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ARTS & LIFE

Much industry debate over wine labels

By SEAN WOOD *Wood On Wine*

One of the more thought-provoking events I attended at the recent Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival was a symposium on truth in labelling.

This far-ranging exercise attempted to look at every conceivable aspect of what goes into a bottle of wine and how much should be disclosed on the label. Issues raised included food safety, concerns regarding potential allergens, additives, authenticity of origin, sustainability and fair trade.

It was noted that giant retailer Walmart is planning to taste something like 200,000 products around the world in order to identify every single ingredient. The symposium was concerned with the worrying question: Is wine going to get drawn into this kind of world?

The distinguished panel was led by Anthony Gismondi, editor of Wine Access magazine and one of Canada's most respected wine writers. Panellists included Arnold Schwisberg, a leading commercial litigator specializing in the field of beverage alcohol, and representatives from three well-known wineries: Rodrigo Millan, marketing director for Caliterra in Chile; Marc Kent, winemaker and co-owner of Boekenhoutskloof in South Africa; and Jose Alberto Zuccardi, CEO of Familia Zuccardi in Argentina. The latter is behind the wildly successful Fuzion label that has taken the world by storm.

A number of panellists led off with their observations on the issues and then the audience, largely made up of wine industry professionals, was invited to respond to a series of questions leading off with this preamble:

"The age of scrutiny is here, and its truth sleuths are on the move in the vineyards and at the counter."

We were asked which of the following factors will be most important in encouraging the world of wine to know and disclose the truth — corporate social responsibility, industry standards and codes, laws and regulations, all of the above or none of the above.

Not surprisingly, there were many different opinions. Some people were very concerned about one issue or another; others felt concerns about labelling were somewhat overblown.

One thing most seemed to agree on was the importance of quality. The problem, of course, is that regulating the notion of quality is extremely difficult.

I think most would agree that authenticity of origin is the key information that should be truthfully disclosed on a wine label. The label should specify where the wine comes from, whether or not it is a blend and, if so, what is the blend? Where was it finished and bottled, and by whom?

In the final analysis it is you, the wine consumer, who really counts. I would be interested in hearing your views and would be happy to share them with other readers in a future column. If you would like to express your thoughts, please drop me an email.

REVIEWS

2009 Catena Alamos Chardonnay, 13.5%, \$14.79, NSLC Port of Wines: This is a modestly priced drop from the respected Catena winery showing ripe but very fresh-scented citrus and tropical fruit with light buttery and mineral notes on the nose. Generous citrus and tropical flavours accurately reflect the pleasing aromatics, finishing with appetizing minerality and clean, crisp acidity.

BARGAIN WINES

2009 Trapiche Varietal Range Pinot Grigio, 13%, \$10.49 (special price), NSLC: The San Juan region of Argentina is just north of Mendoza, bordering on the Andes and the terroir is generally quite similar to its larger neighbour. This wine shows straightforward citrus character backed by some mineral and brisk acidity. Good honest value and very easy to drink on a warm summer day.

2009 Trapiche Varietal Range Pinot Noir, 13.5%, \$10.49 (special price), NSLC: Shows varietal Pinot cherry and raspberry character with spicy scents and a whiff of herb. Red fruit flavours are backed by dry tannins and well-balanced acidity. Straightforward, but not uninteresting. Will pair well with roast beef, veal or roast fowl.