



THE INSTITUTE OF
MASTERS
of WINE

Examiners' Report 2013

Theory Papers
Practical Papers
Dissertation

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Introduction

The 2013 report is written as the Master of Wine examination processes begin to change. In 2015 the Theory part of the exam moves from 4 Papers and one resit to 5 Papers with one resit allowed on Papers 1,2 and 3, and one resit allowed on Papers 4 and 5. The Dissertation also begins to change to the new Research Paper. Detailed briefings have been sent out on both changes and there are also videos on the Institute website.

This report highlights the key observations of the examiners so as to provide information and help for those who sat the 2013 exam as well as guidance for future candidates. This guidance will still be relevant to those planning to sit the Theory exam in 2015.

A video of the exam feedback day of 6 November 2013 is going to be published on the Institute's website and if candidates were not able to attend the day, they should look at the recording. It is a valuable addition to this report.

Each section has been written by the Chair of the respective panel of examiners, and draws on the detailed comments made by the individual examiners assessing the papers. This introduction provides an overview of the more general issues arising from the exams.

General comments

The 20 candidates who passed the Theory and 13 who passed the Practical exams are to be congratulated, as are their mentors. Unfortunately these figures show a disappointing set of results. Theory passes have declined from 34% in 2012 to 31% in 2013 and Practical passes from 20% to 16%. On the positive side, the number of candidates who sat the exam without sufficient preparation continues to decline.

In writing their reports, the Panel Chairs are conscious that they should not sound negative. However, they would not be doing the job properly if they did not point out what went wrong as well as right. The objective is to give help and guidance to those sitting the exam in the future.

Theory Paper 1 has had poor results for some years, but the 2013 results were particularly disappointing. The pass rate dropped below 15% and the number of candidates achieving only a D grade rose alarmingly. Future candidates and their mentors have work to do on parts of the syllabus covered by Paper 1 and should be reminded that the new exam structure, which will be introduced in 2015, will examine technical matters in more detail. In contrast to Theory Paper 1, Paper 2 recorded better results in 2013, Paper 3 much the same and Paper 4 achieving the highest pass rate for 6 years. Whilst there were less factual errors in Paper 3, it continues to help if examples are correct.

In the Practical, 13 passes (out of 81 candidates) was a poor result. Good marks on Paper 3 were dragged down by the worst results for Papers 1 and 2 in six years. As in the past, the Panel Chair has written a long and helpful report, which will assist future candidates. This year, his advice and comments are more important than ever.

Robin Kinahan MW, Chairman of the Examination Board

Without prejudice, this report is delivered for information purposes only, and may not be relied upon by individual candidates with reference to their particular examination papers.

Guidelines to students on examiners' approaches to handwriting, spelling and grammar and abbreviations.

Handwriting: If examiners are unable to read scripts because they are illegible, then they cannot award a mark and such scripts will fail. Candidates should also understand that poor handwriting makes it hard to follow the flow of an answer, with the danger that relevant detail may not be appreciated by examiners.

Spelling and grammar. Examiners take a lenient attitude to a small number of minor spelling and grammatical errors. It is also recognised and accepted that some candidates might come from English-speaking countries that use different grammar or spelling conventions from the UK. However, examiners expect candidates to spell wine names and terms correctly, and persistent incorrect spelling thereof will be noted in the award of marks.

Abbreviations of the most common and conventional wine terms are acceptable in both the Theory and Practical exams. Candidates should not separately list the abbreviations they intend to use at the beginning of each paper or answer, but should follow normal practice of writing on the first occasion in any answer (for example) Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) or malolactic fermentation (mlf), before using that abbreviation for the rest of the Practical paper or Theory answer.

THEORY PAPER 1 – THE PRODUCTION OF WINE I.

By Norrel Robertson MW

This year's paper examined some fundamental cornerstones of viticulture and oenology. Two of the questions were well attempted by most candidates but many avoided some of the more specific questions. Confidence still seems to be a problem for many candidates with this paper. The examiners noted that many started off on a sound footing then lost their way through either not displaying enough technical details or not showing enough depth of understanding and knowledge. To quote one examiner "overall, candidates need to broaden their knowledge of vineyards and wineries and to think more globally".

Those enrolled in the course should be encouraged to grasp the nettle and gain a better understanding of the principles of viticulture and winemaking as Paper 1 still lags behind the performance shown in the other papers. Confidence and authority come with sound knowledge and detail. Whilst the demands of the exam will always be hard, candidates should try to travel as much as they can to experience viticulture and winemaking first hand.

1. WHAT ARE THE MOST RELEVANT PESTS AND DISEASES TODAY? DESCRIBE THEIR EFFECTS AND HOW THEY SHOULD BE COMBATED

A banker of a question and answered by the majority of candidates. The key words in the question were *relevant* and *today*. The question did not ask for a treatise on the history of Phylloxera and rootstocks, which were over emphasised by many. Examiners were looking for a coherent, up-to-date assessment of which pests and diseases are causing most difficulty for the industry, with diverse examples from around the globe. Phylloxera and the major fungal maladies were well covered; however some answers should have had more detail of the factors which govern disease pressure (temperature ranges, humidity etc.) and of course the relevant pre-emptive measures and post infection treatments. Good candidates mentioned different viticultural philosophies from conventional to organic and biodynamic considerations of how to combat pests and diseases.

It was a broad question but some answers failed to mention viruses, bacteria and phytoplasma, an oversight as diseases like Esca and Pierce's Disease pose a significant problem in many vineyards. A number of answers failed to mention common pests such as birds and rabbits. To quote one examiner, 'Some very good answers, but many others showed a limited grasp of these quite significant and economically critical viticultural problems.'

2. MANY FACTORS CAN AFFECT FLOWERING AND FRUIT SET. EXAMINE WHAT EFFECT THESE MIGHT HAVE ON QUALITY AND YIELD

This was a relevant subject given the poor flowering and fruit set witnessed in many areas of Northern Europe in 2013. On the whole the question was poorly answered by those who attempted it.

Few candidates were able to describe and define flowering and fruit set. Some rudimentary biology of the grapevine was needed but it was obvious from the papers marked that many candidates could not describe concisely and correctly how flowering and fruit set occurs. Many chose to ignore the fact that fruitfulness of vines is firstly governed by the previous seasons' growth pattern where compound buds and flower structure are laid down in the vine.

Candidates then needed to show a logical progression through the year, describing how weather events, climate and vine nutrition can influence flowering and fruit set with relevant conclusions. Good answers included optimum temperatures and weather conditions for successful flowering and fruit set and viticultural techniques that can enhance both. It is important to note the different effects

of coulure and millerandage on white and red grapes. The majority of responses were too general without enough physiological detail. Certain cultivars such as Grenache, Merlot and Malbec should have been highlighted as more prone to suffer from poor flowering and fruit set.

Flowering and fruit set are not the most exciting viticultural topics but students need to garner a better understanding of the life cycle and biology of the vine.

3. WHY, WHEN AND HOW ARE ENZYMES USED IN THE WINEMAKING PROCESS?

This was a technically specific question lending itself to a straightforward structure. The key word on the question is *'used'*. The question infers the intervention of the winemaker using enzymes rather than a broad discussion of all enzymatic reactions in winemaking, which was how one candidate chose to interpret the question.

Good answers covered the production of white, red, sweet and sparkling wines and mentioned the main types of enzymes used in winemaking.

Enzymes are involved in virtually all steps of winemaking. Through better understanding of enzymatic transformations during processing, winemakers have been able to master positive effects and to reinforce desired activities, such as settling of juice, colour extraction, improved turbidity, aroma release, etc. Good answers mentioned the effect of pH and temperature on the efficacy of enzyme action and some of the pitfalls of poor enzyme use, the side activities such as phenol release and over clarification of musts.

Industrial enzyme preparations have become the norm in large production winemaking due to specificity, convenience and effectiveness. The majority of enzymes employed in winemaking are processing aids, which have economic, time saving and quality derived aims, however it should be noted that many winemakers eschew their use from a non-interventionist standpoint.

4. YOU ARE TASKED WITH ESTABLISHING NEW VINEYARD SITES TO PRODUCE CHARDONNAY IN CASABLANCA VALLEY, CHILE AND IN CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MAJOR CONCERNS?

Very poorly answered, this question called for a good knowledge of the two regions concerned and solid concepts involved in vineyard establishment, especially the viability of new sites. Few candidates chose to mention that both Casablanca and Champagne are high frost areas and how site selection and frost management should be handled. Similarly several candidates had forgotten that Phylloxera is not an issue for Casablanca but good answers did note the possible need for rootstocks to combat nematodes in Chile.

“Many papers were ‘generic’, talking more about growing Chardonnay in a warm vs. cold climate, instead of the specific cases” was one of the markers’ main comments.

Candidates needed to use some imagination to compare and contrast the major concerns of vineyard establishment in each area. Viable and sustainable, quality grape production should be the aim for vineyard establishment in both areas.

A question that requires not only attention to viticultural issues such as soil type, exposure, climate aspects, altitude, water availability, drainage, rootstock and clone types, but also cost of land, labour, water rights (if needed), and the attendant appellation regulations demanded.

There was a tendency for candidates to concentrate on only one or two issues such as choice of clones and rootstocks without consideration of planting density, orientation, trellis and pruning systems and planting and vine care.

5. CRITICALLY ASSESS THE ROLE OF OXYGEN DURING WINEMAKING UP TO THE COMPLETION OF THE MALOLACTIC CONVERSION.

This was a question intended to test knowledge of an important aspect of winemaking. It was answered by many and was generally well answered. The major problem was that few managed to 'critically assess'.

It was not sufficient to say how much you know about oxygen's role in winemaking. The question asks the candidate to make a judgement about where, when and how oxygen is important in winemaking.

Markers expected to see coverage of all wine styles and the question lent itself to a simple chronological order from reception and handling of grapes and must up to the end of malolactic fermentation.

Good candidates managed to cover different winemaking scenarios and mention reaction rate of oxygen and how the winemaker can utilise it to positive effect and when it should be avoided.

6. DEFINE THE EFFECTS *BOTRYTIS CINEREA* CAN HAVE ON WINE QUALITY AND EXPLAIN THE MEASURES A WINERY SHOULD CARRY OUT WHEN BOTH WHITE AND RED GRAPES HAVE EXTENSIVE BOTRYTIS INFECTION ON ENTERING THE WINERY.

This was another relatively technical question that called for a good understanding of how *Botrytis Cinerea* affects red and white grapes and how this should be treated in the winery.

The major problem with botrytis is that laccase is very pervasive, highly soluble and stable in wine and musts after settling and clarification. Sulphur is not very efficient and there is no real silver bullet. The best candidates mentioned how the winery copes with the changes to musts that botrytis can bring, both negative and positive which generally require careful crushing, pressing and processing with the aid of specific enzymes and processing aids.

The best answers considered sparkling, white, red and sweet wine productions and gave specific treatments and measures that winemakers can employ. Again the question lent itself to a simple chronological structure so candidates should have had more time to consider the scenario in the winery, however, the low pass rate shows that the majority struggled with providing detail and technical knowledge.

THEORY PAPER 2 – THE PRODUCTION OF WINE II.

By Neil Tully MW

GENERAL

This year's Paper 2 prompted a good number of strong responses. Any successful answer is underpinned by a detailed knowledge and understanding of the scientific and technical principals ideally supported by relevant examples. The responses to Paper 2 this year contained a good number of well-applied examples. Examples cited should preferably be from the most relevant part of the world, rather than being limited to a familiar home market.

This knowledge, together with examples, can only be used to good effect within a well-structured answer. Quite often the structure was lacking to provide a coherent vehicle to convey a candidate's knowledge and understanding, and to provide an answer to the question.

It is vital to consider the exact wording of the question, and ensure that at all times the response keeps closely to the question, and does actually provide a conclusive answer. The temptation should always be resisted to write about the question that the candidate might have liked to have been asked, rather than the one on the exam paper. Throughout Paper 2 this year there were examples of albeit sound responses, but not necessarily to the exact question being asked.

Handwriting should be as legible as possible (if not using a word processor), and candidate number and page numbers clearly and correctly recorded.

1. WHAT WOULD BE THE MAIN QUALITY CONTROL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CONSIDERING A CHANGE FROM BOTTLING AT SOURCE TO SHIPPING IN BULK AND BOTTLING ELSEWHERE?

This question relates to the core of the MW Paper 2 syllabus and candidates should be absolutely clear of the processes involved in loading, unloading, shipping and preparing wine for final bottling. Many answers failed to cover all the QC issues from loading to bottling (including QC of packaging goods) and focussed instead on the shipping process, many without discussing the QC issues. This was not a question on how to ship in bulk.

The better responses were able to demonstrate the consideration of the change of bottling location throughout their answer, and in doing so raise the potential quality control issues.

Answers should have discussed a range of wine styles and the specific QC issues relating to each wine style. They should also have used examples from across the globe, rather than focussing on their home market only. Answers should have demonstrated knowledge of the various QA programmes around the world (BRC, HACCP, ISO etc.). Relatively few responses mentioned these. Better responses tended to be pithy; tightly constructed and to the point.

2. TO WHAT EXTENT, FOLLOWING THE MALOLACTIC CONVERSION, CAN CLARITY AND STABILITY IN WINE BE CONTROLLED?

This question received relatively few responses, and those who did attempt it did not always provide compelling answers. Very few answers clearly defined and differentiated between clarity and stability, which was a key requirement of the question. The two were very often confused. Responses were also very often unbalanced, over-emphasising issues such as brett, for example, which though relevant, is not the focus of controlling clarity and stability.

Potentially an answer to this question could have covered a very broad scope, so the more successful responses tended to be concise, yet still addressing all the main points. This is a question where a clear understanding of the various methods for achieving clarity and stability was essential. The examiners

were looking for coverage of all the main methods of controlling each of these factors. Relating to clarity: Fining agents, filtration (earth, pad and cartridge) and rackings. Relating to stability: Protein stability, Tartrate stability, Oxidation stability and Microbial stability. The question called for an analysis of the ability to control, and an assessment of the potential efficacy of each treatment.

3. WRITE CONCISE NOTES ON FOUR OF THE FOLLOWING: A) HYDROGEN SULPHIDE, B) VOLATILE ACIDITY, C) OAK CHIPS, D) CARBOXY METHYL CELLULOSE, E) ISINGLASS

A popular question, with many accurate answers. The responses to this question needed to be pithy – “concise”, and not be a rambling discussion. This question did expose any lack of knowledge in a particular area. A question such as this requires a detailed factual account and demonstration of a sound knowledge of the principles behind each of the four headings chosen. Good answers showed a good technical understanding but supported this with factual evidence, an understanding of implications and examples.

There were a number of responses with two initial very detailed accounts followed by two far less detailed accounts. This may have been indicative of a less detailed level of knowledge on two questions, or possibly poor time management. Either way marks would have been jeopardised.

4. CONSIDER THE IMPLICATIONS OF REDUCING LEVELS OF SULPHUR DIOXIDE IN THE POST MALOLACTIC CONVERSION HANDLING AND BULK STORAGE OF STILL WINE.

This is a technical question, which required a technical answer. For a question around a core part of the Paper 2 syllabus, this prompted few convincing answers. Very often answers tended to lapse into a general account of the use of SO₂ and maturation. The question required a structure that enabled the implications of reduced levels of SO₂ to be properly addressed. Stronger responses firstly defined terms, sulphur dioxide, its role and usual dose rate (with accurate levels quoted), and also defined the post malolactic period. This might be followed by an identification of the risks associated by a reduction in SO₂ levels during handling, and storage. An examination of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of a reduction in SO₂ levels would present a balanced argument. There were many good uses of examples, but too often responses just did not answer the question itself.

5. “BLENDING CAN BE AN ART OR A SCIENCE”. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONSIDERATIONS A WINEMAKER MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHEN BLENDING:

- A MIDDLE PRICE POINT RED WINE
- A GOOD QUALITY NON-VINTAGE CHAMPAGNE.

This question prompted the greatest number of responses for any question in this year’s Theory Paper 2. For a popular question, this did not always elicit the strongest of responses, however.

Successful answers to this question had a simple structure and adhered to it rigorously. The question itself suggests a structure, though quite a number of candidates made their lives difficult by adopting one that was overelaborate.

Stronger responses included a short definition of what was understood by middle price point red wine and good quality non-vintage champagne, and used relevant examples with precision and technical detail.

It was also vital to ensure that the question itself was addressed. Rather than simply describing the use of blending in relation to these two wine types, answers had to analyse the “art or a science” issue. The better responses were not afraid of venturing a personal opinion on this part of the question where appropriate, rather than simply repeating received opinion. Too often responses were too narrative; an account of events, relying on a description of the philosophy of blending and with very little reference to the question being asked.

6. CONSIDER THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF NON OAK MATURATION VESSELS.

This question was very well answered by many. Stainless steel as an option was fully covered, and often with well cited examples. Concrete and epoxy / glass fibre tanks were less well understood, and in a very few cases omitted altogether. Where these were mentioned, their advantages and disadvantages were not always explicitly considered. Better responses also considered the commercial realities of using these maturation vessels, adding credibility to their answers.

For a number of candidates, this question was interpreted as “consider the disadvantages of oak maturation vessels”, which was not the question being asked. While the impact of oak can be used to illustrate the consequence of not using it, the core question was around the alternatives.

Bottle maturation and glass was omitted in many essays. Alternative wood vessels, such as acacia and chestnut, were also quite frequently not mentioned.

THEORY PAPER 3 – THE BUSINESS OF WINE

By Laura Jewell MW

GENERAL

Overall this year's questions were well answered, with few really poor answers. However, somewhat disappointingly, there were few outstanding answers. The best answers avoided appearing superficial and used original examples, showing interesting original thought.

The emphasis of this paper is the Business of Wine, and candidates must always consider the financial aspects and cost implications in their answers. Weaker answers simply quoted statistics without explanation or analysis. A list of facts shows knowledge, but not necessarily understanding of the subject or the ability to argue and reason the points required.

Frequently no source was quoted for the figures, which made them suspect, and often unconvincing – '69% claim to be influenced by varietal' – according to whom? Figures must also be accurate – a mix up of thousands versus millions of pounds makes little sense. And figures should be up to date – why quote a Rabobank report from 2006?

More essay planning is needed, with more thinking and less writing. Unsubstantiated and sweeping statements do not earn marks. Well thought out opinion backed up with facts and lots of relevant examples does. Examples quoted must be relevant, detailed, specific and accurate, not simplistic or anecdotal, and should be attributed if appropriate. They should also demonstrate a global knowledge, and not be too focused on one country.

Always check the spelling of key names and brands such as Veuve Clicquot – getting them wrong is unforgivable. This year there was a lot of sloppy typing –with 17 typos on one page, it does not make the examiners job any easier. And get the facts right – Asda does not sell the Finest* brand, and Tesco does not sell Etienne Dumont Champagne. Make sure your examples are accurate.

1. WHAT MATTERS MORE IN TODAY'S WINE MARKET: BRAND, VARIETAL OR APPELLATION?

This was by far the most popular of the 2 compulsory questions, but tripped up a lot of candidates with many generalisations and assumptions with no back-up, and a lot of wandering into descriptions of the 3 areas with no real analysis of customer segmentation. An answer needed to be given to the question, even if it was that it depends on the maturity of the market and the engagement level of the customer.

Good answers covered more than one market or country, and balanced the 3 areas with price points. Inaccurate opinions and made up statistics abounded – 'varietals are king in North America' was followed by 'red blends are growing in the USA'.

Weak answers missed the emerging markets completely, while others did not consider customer segmentation at all. Descriptive answers with no argument, insight or commercial reasoning, or conclusion, did not pass.

2. HOW CAN THE ROLE OF THE INTERMEDIARIES BETWEEN PRODUCER AND CONSUMER BE JUSTIFIED? HOW IS IT CHANGING?

This was not a popular question, and overall poorly answered with only 1 candidate passing. This is a fundamental issue in the changing structure of today's wine industry so to see so few candidates attempt it and such a small percentage of them achieve a pass was a real disappointment. It was a basic distribution channel question which required knowledge of the different models in various markets, including the monopolies and the USA 3 tier. On-trade, auction houses, the Bordeaux Place, and technology were barely mentioned, and the second part of the question largely ignored.

With narrow content and virtually no statistics given, this was not well thought through. The second part of the question offered the most opportunity for strong candidates to shine, expanding on the changing nature of the existing roles and models and reassessing the value of these roles in the light of recent and likely future developments in technology and an ever changing market. A clear understanding of how and to whom the role can be justified should be made in terms of what value they are adding and at what part of the value chain.

3. ASSESS THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF GENERIC BODIES (SUCH AS WINES OF AUSTRALIA AND WINES OF PORTUGAL).

A popular question and generally well answered with some outstanding papers. This question demanded lots of examples from a broad range of countries, and an analysis of how well generic bodies functioned, and to whom they were important throughout the value chain.

Strong answers gave us some idea of the history, and contrasted different examples to demonstrate the importance to the individual parts of the value chain, from grower to consumer via agent and the trade in general. Consideration of political agenda, funding, personalities, communications and education should all be included.

Weaker answers were simply a list of generic bodies with some of their activities with little analysis or discussion of how relevant these were to the various audiences. Occasionally the focus was too much on one market, e.g. Germany, rather than considering the role they could play in emerging as well as mature markets.

The best answers also challenged the value of some generics, and the lack of relevance in some markets.

4. AS A LARGE CORPORATION TAKING OVER A FAMILY WINE BUSINESS, SHOULD YOU KEEP THE FAMILY VALUES ALIVE AND, IF SO, HOW?

This question was attempted by a good number of candidates, but with few passes. Some misunderstood the question completely and read it to ask what are the benefits to family companies of being bought by large corporations? Of those who did understand the question, many did not answer it, or were vague in their conclusions. There was also the perennial misconception that family equals small – what about Gallo?

Good answers considered the human aspects, and understood that not all family values are positive and, therefore, should possibly not be kept alive. The second part of the question was generally answered badly, with the only suggestion being to hire a family member of staff. Successful answers stood back and thought about the mechanics of a takeover, and how to focus on the people within the business. Various structures were used successfully, including SWOT and the 4 'P's.

Again facts were misquoted, with the classic erroneous statement that Mondavi was taken over by Gallo, and several mixing Constellation and Accolade.

5. HOW HAVE THE RECENT FLUCTUATIONS IN GRAPE HARVEST SIZE CHANGED THE GLOBAL SUPPLY AND DEMAND OF WINE? HOW DO YOU SEE THIS AFFECTING THE WINE MARKET IN THE NEXT 24 MONTHS?

This is a frequent subject in the exam, and one which changes from year to year with the impact of the vintages. It was well answered by most of the candidates with a high proportion of very good grades, with plenty of up to date figures backed up by the source, and strong examples from more than one country.

Low marks were given for superficial answers with few figures, little analysis or discussion, and for not answering the second part of the question. There were some muddled answers with little planning, which made for some long and rambling discussions. This year the impact of the 2013 New Zealand

vintage following the small 2012 was largely ignored, although relevant and the most obvious example of how the balance has changed. Candidates must be up to date with facts and figures on production and consumption, and consider shortages and oversupply.

There was an over focus on the UK and the supermarkets, with less discussion on other parts of the market and other countries to be affected.

6. AS AN EXPORT MANAGER FOR A MEDIUM SIZED FAMILY OWNED WINE ESTATE, WHAT STRATEGIES WOULD YOU EMPLOY IN THE USA, EUROPE AND CHINA?

Tackled by a large number of candidates, many took an interesting and original approach by detailing an example of the winery in question, to give life to the strategies being discussed. One decided to use a Japanese winery which was very unusual. Some worked, some less so, as the answers became bogged down in the example rather than the strategy.

Answers needed to deal with each of the 3 markets in equal detail – several were strong on Europe but weak on China. Given its relevance to the market today, it was disappointing to see a lot of anecdotal matter on China and very few facts and understanding. Putting red on a label is not a strategy that is going to win as everyone is doing it. Strong answers made it very clear what the restraints of being a medium sized winery were throughout their argument. Those who used Gallo and Torres as examples missed the point.

Weak answers included a lot of flippancy and naiveté, with a lack of arguments and more discussion of methods rather than strategy. Too many generalisations and unrealistic strategies let the answers down. Again, lots of examples were needed at all stages. ‘The Americans are also sometimes suspicious of nudity on labels’ was a classic example of overgeneralisation. Lack of understanding of the USA market was clear and disappointing. Several answers discussed the ‘how to’ rather than which strategies to employ and why. The best structures looked at the 4’P’s in each market.

A mere recital of facts relating to China, the US and/or Europe, no matter how accurate or detailed, was not enough to pass.

THEORY PAPER 4 - CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

By Arne Ronold

GENERAL

Paper 4 presents an opportunity to explore contemporary issues in the international wine trade. It gives candidates the chance to develop strong arguments, which must be supported by as many relevant facts as possible. Discussion is essential to demonstrate that the candidate has a broad vision, accommodating more than one point of view on any issue. This paper requires answers that are illustrated with solid evidence from around the world – simply writing from the perspective of one country will rarely allow the candidate to achieve enough marks to pass. Candidates are therefore encouraged to read extensively and to widen their knowledge of international wine trade issues in preparation for this paper.

The questions in Paper 4 are deliberately wide ranging, and so there must be a clear logic to the way that arguments are built up and demonstrated in the answers. To develop a proper essay writing technique should be part of the preparation for the MW exam, in particular for Paper 4. Once again this year many candidates could have done better in this respect. Many essays were descriptive rather than analytical and discursive, and many were also presented as poorly written essays, lacking in structure and with insufficient arguments and examples. And again this year some candidates whose mother tongue is not English might have done better had they written in their own language and had the answers translated. By writing in English many of these essays appear rather simplistic, whereas writing in their own language would facilitate more complex arguments. Whilst there are no precisely right or wrong answers on this paper, candidates are reminded that factual errors are likely to result in lower marks.

1. HOW IMPORTANT IS CLIMATE CHANGE TO THE INTERNATIONAL WINE MARKET?

This was by far the most popular question in this year's Paper 4, also the one question with the highest pass rate. Many candidates seemed to have prepared well on the topic of climate change.

The important terms in this question were "How important", "climate change" and "the international wine market". Answers thus needed to give definitions of "climate change" and "the international wine market", and they also needed to answer the question "How important" with a truly global approach.

Overall there were a good number of high quality answers. However the word "important" was too frequently overlooked. Although the international wine market should include the consumer, there were a number of otherwise excellent answers, erudite and confident, which did not include the consumer. These candidates still did pass, but would have done even better had they looked at "the international wine market" in a broader perspective. Once again, those who described what they knew and did not use examples failed.

Those who provided informed and balanced debate showing their knowledge of both sides of the argument, and coming to real conclusions, did extremely well.

2. IS THE GLOBAL WINE MARKET TOO FRAGMENTED?

This was by far the least popular question and also the least well answered one. As in Question 1, answers needed to define the term "the global wine market". They also needed to address how and why the market is fragmented and they were expected to justify, with international examples, whether the market is too fragmented or not. In addition, the wording of the question was to encourage candidates to show clear opinions.

Overall, however, this was a very disappointing set of answers to an interesting and wide ranging question. Of the few candidates who did answer this question, one candidate obviously ran out of time, and another also delivered a very short answer. Almost no one understood “the global wine market” in its widest terms, or even really tried to define it.

Moreover, many answers were simplistic, lacking in structure, analysis and sophistication – and generally not at Master of Wine level. In such a broad question, where answers need to discuss a wide range of issues, planning the answer is essential and time is well spent on doing this in the exam before starting to write.

3. IS THE GOLDEN AGE FOR FINE WINE INVESTMENTS OVER?

This was the second least answered question in this year’s Paper 4. It implies that we are emerging from a golden age, and the important word here is “over”.

Answers needed to define the phrase “fine wine” and also express what the term “the golden age” comprises. What were the successes in it? Who was behind it?

Based on the description of “the golden age” candidates needed to agree with the implication of the question, or refute it. Again the wording of the question invited a clear and direct answer. “Is the golden age over?”

An in-depth knowledge of the fine wine investment market was required by this question, and candidates needed to support their analyses with clear and specific examples of auction markets, secondary markets, wine indexing funds and advantages and disadvantages of wine as an investment item. Supply of fine wine and access to it also needed consideration, along with some of the problems associated with it, such as fraud, storage, minimum investment needed, liquidity and lack of regulation.

The question further invited candidates to look both forwards and backwards, so a display of perspectives, and knowledge of the history of wine investment as well as its current situation, were beneficial.

Overall this was an interesting question. Candidates who defined the terms well and showed a good perspective forwards and backwards, as well as clear opinions, generally did well.

4. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR COUNTRIES AND WINE PRODUCING REGIONS TO HAVE SIGNATURE WINES?

As in the first question in Paper 4 one important term in this question is “How important”. The second important term is “signature wines”. Answers thus needed to define what is meant by “signature wines”, and they needed to answer the question set: How important is it for countries and regions to have such wines?

Many answers defined “signature wines” as either “icon wines”, that is wines that enjoy a very high status within their country or region of origin, or “typicity wines”, that is wines that have the distinct style and hallmark of a region or country. The best answers to this question were generally provided by those candidates who took both these definitions into consideration.

However, too many candidates did not understand the question and failed to read the words “How important?”. Secondly, too many answers interpreted signature wines either as “icon wines” only or as “typicity wines” only and, therefore, provided a too narrow approach to the question. Furthermore, with a question so easy to pack with examples, there were disappointingly few given. The few strong answers were excellent and produced well rounded and highly informed debates.

5. TO WHAT EXTENT IS WINE CONSUMPTION HEALTHY? HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

In this health-related question there are actually two questions to be answered, and the important terms are “To what extent” and “How much”.

Candidates were expected to discuss everything from not at all healthy to very healthy, giving international and wide-ranging examples from different cultures and consumer groups around the world. The question also needed candidates to appreciate that there is no simple answer to ‘how much is too much?’

Many answers displayed a good knowledge on the subject, and most referred to The French Paradox and health benefits from moderate wine consumption. However few answers were able to quote more recent research where focus is more on consumption patterns rather than on the amount of intake.

Overall most candidates showed that they had enough information to answer this question well. The ones who passed were generally setting the question into a historical and cultural context, while understanding that the question revolved around the matter of limits and the difficulties of identifying them.

PRACTICAL EXAMINATION REPORT 2013

By John Hoskins MW, Chair of the Practical Papers

This has been, statistically, the most unusual of the eight Practical Exams I have managed. 13 overall passes is a disappointing result, particularly after the excellent preparatory work I observed at various seminars and other MW tasting events. The ‘unusual’ element was the variation between the three papers – just 9 passes on Paper 1, 13 on Paper 2 and 49 on Paper 3.

A pass has always been an average score of 65%. Interestingly it was Paper 2 that was responsible for the most ‘crashes’ (scores so low in one paper that they made a pass virtually impossible). 49 candidates ‘crashed’ in Paper 2, compared to 27 in each of the other papers.

Clearly Paper 1 was not easy. Equally clearly Paper 2 was a paper in which a few wrong turns could result in very low marks (see the comments below on the Paper 2 Question 3). However the best candidates stood firm under pressure. Those candidates really earned their success by staying calm after struggling on day one, battling through a tricky Paper 2 and then finishing strongly in the relative sanctuary of Paper 3.

This exam is above all about tasting experience, but it is also about the ability to think clearly and rationally when the answers are not obvious – and to communicate to the examiners those rational ideas. It is not just about ‘picking the winners’.

Here are a few general thoughts and then some comments on each paper.

REASONING

We have argued recently that “less is more” in your answers – better to be brief than irrelevant or confusing. One examiner has repeated this point:

Candidates are advised to be mindful of the space and mark allocation on the pro forma as a guide to the level and detail of the answer required. Resist the temptation to write too much or the timing will become a problem.

However some candidates have clearly taken this too far, or at least not got the balance right. Another examiner commented:

I found some candidates often wrote too little to earn the full marks allocated to the question. This frequently was the case when answering for quality.

However some candidates included superfluous information such as commercial position when answering for quality (i.e. “white table cloth restaurant”, specific food pairings, WBG, etc.) while neglecting to include price point or when to drink / capacity to age.

It’s all about balance. Stick to the point and back that point up. There will be more detail about this issue in the Feedback Day video

BULLET POINTS

Bullet points can work, particularly when time is short. But if you need to argue a point, to compare and contrast, or even to ‘funnel’ when you are struggling, then bullet points rarely do the job. This year’s Feedback Day video will also expand on this issue.

'PREMIUM' (again)

One brilliant candidate (who in fact passed!) used the word premium incessantly. It didn't help him (or her) succeed. The same candidate also used his (relatively little known) native currency as a reference point for quality. The candidate also happened to have almost illegible handwriting. As stated, brilliance shone through. Don't take any of those risks. The examiners' message is always the same: whatever you are trying to tell us, please be clear about it.

FINISHING

We asked candidates to fill fewer pages this year and we were pleased to see more completed papers.

However one candidate, clearly an outstanding taster, left a blank page for Paper 2, Question 1, Parts b and c – the comparisons of quality and maturity. They also barely filled out Part a. They earned a mere 5 out of 50 on what was the easiest question of the 4. If they had earned just 25 marks they would have passed that paper. We will always try to "mark up" candidates when we can, but in this case it was impossible to be generous when there was nothing to mark.

WRITING

Legibility seems to be more of an issue each year – another reason for candidates to write less, but to write more clearly. Also please write with a dark pen. Scans and photocopies (which the examiners receive) tend to make the text fainter.

PRACTICAL PAPER 1

In hindsight this paper may not look as hard as it proved to be. A relatively high number of light, fresh white wine styles clearly caused panic.

If ever there was a case for intelligent 'funneling' then it was the first 4 pairs, particularly Q2, Q3 and Q4. Many of those who panicked jumped headlong into one option, and inevitably failed to use all the relevant evidence from the glass (i.e. body, acid, alcohol, aromas) to prove their answer. Others spent too long weighing up the options and ended up with blank sheets.

Calm heads concentrated on the wines with more 'obvious' characteristics: the evidently extensive wood ageing on wine 2 (Tondonia Rioja); the power but restraint of wine 4 (the Riesling from Prager); the toasty, barrel-fermented Chardonnay in the third pair; the oak combined with relative neutrality on wine 8 (De Morgenzon Chenin). If these were sensibly argued then the more neutral partner often fell into place quite easily.

Please remember that the examiners are always aware that some wines (or groups of wines) are harder to identify than others. In every case what we are looking for is an intelligent summary of the likely options and a reasoned argument, backed up with relevant evidence, for the chosen conclusion.

Apart from panic, there were two common 'technical' faults in evidence. Only the best candidates

attempted to “compare and contrast” when asked to do so. Many winemaking and quality statements were too vague (not enough specific evidence from the glass) to achieve enough points to earn a pass.

Wines 9 to 12 were answered more successfully but again the more difficult two (9 and 10) proved (predictably) difficult. We do not expect candidates to be able to unerringly spot a Gavi within a mixed bag. But we would expect them to at least consider one or two classic Italian varieties when assessing a range of clean, elegant but fairly neutral white wine styles.

There was much less evidence of general weakness in knowledge than previous years, but some should be cited. This is not to pour scorn on those who made these mistakes, but to remind any potential candidate that if they cannot immediately see why we have singled out these quotations, then they should accept they are not quite ready to take the exam. The Practical papers do expose gaps in both tasting and more general wine knowledge.

“Lees work is evidenced by marked minerality.”

“Rias Baixas - warm climate and high altitude.....”

A winemaking note for Gewurztraminer claiming “cold soak and MLF.”

“Macebeo” as grape for wine #1 - correct, but inappropriate.

“1er Cru Corton Charlemagne.”

We were also intrigued by “Twist on the finish consistent with Gewurztraminer”. There is plenty of room for individuality in your answers, but you must be clear in what you are telling us.

Finally a summary from one Paper 1 examiner:

In general, too many candidates still rely on one or two wine characteristics in determining origin and varietal character. Overall, there was a lack of aromatic/flavour descriptors given as evidence, and

the quality assessments offered were often monotonous and unconvincing. It is not enough to know just the classic grapes and origins. This year's paper served as a reminder that candidates need to taste broadly and be familiar with market trends.

PRACTICAL PAPER 2

Question 1

Most candidates answered this well, clearly distinguishing between the differing levels of quality and the relative maturities. However, only the best candidates were confident in identifying specific vintages. Too often there was ambiguity in the final choice – there has to be a definitive conclusion.

Candidates did generally “taste what was in the glass”, there was little evidence of assuming that if Wine 1 was X then Wine 2 must be Y. It was also fair enough for Wine 1 to be over-estimated – it was an exceptional example of its appellation.

However, some candidates lost easy marks in the comparative section by not clearly stating which wine was the better of the two, simply describing each wine individually.

Prejudices can only harm your cause – “probably a négociant Burgundy”.

Question 2

The first key to passing Paper 2 was to pick for Question 2 a New World country with a range of appropriate options. Those who went outside New Zealand, Chile, Australia or South Africa inevitably ended up squeezing their tasting notes to try to fit their answer and, therefore, gaining few points.

Question 3

The second critical choice in this paper was the choice of grape variety in Question 3. Successful candidates all either identified Grenache, or thought very carefully how to justify their selection if they went (as many did) for Syrah, Merlot or Cabernet. Despite the richness/intensity in evidence across the group, two of the wines were pale in colour and none of the wines were high in tannin. This didn't rule out those other options completely, but it did mean that the arguments used for their justification had to be carefully chosen – and (again) not involve changing tasting notes to suit a conclusion.

Sadly, most candidates went badly wrong with at least one of Questions 2 and 3.

Question 4

Wine 10 provided candidates with a banker, the Beaujolais, and there were many well-argued answers for both wine making and origin.

Wine 11 & Wine 12 proved more challenging particularly Wine 11 with very few candidates recognising the Ripasso style. Good candidates managed to gain reasonable marks by noting a powerful but traditional red wine style and offering intelligent guesses as to the wine making options. Wine 12 was rarely spotted as Argentinian, but there were again many sensible answers which concentrated on the fruit concentration, the use of oak and the lack of any obvious mono-varietal character.

General issues on Paper 2

Timing was not an obvious issue, with relatively few blank answer sheets. However, it must be worth the discipline of finding the time to check the answers at the end. Some of the simple errors or clumsy phrases could be avoided if checked. If in fact the errors are from genuine lack of knowledge, then (obviously) the guilty parties are simply not well enough prepared for the exam:

“Quality of wine points to Cotes de Nuits in Cote d'Or.....suggests a good area such as Chassagne Montrachet.”

“Suggests Cotes de Beaune....Pommard or Chambolle Musigny.”

".....suggests Cabernet Franc, Tempranillo, Sangiovese, Barbera or Mencia. 'Okuzgozu' from Turkey also considered" - but no conclusion drawn. We cannot give any marks if we are simply given a list of diverse options.

".....apart from the tannins which stood out, it is well balanced."

“Wine 2 is a younger wine, probably 2007, showing bright red, with primary fruit on nose and palate.”

PRACTICAL PAPER 3

Question 1

Generally well answered and good candidates scored well here. Most identified the country as Italy, a few as Australia (Lambrusco is different from Shiraz) and one or two tried to shoehorn the wines into France. Candidates generally did well on the differences between the two Charmat and one Traditional Method wines. Sugar and alcohol levels were well identified, too. Some did not know the detailed geographical origin of Franciacorta and even, in some instances, Lambrusco and Prosecco.

Question 2

Most candidates spotted Semillon as the common theme here, although a few tried Riesling. Hunter style generally recognised, although very few candidates spotted how old it was (not easy, given its colour). Wine 5 was commonly thought a Semillon/Sauvignon blend, although some candidates placed the wine in Margaret River, understandably. The use of oak was not always identified. Wine 6 was identified as a Sauternes, although some candidates thought it Australian. The age of the wine and the quality level (not in fact ultra premium) were less well assessed.

Question 3

Some very mixed responses here, with the best candidates identifying origin, variety and residual sugar levels. Others were way off and appeared to have limited knowledge of, say, how sweet an Icewine is. Half a dozen candidates were able to spot the difficult wines by logical deduction. Many other candidates got the wines geographically wrong, but were able to pick up good marks through their reasoning.

Wine 7 was the wine that most people got right, although some placed it in the Rheingau. Or even New Zealand. Many answers showed good general knowledge of the way Kabinett styles are produced.

Wine 8 was the least well answered of the group, along with Wine 10. It was not easy: an unfamiliar grape, passerillage, a mix of stainless and some older oak. But good candidates, even if they didn't recognize the wine, picked up marks for good deduction: Loire Chenin, for example.

Wine 9 was recognised by a good number of candidates as Tokaj, although some were a little shaky about production methods. Generally, this was the second best answered question among the sweeter wines.

Wine 10 was tricky – exotic sweetness and not immediately clear whether the sweetness was from botrytis or not. Also difficult to identify, partly because it was a blend. Another wine that required candidates to assess the options and make a methodical choice. Not jump into one particular style just because they had chosen their other 5 options so this one 'had' to be whatever seemed to be left over!

Wine 11 was nailed by a few candidates, but most thought it was aged in oak and was much less sweet than it is. Candidates should taste more Icewines, especially those made from Vidal, as this should be an easy wine to spot: very sweet, unoaked and high in acidity.

Wine 12 was generally well answered, although some thought it came from southern Spain. Most spotted the VA, the oxidative handling and the dried grapes. The common error was to overestimate the amount of alcohol here and underestimate the amount of sugar (close to 300 grams).

DISSERTATIONS 2013

By Benjamin Lewin MW, Dissertation Moderator

There was a significant improvement in the quality of dissertations this year, with the result that the overwhelming majority (92%) passed. A large number of dissertations continue to be based on surveys, mostly of producers or the trade, although this year saw the inclusion of several direct consumer surveys. This avoided the problem that has been encountered in previous years when attempts were made to define consumer attitudes by indirect surveys of the trade. Also, candidates were careful either to demonstrate statistically that their surveys were representative, or where this was not possible to define the resulting limitations. As a result, there were no failures because of problems with survey design as such. There continues to be something of a problem with attempts to compare producer and trade attitudes through surveys, or to compare attitudes through surveys with responses to tastings, insofar as the two aspects are not always directly well enough related.

Candidates are reminded that research methodology needs to address directly the issues raised in aims and objectives. The most common problems of prior years have been surveys that ask for opinions rather than facts, often with sets that were too small: these were largely avoided this year. One remaining problem is that surveys sometimes fail to ask the questions that are most pertinent to the conclusions: the use of pilot surveys would help to sharpen the final surveys and avoid this problem.

There is still a tendency to rely too heavily on semi-structured interviews or other sources of information that tend to be descriptive. Candidates are reminded that interviews are useful for defining the issues that will be investigated and for completing the background, but are unlikely in themselves to be the basis for a successful dissertation. It remains important to distinguish the new information provided in the dissertation from data based on prior reports or other sources in the public domain.

Dissertations should never be predicated on a specific outcome but should follow the principle that the results will be of interest irrespective of their outcome. Conclusions should follow directly from the information that is presented in the paper.

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