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MAGAZINE FOR OFF-PREMISE INNOVATORS

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July/August 2005

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Once Upon A Wine Trend

Will American's Love Affair With Wine Live Happily Ever After?

By Fred Tibbitts Jr.

Americans and our visitors are drinking more wine than ever before, and they are spending more for it both on- and off-premise. In fact, it is predicted with growing certainty by those who keep such statistics that the United States will become the top wine-consuming nation in the world by 2008.

I guess the folks predicting this rather welcome development haven't been listening very closely to the increasing cries of "yummy" from the growing wine consuming populace of China that is learning very quickly to appreciate red wine. They say that if the adult population of China ever decided to drink just one glass of wine a day, the vineyards of the world couldn't possibly supply it.

But have no fear, your favorite wine should be available in increasing quantities for quite some time to come, because not every adult in China is consuming wine; but many are awakening to the joy of good wine and any trend in China is serious when it comes to consumption, simply because we are talking billions rather than millions.

Good is What You Like

So what constitutes a good bottle of wine these days and what's new and exciting with respect to the world of wine this side of the pond, you ask?

Well, the definition of a good bottle of wine has not changed: It's what you

like — not what someone else likes. But the origin of more and more of the wines that Americans are consuming on- and off-premise is changing, as is the mix of grapes and the prices we are willing to pay for our wine.

There was a time not that long ago when the world's leading wine producing countries considered the typical American wine consumer to be neophytes not to be taken seriously (of course there always have been serious palates, educated collectors and wine authorities from the time of George Washington, but they were the exception, not the rule, statistically speaking). The majority of imported wines were aimed at entry level and elderly consumers who wanted the equivalent of adult Kool Aid (Reunite, Lancers Rose, Mateus Rose and Blue Nun being some prominent examples).

But we have changed for the good of the industry as well as our own palate satisfaction, and it would appear this trend will continue, if not accelerate. We are drinking more wine with food (a concept made popular by the

Europeans and brought to our shores with the waves of their immigrants who founded the American wine industry from New York to

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California). Restaurants are serving a better selection of wines by the glass, from very basic to very complex, carefully paired with the food offerings; waitstaffs are being trained as never before and wine preservation is at long last being taken seriously by more and more restaurants.

Wining and Dining

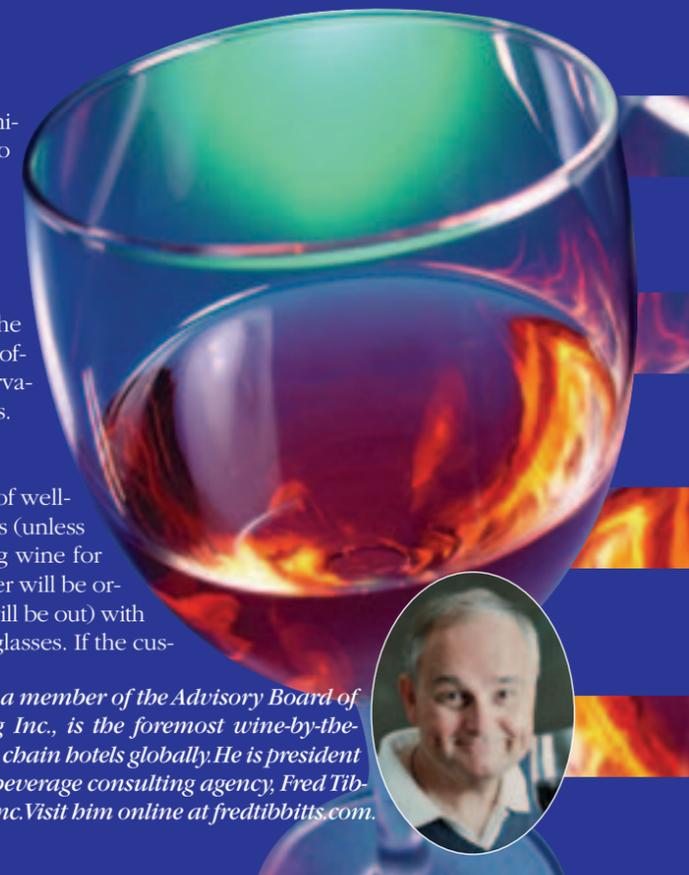
This does not mean that by 2008 you will be able to have a glass of well-made Cabernet Sauvignon with your Quarter Pounder at McDonald's (unless of course you travel to France where McDonald's has been serving wine for years), but it does mean that the assumption will be that the customer will be ordering at least one glass of wine as well as bottled water (tap water will be out) with lunch or dinner; so tables will be preset with both wine and water glasses. If the customer orders a bottle rather than a glass, the table will be reset with even larger, more expensive crystal in honor of the additional investment in the quality of their entertainment.

Consumers will be familiar with far more varietals and types of wines from around the world. The momentum towards Southern Hemisphere, new world wines will continue with no end in sight. So Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, South Africa, Canada and the United States (mostly California, Washington State, Oregon and New York) will comprise the majority of wine sales in the United States.

Europe or the old world will have regrouped and reinvented (except for the first growths and Champagne of France which remain in high demand globally). Italy, France, Spain, Germany and Portugal will form an alliance similar to the European Union and market their wines on a united front. The wines of Eastern Europe will have new fame, but will continue to be the stepchildren of their more globally recognized cousins to the West.

Ahead of its Time

Waitstaff will be far more sophisticated in terms of making the best suggestions for pairing the food and wine menus. Wine will be offered in virtually every chain beyond fast food, and those with a serious wine program will offer their selections by the taste (2 ounces), the half glass (3 ounces), the glass (6 ounces), the half-bottle (12 ounces) and the bottle (24 ounces); better wines will as well be offered by the magnum (36 ounces) and poured at the table in the best restaurants. **BR**



Fred Tibbitts Jr., a member of the Advisory Board of Oxford Publishing Inc., is the foremost wine-by-the-glass consultant to chain hotels globally. He is president of his own global beverage consulting agency, Fred Tibbitts & Associates Inc. Visit him online at fredtibbitts.com.

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