the consumers. It goes without saying that without consumers there would be no industry. Accordingly, wine businesses these days spend considerable time and effort, not to mention expense, in identifying the changing tastes of consumers as well as promoting and marketing their products. This is also becoming an increasingly demanding exercise, as consumers become more educated and discerning. They will not buy products that do not meet their expectations in terms of quality or price." (Alexander Downer, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Australia)

The real challenge these days is to identify what the consumer expects in terms of quality and price. Producers in the old and the new wine world seem to have a completely different understanding of the “evaluation”. This can be described with the following two examples:

1. Chips

Worldwide consumers enjoy wines with oak flavours. The traditional techniques of using barriques is time consuming and expensive. The same result in taste can be achieved faster and at extremely low costs if chips are used instead.

Experts are fighting over the question of whether chips represent an aromatisation of wine and should therefore not be used. Can barriques as the traditional way be the only answer?

The conservative wine world will support this while the new wine world responds with more consumer friendly prices. Who is right ?

2. Eiswein

In some European countries and Canada Eiswein for centuries is traditionally produced at extremely low temperatures in the vineyards. This involves a very high risk of losing the grapes due to non-favourable circumstances. But because of that risk Eiswein has the image of being a rare and very valuable product.

Of course it is possible to use refrigerators to create the same effect. Low risk, continuous market supply, lower shelf prices etc. are possible. But is this still the same product?

Some countries are opposing this strongly, others believe that the effect is the same.

Who is right?

The answer will come from the consumer.