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Samantha Sans Dosage

The Pursuit of Happiness... One Glass of Wine at a Time •OR• Confessions of a Wine Slinger

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Wine Biz Interview #10 The Most Famous Wine Writer In The World, Eric Asimov



So I heard you're like famous and junk, so how's about telling me where you work?

Famous? Hardly. Junk? Maybe. The New York Times, of course!

You are aware that I asked that just so the first thing people read would let them know how wicked cool I am to be granted such an interview right?

Sam, I wouldn't be talking to you unless you were cool. "Wicked" makes it sound like you're a Red Sox fan or something crazy like that.



How long have you been writing for (ahem) The New York Times and was wine your first gig there?

I've been at The Times since 1984, before you were born, I think. Didn't start writing regularly until 1992, when I began reviewing cheap, offbeat restaurants. I started writing about wine, too, in 1999, and full-time about wine in 2004.

When did you first discover that you had not only a passion for wine but a talent for articulating it?

Let's just say that I used to write beer reviews for my high school newspaper, and they were well received. Things were different back in the 1970s. To be honest, conveying passion is never hard. Describing taste sensations and flavors in a way that is meaningful always is.

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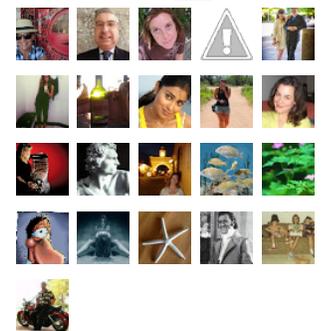
Best Sensual Wine Blog Winner

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Can you remember the first wine that flipped your switch?

When I was a grad student at UT Austin in the early 1980s, my friends and I often drank wine with dinners. Of course it was wine on a student budget – big bottles of Minervois, that sort of thing. One day in 1982, for whatever reason, I splurged on an \$8 bottle, a 1978 Barbera d'Alba from Giacomo Conterno. Just luck that I blundered into it. It was a revelation, unforgettable – the clarity of flavors, the shapely intensity of the fruit, the refreshment. I vowed back then that I would take whatever steps were necessary to insure that I would always drink that well.



Boxers or briefs?

You're not serious, are you? You honestly believe those are the only choices available to men?

I find that Rombauer Chardonnay makes me gag, you ever experienced that sensation with a wine?

More with wine writers than with wine.

You are often charged with having an Old World palate....do you hate America?

That's just crazy. Who says that, anyway? I do have my own palate, and I don't feel that I should pander to anybody by being uncritical. America makes wonderful wines and it makes bad wines, just as Europe and everywhere else does.

How do you feel about, and what do you think the future is for wine blogging?

I was happy to see that Decanter recently named the "Wine Blogger" among the 50 most powerful figures in wine. Bloggers have been instrumental in increasing the variety of points of view heard about wine, and making people feel more comfortable. The future? As long as Apple doesn't invent an app that does the job, we will continue to hear more voices regardless of the specific form or platform.

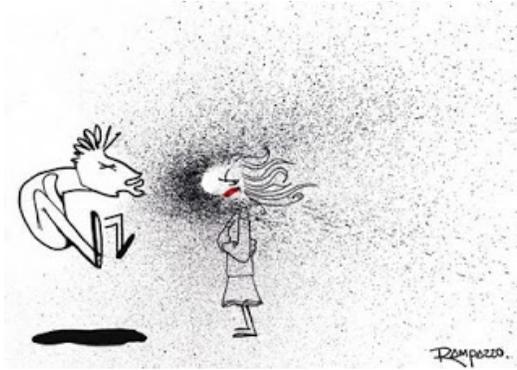
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Ever chap your hide that you are among the most respected of all wine writers and have, as of yet, not won a wine blog award?

I don't consider myself a blogger since the Pour blog's demise. And no, I'm happy that the awards have not gone to corporate bloggers.



Have you ever sneezed while peeing?

Was you ever bit by a dead bee?

As a fellow lover of lower alcohol and less extracted wines I have to ask, you ever feel like there is a massive double standard when it comes to what is deemed “acceptable” when discussing your preference?

Well, since you put it that way...I have noticed that some people have gotten upset if I try to highlight other styles of wine, which, over the last decade or so, got virtually no critical praise. I don't remember them getting upset when James Laube suggested Monte Bello was better suited for chardonnay than cabernet sauvignon, or when Parker criticized Steve Edmunds for making French-style wines in California.

Do you consider yourself a critic or a reporter?

I consider myself a wine writer. However, my job title at the NYT is wine critic, which I think is important, at least in the nomenclature of the NYT. It means that The Times considers wine, like art, film, books, food, theatre, architecture etc., an expression of culture worth discussing and analyzing. It's more than just a beverage in a glass. We didn't have a wine critic before 2004, which shows both how far wine has come in the United States, and how lucky I was to benefit from decades of Frank Prial's brilliant work.

Hangover cure of choice?

Water. Lots of it. And Underberg.



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Sara in Le Petit Village

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1 year ago

Afro on the Rocks

Kentucky Love in the LBC
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Your most cringe inducing wine comment is?

“Killer.”

Single worst wine you’ve ever tasted?

Purged my memory.

Is there a wine that still haunts you? One that slithers along your spine and digs its nails into your back.....left a whisper that you are still following?

I hope whatever I’m drinking with dinner tonight.....

Guilty pleasure drink?

Lemon-lime Gatorade.

**Is there a wine writer, now or historically, that makes you say, “Damn, I wish I could have written that”?**

Frank Prial. Hugh Johnson. A.J. Liebling. Andrew Jefford. Robert Camuto. People who can place wine in the context of culture without unduly fetishizing esoteric aromas and flavors.

How many wine blogs do you read on a regular basis?

Nowadays, whichever I get directed to by Twitter.

Playing rock star in your car, who do you pretend to be?

How about with an iPod on the Subway? Hank Williams, Howlin’ Wolf, John Coltrane, John Lee Hooker, Merle Haggard.....

Dry boogers, ever an issue when evaluating wine?**hammered**

Butcher, writer, winemaker
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VinoFictions

3 years ago

cook plate shoot

cherimoya punch
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Benito's Wine Reviews

Dinner at Goldsmith's in Memphis,
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notes from the winemaker

The Naturalistic Fallacy
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Midtown Stomp- A Memphis Food & Wine Blog

The List of 30
6 years ago

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6 years ago

Peter Liem's Champagne Guide**Alice Feiring - In Vino Veritas**

The Wine Country

Beaune Imports

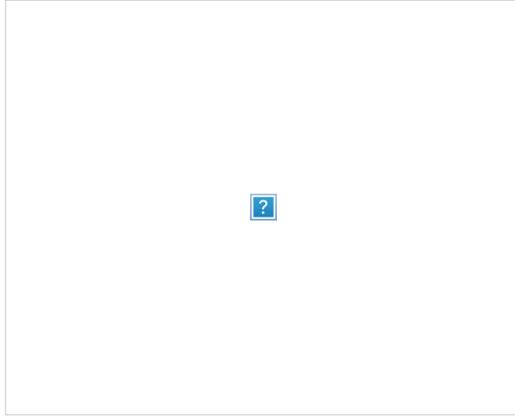
I try to avoid solids in wine.

Last two publications on the rack; Wine Advocate or US Weekly...what do you grab?

Wine Advocate. I'm a subscriber.

Is there a winery or winemaker that you find hits your, "Damn" button every time?

Do men have "Damn" buttons? I'm not sure. I get a lot of chills in my neck and shoulders, though.....



Stumbling home from a long night of over consumption, what do you eat?

My mattress.

Percentage of overall consumption red to white?

40 percent to 60 percent

Chocolate and wine, yay or nay?

Ugh.

I've heard, (and yes I am boasting a bit) that you read this stupid blog of mine from time to time...how the hell did you end up here?

I probably googled wine and lingerie, or something.

You have a way of writing that is so precise and focused but still informs and leaves us twitching to get our hands on that thing, that thing you just told us about...how do you do that? Is it like the, "take a look in the mirror and the most glaring object, remove it" kind of deal or is it really just that easy for you? (and yes, I am glaring at you)

If only you knew how difficult answering this questionnaire is!

If you had to describe your passion for wine, without words, by sharing three bottles with me, what would they be?

Impossible question! OK, I will finesse this by ruling out the historically great wine regions: No Champagne, no Burgundy, no Bordeaux. Let's instead have three bottles nobody ever heard of, which I think express cultures that have developed over the course of centuries. We'll start with a rosé from Iroulegy, from grapes grown in the Basque country in the southwest corner of France, a wine that transcends the notion that rosé is innocuous, and connotes mountains, hard work, sweat and pleasure. Then, to bring it home, a white from California, from Napa Valley, no less, a wine that represents free-thinking individualism, that goes against everything that people assume about Napa. It's the Napa White from Matthiasson, a family venture that epitomizes the do-it-yourself American ethos that we venerate so freely in mythology but so rarely in real life. It's a blend of grapes rarely associated with Napa, like ribolla gialla, tocai friulano and sémillon, along with sauvignon blanc. Finally, we must have a red. I want one wine that is indisputably great, yet also an example of uncompromising passion. I would choose a bottle – let's make it a magnum! – of 1971 Monfortino from Giacomo Conterno, the same producer who made my formative bottle of barbera d'Alba . It's a wine that quite simply leaves me speechless, which is the absolute best response a wine writer can have.

The most frustrating part of your job as Most Famous Wine Writer in the World?

Parting the screaming crowd as I try to make my way to the limo that will carry me to my private jet for lunch on my terrace on the Côte d'Azur. Actually, you're confusing me with Steve Heimoff. I'm the Most Handsome Wine Writer in the World.

**You are invited to a party and bring a chilled bottle of Muscadet but when you walk in and hand your refreshing gift over are handed a glass of Molly Dooker Blue Eyed Boy....what do you do?**

I say, "Thank you." I firmly believe that bottles given to the hosts are for the hosts to enjoy on their own time.

Three wine bloggers you would love to spend an evening eating and drinking with?

You, Renee Zellweger and Keira Knightley. You all write about wine, right?

Worst trend in wine in the past ten years?

I actually think more great wine from more different places in a great diversity of styles is available today than ever before. Are there pernicious trends? Yes, mostly having to do with marketing, pandering, fad chasing, wine manipulation, etc. But, as with anything else, you have to learn to steer clear of the bullshit.

Most exciting?

The understanding that wonderful wines can come from all over the wine-producing world, not just those pantheon regions focused on obsessively by most wine publications.

When you read a wine description that is all, “Laced with Colombian coco, Washington cherries, #2 pencil lead, currants, mustard seed, sweaty leather and pork rinds” or whatever do you think the writer is crazy, has a brilliant palate or is full of absolute shit?

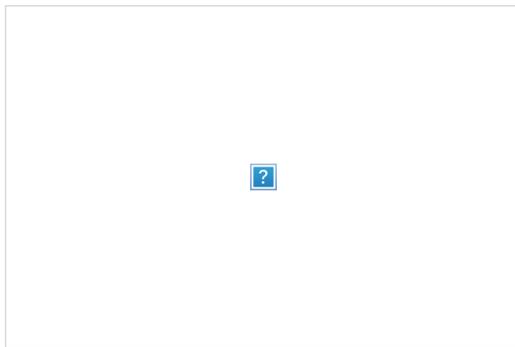
Delusional conveyance of useless information.

Region you find yourself drinking above all others?

These days, I’m fascinated with Sicily. Also the Jura, the Loire, the Mosel, Jerez, Beaujolais, Valtellina, Santa Cruz Mountains.

Advice for delusional bloggers that wish to make wine writing their full time gig?

Go for it! But don’t drain off the trust fund.



Gary V, super genius or crank yanker?

Genius. And a nice guy. And a great Jets fan!

Orange wines, fad or here to stay?

A fad since 1500 B.C.



If I told you that the night I heard that you not only knew who I was, but that you read and respected my writing was one of the most affirming and proudest moments of my wine and blogging career...would you let me kiss your adorable face and share a glass of Champagne with me?

Aw, Sam, make it a bottle and you're on.

POSTED BY SAMANTHA DUGAN AT 8:14 AM 

LABELS: WINE BIZ INTERVIEWS

20 COMMENTS:



Thomas said...

"Was you ever bit by a dead bee?"

Walter Brennan--To Have and Have Not?

(I am sure that Hosemaster knew that)

Nice interview, and Eric answered beautifully, mostly.

JUNE 7, 2011 AT 8:26 AM

SUAMW said...

"Delusional conveyance of useless information". Kind of like knowing that maltol smells like creme brulee and comes from oak (not sur lie time), - as does furaneol, which smells like strawberry jam or dried tropical fruit. So it's useless to know that? We can just say that the wine is "fruity" (when in reality it has gobs of oak).

An accomplished winemaker told me that there is nothing a wine critic can teach him or contribute to his understanding about his wines - I think it's because most wine critics dismiss this real information as "useless information", refuse to try to learn it, focus on creative writing and "cultural context" and "experience" rather than actually understanding wine (or whatever the subject at hand is). Which is how Le Tourment Vert is declared a good "absinthe"....

Now, can I get a mop? It's all wet and sticky in here....

JUNE 7, 2011 AT 10:38 AM



The Passionate Palate said...