

**WARNING:
The following may be too esoteric and downright
boring for the average wine drinker to read!**

World Wine vs. Authentic Wine – Who Cares?

By: Philip Bernot

There is an epic battle raging right now in the wine world. At stake are the palates (and wallets) of wine drinkers around the globe. That battle is between the stylistic taste differences of world wine vs. what I call “authentic” wines.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the good guys are losing.

World wines are all the rage right now. The world wine style can be neatly summarized by two components: wood and extraction. Authentic wines are not as easily defined, but I like to say that authentic wines are a true taste of the place where they are made. World wines are fruit-driven (fruit being the primary characteristic), and most of these wines are borderline sweet, though the wine buying public would collectively rather die than admit their predilection for sweeter wines!

Authentic wines are much harder to get to know than their gregarious world wine cousins, but can be infinitely more rewarding (isn't that always the way?). World wines get by far more press; authentic wines by their nature are doomed to relative obscurity except amongst a small percentage of wine cognoscenti.

So why should you care? For starters, you don't have to care and I would suggest that the vast majority of wine buyers do just that. But you *might* want to care for this reason: there could come a time when there is nobody left who remembers what authentic wines taste like. Imagine if Baskin-Robbins had 31 different flavors *of Vanilla*? Most of Australia, lots of California, parts of Italy, larger parts of Spain and smaller parts France have jumped on the world wine bandwagon with glee. To their great financial success, I might add.

Australia has turned the wine world upside down (get it?) in the last couple of decades. Not only did the Aussies provide copious amounts of well-priced fruit-driven, high extraction wine to a thirsty public, they completely revolutionized how wine is labeled. Apparently many people are more comfortable buying Woop-Woop, Jim-Jim, and Hooley-Dooley than they are Macon-Villages and Domaine Fillintheblank. Why? I haven't any idea!

Many of these world wines are quite tasty, although at least an equal number are boring beyond belief. Much of it goes back to the taste of oak. Too much oak can easily mask any fundamental shortcomings that a wine might possess, but every week I see a customer react positively to what I consider fatal amounts of oak in a wine. I think oak in wine production is like salt in cooking: the proper amount is indispensable, too much ruins everything. Then there is extraction, which can include both fruit and alcohol. Many of the most popular wines on the market today taste more like grape jelly to me than wine, and the majority are too “hot,” or exhibit high levels of alcohol that are out of balance with the overall structure.

You can mark these rants down to the bitter ramblings of a traditionalist, but when I first became interested in wine, it was largely because of all the fascinating styles and types that were produced around the world. World wine tends to focus on a few select varietals, and frequently you can't tell if the wine was made in Barossa, Tuscany, Napa, or on Mars! Authentic wines, however, are the distinctive flavor of the place - unique, challenging, and all together fascinating.

P.S. Like everything else in life, the above opinions are full of ambiguities and can be refuted easily on a case-by-case basis!