AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF VITICULTURE AND OENOLOGY

Australian Society
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Who's Running This Show?

Future directions for the Australian wine show system

Proceedings of Seminar held in Melbourne in August 2001

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ASVO SEMINAR

Who's Running This Show? Future Directions for the Australian Wine Show System

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Contents

The Australian wine show system: a SWOT analysis

James Halliday
WinePros, Vic.

This keynote address presents a SWOT analysis—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats—of the Australian wine show system.

Strengths

A history stretching back over three centuries

The history of wine shows does go back a long way—over three centuries. That's one of those funny things that we do now, when we really mean 150 years. But it's striking, when reading back, how many of the issues today were in fact issues back in the 1800s—perhaps of slightly different dimension, but they certainly existed.

George Wyndham wrote to the Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) in Sydney in the 1880s, complaining bitterly about the fact that they were now awarding mere parchment certificates instead of gold—meaning real gold—silver and bronze medals. He also urged that the Royal Sydney Wine Show be held not in February, which was in the middle of vintage, but be moved to the far more sensible time of May. A hundred and fifty years on, nothing has been done about that. You can't rush these decisions, obviously!

There were also quite striking differences of opinion between the councillors of the RAS and the stewards running the show about the minimum volumes for entry.

Broadly speaking, it has worked very well, and certainly better than the system(s) in operation in any other country

The system has worked well over this period of time: the frequency of shows; their structure, which is, or has been very logical; the experience of Australian wine show judges; and the basically cooperative environment which, at least in recent times in the shows, has existed both between the judges themselves and between the judges, the stewards and the committees.

There is a legion of tales from earlier of battles royal between judges. In Brisbane, three of the judges got into such a tizz on the first day that they stalked out and refused to speak to each other at all during the ensuing three days— not even what time they would be in the lobby and whether they were going to get a bus or a taxi. There was also the famous Peter Lehmann line that 'I can take off more points than you can add on' when becoming involved in a fairly heated discussion. There was a time when the chairman of judges at a particular show went to sleep in the morning, having had a few quick snorts to start the day off, and was still asleep when the judges went to lunch. When they came back they found that he'd rejudged the classes of that morning for them, with very different results. But those are things in the past, and one always goes for the headlines in that sort of circumstance.

It is transparently open to the whole industry to participate

The system is a transparent one, and the fact that some makers choose not to enter does not in any way, shape or form indicate a flaw in the system. It's simply a choice situation. It should be widely recognised that show results are but one indicator of a wine and its potential. There are many other ways of coming to a view about that wine, and certainly a single take or even a multiple take from a wine show isn't the end of the road.

It can and does serve two masters to a surprising degree

There are two master issues which will inevitably be discussed today—improving the breed on the one hand; promotional marketing on the other. Wine shows should continue to be, as they were originally conceived to be, for the improvement of the breed. This view disagrees with Brian Croser in his attitudes or in his initiatives at least, taken with the Adelaide Show, to try to introduce price classes that are aimed at helping, or intended to help, the consumer. Marketers will always take advantage of show results if they so wish and the results are there. That should be the tail. It should not be the dog under any circumstance. There will inevitably be more discussion about these issues during the day.

It promotes the proactive discussion and development of style between the industry's top winemakers in a non-adversarial environment

There is a perception that judges determine wine style, that they somehow or other take the industry by the nose and say, 'You will make a Chardonnay this way; you will not make it that way.' The corollary of that is that exhibitors enter wines specifically structured for wine shows. But what does the perception that judges determine style really mean? If it means that they assist in the development of style and the improvement of the style, it's good. If, however, it means that one gets stuck in a tram track—of excessive oak, for example, which was tolerated for a while—that is not good. It's one of those emotive lines that are often used by journalists who don't really have any particular understanding of the way the wine show works.

The discussion that occurs at the end of the classes, in the more general environment and in the panel chairman's instruction to the judges is fundamental to the show. It is a fully proactive environment and that discussion at the end, particularly about the gold medals and the points of disagreement, is very, very valuable.

It has an in-built succession plan through the training of associates

The in-built succession, of course, comes through the associate judge system and to a certain extent, the junior judges, remembering that you have then got panel chairmen and show chairmen to come through the system. This is under severe threat at the moment. Indeed, it would not be going

too far to say that, at the moment, it's basically been thrown out with the bathwater through the time pressures. This will be examined again shortly. But nonetheless the system is there and it's a very, very worthy system, having the three associates backing up the three judges.

It provides extra-curricular general wine education for judges and associates
Len Evans was one of the people, if not the person, most responsible for getting this tradition going. It must have been in 1977 that this author brought along a '61 Burgundy to a wine show dinner. Brian Barry took one sniff of it, immediately rejected it as being unfit for drinking because it was volatile, and so far as he was concerned that was the end of the matter. When questioned, it turned out that he'd never tasted a Burgundy in his life; he'd never even tasted a Pinot Noir.

It's strange, looking back on this relatively short period of time, how common that was through the Australian wine industry. Many winemakers and judges had no experience of the great wines of the world and, in particular, those from France. What happened then was that seeing an array of these wines in the evening caused the senior winemakers, who are judges, to go back to their companies and say, 'Hey! We ought to spend some money and we ought to do some Friday afternoon tastings, because we think that there is a great deal to be learnt out of that.' This duly happened, so the next thing was that the senior winemakers then went off overseas to see for themselves where and how these wines were made, and that in turn led to the flying winemakers.

Important networking opportunities for participants
One of the major reasons for the Australian wine industry's success has been the willingness within the industry to share knowledge, to share thoughts, to share questions. There are very few no-go areas. One or two companies might have a few, but the vast majority doesn't. This has been a focal point for that sort of networking and, of course, bringing winemakers from all over Australia together.

Weaknesses

The seeming inability to control the ever-growing:
a. Length of show
Here we get to some of the nasty bits—the length of the show, the number of panels, the size of the classes, and the number of wines to be judged every day. The length of a capital city show should be a maximum of three and a half days or towards the end of a fourth day, not five or more, for two main reasons. First, if you're there for a whole week at the show, you're really away from your place of work, effectively, for nine days once you add in the weekends, and that is clearly excessive. If you at least get back on the Friday, you can clear the desk and it's not so bad. One has to remember that the more senior the judges, the more senior their position in the companies for which they work or, if they are freelance-style judges, they are probably self-employed and the implications are not dissimilar. Second, the concentration required has to be experienced to be believed, and four days leaves a judge mentally exhausted.

b. number of panels
The number of panels should be three, preferably. You can possibly extend it to four, but under no circumstances can a show be effectively run if there are five panels. The chairman of the show has a full-on job, rushing between light-bodied table wines, fortifieds and reds, as it is. If you go to four panels, the more likely it becomes that there will be intersecting and radically different classes to deal with simultaneously. With five panels, this is certainly so.

So what then happens? Well, either the chairman doesn't get to give any input at all, or some of the classes will be standing around waiting for the chairman to get free of the discussion at the other side of the room. The chairman, for his or her part, becomes acutely aware that people are standing on their feet waiting for him, and probably won't give as much time to the discussion. Some classes really do require a lot of discussion, and the value of that discussion has already been mentioned.

c. Size of classes
Humungous these days; classes of more than 200 for Chardonnay, Shiraz and Cabernet are now the rule rather than the exception. Some shows expect the judges to sit down at the start of the day and work their way through 200 Chardonnays or 200 one-year-old Cabernets or more, and the numbers in these classes are going up alarmingly. A class should not be greater than 60, and certainly nowhere near 200. Yes, you can split the classes between judges. It's a band-aid solution; it does give rise to practical problems; it does slow the show down.

d. Number of wines to be judged every day
This should not be more than 150. Yes, judges have shown themselves capable in terms of getting through the day and putting some points against all wines, but doing up to 220, 230, even 240 is ridiculous. Contrast that with what the OIV says is a proper approach: no more than 15 wines in a class and no more than 45 wines in a day. While it is not suggested we adopt that standard, you can't ignore it as entirely frivolous.

Confusion and/or disagreement on the fundamental purpose
There is obviously confusion about the purpose—and this is going to be a repeating theme through this paper and others. It underlies some of the less well-argued or informed criticism, basically suggesting that shows ought to be made simpler for consumers; that Class 1 in Sydney should be the same as Class 1 in Canberra, and so on and so forth. Manifestly, that's impossible. Let's assume for the sake of the argument that Riesling is Class 1. (It used to be; it no longer is in most shows.) In Canberra (which is held in November) the wines will all be the wines of that year. In Sydney (held nine months earlier) they will not be of the year of the show, but the year before. And as you go back throughout the year or go on, your compositional base is changing as wines sell out and are no longer available. Also, of course, they will have changed significantly if they are light-bodied wines.

Increasingly insufficient time for training associates (and hence succession planning)
This point concerns succession planning. Judges really do have to rush on through the calling of the points. It is forced on them by the system to say to the associates, 'We're going to add up the judges' points and concentrate on those. If you don't understand what the judges have done or if your points are wildly askew, please shout and we'll stop.' It doesn't often happen; most of the time they are intimidated. It shouldn't be that way. It should be the judges seeking to involve the associates in discussion if they are really going to properly train them and gain the benefit of having them there in the first place.

Blatant inconsistencies in results/pattern of results between shows/groups of shows
It is generally accepted by the industry that there are shows

which could be called 'good' and shows which could be called 'bad'—shows at which the results, or success, are generally regarded as meaningful and other shows less so. After an examination of the pattern of results (and this in turn may also reflect the commonality of judges) the Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Hobart and quasi national shows tend to group together on one side of the divide—Adelaide, Sydney and the national show in Canberra on the other side. The pattern that emerges is quite consistent.

No generally agreed criteria for:
a. selection of judges
There are no generally agreed criteria for the selection of judges. So far as selection, some shows exclude exhibitors. Other shows, equally insidiously, have a 'one judge per wine group' rule. Going back to the issue of excluding judges as exhibitors, the industry has passed beyond the stage where that is a necessary or proper approach, although the argument is understandable.

The 'one judge per group' is of concern. From experience at the Adelaide show, it was essential to have four good panel chairs. You really can't run a show as chair unless your panel chairs are good, so there were four good panel chairs who, in almost all instances, were senior winemakers with one or other of the big companies. That meant there could not be any junior judges from the same companies, who by right should have been in the show. Not inviting the seniors so the younger judges could have a go was a possibility, but the cure might well have been worse than the illness.

b. qualification of wines for entry
There are varying rules for quantities. This is not necessarily disturbing, but it's one of the factors in making the shows less transparent and easily understood by consumers. If you start yapping at them about 2,250, 4,500, 9,000 and 22,500 litres, their eyes will glaze over. The other issue is what could be called true ownership, which will be addressed later on.

c. description of classes
This ought to be the easiest problem to solve, but each show determinedly marches off in its own direction. Some write specifications (or guidelines) for each class, others none at all. Some arrange the classes by variety and vintage, others by (for example) body and finish, thus medium-bodied soft finish, full-bodied firm finish, and so on.

Big companies bowing to demands of their marketing departments and using scatter-gun approach to entries
This has been discussed by some of the group winemakers in the big companies—that they should refuse to enter wines unless they genuinely think they have a chance of winning a gold medal. It's always there as an idea. There are a number of possible solutions here. One is 'Three strikes and you're out.' In other words, once a wine has been entered three times and hasn't won a medal on those three entries, that's it, it can't be entered again. Also, one could tighten up on the 'one entry per class' rule—commonly two entries, but you can take that back to one. Lastly, there is the pre-qualification route, which again is going to come up for discussion later this day—the pyramid system.

Entry of un-bottled wines permitted by some shows
Un-bottled wines have no business in national wine shows. Also, there should be no continuation of the 'very highly commended', 'highly commended', 'commended' system. That is the ultimate deceit so far as consumers are concerned. Where should un-bottled wines appear? In the regional shows. But there they should be entered on the basis that all the judges will do is comment on the winemaking faults or, for that matter, virtues. This method works at the Tasmanian Wine Show, albeit a much smaller show with much easier one-to-one contact. Reactions may be, 'Bottle it immediately. It's great now. Don't muck around;' 'For God's sake, get some sulfur into it;' 'Fine it heavily;' or 'Don't even bottle it.'

Opportunities

To devise means of simultaneously clarifying messages to consumers and improving the breed.
To better educate both trade and media about the process and outcomes of shows

Obviously, to be positive, ways should be devised of simultaneously meeting the improvement of the breed and marketing functions. This and the next point—better education of trade and media—are linked. Those who have seen some of the most virulent criticism know that it comes from people who either have not participated in a show or who have some particularly iconoclastic views. Some people at this seminar may have read a marvellously vitriolic paper by John Middleton, who might have delivered it today had he not been certain that he would have had a cardiac arrest while giving it.

But it turns out—and Middleton says this in his paper—that his experience of wine shows came from just one; it was many years ago; it was in Perth; and the rudeness that he saw there between the judges and hostility between them made him realise that the show system was a farce. However, that's just not the way the show system works these days.

To devise a pyramid system of qualification criteria for entry of wines into shows:
a. regional
b. state
c. national

This issue will not be addressed, as it is the subject of Tim James's presentation. However, it will be a major point for discussion, and the closer you get to it the more questions arise, even though it may ultimately be only one of the likely solutions.

As part of the pyramid system, to take back ownership from Royal Agricultural Societies whilst preserving their income and PR opportunities

No objection should be raised over the existing structure. What is of concern is that the shows should deliver the right outcomes for the wine industry as opposed to the right outcomes for the agricultural societies. Rightly or wrongly, there is a perception that shows are very good money earners for the show societies and that the councillors take away ever-increasing boot-fulls or truckloads of the wines left over.

Threats

Implosion due to inexorably increasing numbers of entries and class sizes
This is the biggest threat, and it comes out of all of the things earlier, as these figures show. If you have five panels of three judges, you get 15 man-days (or person days). If you judge for five days, it's 75 person days, and if there are seven shows, that equals 525 person days. If you then double that because you've got three associates, assuming you have three associates and three judges, you've got 1,050 person days. If you do

the same exercise with three panels of three judges at three and a half days, you get 220 and 440 respectively—in other words, significantly less than half.

Pseudo-national shows run by small regional associations
There is also what could be called the pseudo-national shows. Cowra is the most obvious of those, and it's acknowledged that there are people from Cowra here, but there are other shows which fall into the same camp—the Murrumbateman show, for heaven's sake. These either can or will discredit the system as a whole, and they worsen an already acute problem by the confusion that follows from the duplication.

If you then add in, on this workload, 20 worthwhile regional shows—two panels, three judges each, by two and a half days—you get another 300 person days. Add that up and you've got 1,550 judge or person days. This means that 310 weeks or six and a half years is being invested in the wine industry each year, and that cannot go on forever.

The pseudo-nationals like Cowra and Murrumbateman have an understandable value to the local communities. It's really like the RAS's, but multiplied because the background is smaller. But we can't sustain this. They are not logical.

Additional duplication of shows through (e.g.) cool climate shows, e.g. Mornington Peninsula, Bathurst
There is also further duplication through these curious shows: Mornington Peninsula, which the author has judged; Bathurst, which Nick Bulleid has judged. What does 'cool climate' mean? What's this all about? It goes nowhere in helping, unless they can be in some way equated and accredited to regional shows. There's a vague argument for it, but not a totally convincing one.

Cynical manipulation of brand ownership by large companies to effectively double or treble their entries in each class
This is one of the author's hobbyhorses; he attempted to rewrite the Adelaide regulations some years ago, with no success. Take the Seppelt Great Western Shiraz at the last Adelaide Wine Show. There were several gold medals for this wine, both in its standard and reserve form. There were perhaps four or six entries, and two of the Shirazes (because you had two entries per class) were entered by Great Western Champagne, noted producer of red wine! The remainder came from Seppelt's bona fide business name. All the big companies are guilty of this, trying to increase the number of entries they have by using subsidiaries which are just there in the corporate system—stock transfer journal done just before the entry is made, so legally it's okay.

Here the solution should be perfectly obvious: a medal can only be claimed, advertised or in any way used if it is the brand shown in the show entry and on the bottle when it is sold. In other words, there's a direct link to the brand entered in the wine show and shown in the catalogue—very important—and the wine that's ultimately sold.

Artificial barriers to selecting judges with the greatest skill and experience, e.g. Melbourne, Adelaide
These artificial barriers have been touched on before. If we do nothing to address the main issues, this is not necessarily going to lead to a contraction of the pool because these restrictions are already in place. However, it won't allow the pool to expand to meet the ever-increasing demands that are going to be put on the system.

Conclusion

The way forward will not be easy; wherever you look, the devil is in the detail. But the importance of a fully viable show system cannot be overstated. It has played a pivotal role in the past and must be allowed to do so in the future if the Australian wine industry is to keep its competitive edge in an increasingly competitive world.

Stakeholder presentation – wine show committee

Richard Haselgrove
The Capital City Wine Show – Melbourne, Victoria

The Wine Committee of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria (RASV) is in charge of the running of The Royal Melbourne Wine Show which is, by any measure, a large and successful wine show. What are its credentials? The RASV has been running exhibitions and competitions for agricultural pursuits for more than 130 years and no doubt wine samples were part of the very earliest exhibits. At this time Victoria was the predominant wine producing area of Australia, even earning the soubriquet of 'John Bulls Vineyard.'

The first recording of a wine competition in the society's history book *Speed the Plough* was in the year 1903. First prize of £100 and second of £50 were awarded in classes for 'farm, dairy, horticulture, wool, wine, root crops, minerals and wood', an eclectic gathering. The current format of the Royal Melbourne Wine Show dates from the 1930s and 1940s and was established by such wine notables as Tom Seabrook, W. W. Senior and George Fairbrother. It has been expanded and refined in line with the changing requirements of the wine industry. Today the show receives some 4,000 entries from about 470 exhibitors. These are to be judged by five panels of three senior judges assisted by around 40 paid and volunteer staff including associate judges, stewards, clerks, pencillers, et al.

In the late '60s a Federal Council wine committee, under the chairmanship of Colin Haselgrove, attempted over three years to develop a uniform schedule and set of regulations for Australian wine shows. After these had been agreed by the Federal Council, they were to be adopted by all the major shows in Australia. The uniformity lasted about one year, but ended when Sydney went one way and Adelaide went another.

The Royal Melbourne Wine Show divides into three distinct activities as far as the committee is concerned, with an overall annual budget of about $350,000. The first is the competition itself, the second is the wine awards dinner and the third is the matter of sponsorship. The competition is meant to be self-funding and includes such activities as underwriting (together with the Victorian Wine Industry Association (VWIA)) the visit to Melbourne of an international judge. The dinner is also meant to be self-funding after providing entree for sponsors, trophy donors, judging panels and so on. The committee sells sponsorship of the Royal Melbourne Wine Show and this provides the return on investment expected by the RASV for the use of facilities and 'know-how'. The committee's budget is not all the input to the worth of the Royal Melbourne Wine Show. Exhibiting winemakers make a huge contribution through the samples provided for assessment. With 4,000 entries and at least four bottles for each, the cost to the exhibitor is plenty.

The other significant input, which is impossible to quantify, is the volunteer contribution. These volunteers hail from the wine industry, from industries associated with the wine industry, from among wine 'amateurs' and from students of the hospitality industry. Of the 55 people involved with making the wine show a success, only some eight are paid staff of the RASV. The committee is extremely grateful to those who give so freely of their time and expertise. Today it is not necessary to debate the philosophy of the wine show system, nor how shows contribute to the success of the industry of which we are all so proud. This paper seeks to highlight the problems and opportunities for the RASV, and to demonstrate that they are closely related to the reasons for conducting this seminar. These are some of the issues the committee is grappling with.

Facilities

This refers to the physical facilities on the showgrounds. Showground buildings tend to be erected for purposes other than housing wine judging, such as trade exhibits, animal rings, sideshows, rock concerts, etc. The RASV has had on the drawing board for many years the ideal design for a purpose-built facility. Air-conditioned, full of indirect light, free from off-odours, warm and soft under-foot, with racking for 1,500 dozen bottles, modern glass-washing machines and judging benches for 400 wines at a time for 15 judges and 15 associate judges, not to mention computer terminals and communication facilities. The RASV is trying to make it happen with support from the Victorian State Government, but in the meantime must do its best with the P.B. Ronald Pavilion. This year once again the pavilion has been rearranged and the new layout, together with changed procedures, has given a few more years' breathing space. What is known however is that The Royal Melbourne Wine Show is nearing the limit of its physical capacity, for as the wine industry continues its rapid growth more and more winemakers want to exhibit. The RASV must do all it can to retain the integrity of the wine show.

Entry schedule

For the last 20 years the schedule of classes, quantities, conditions and wine definitions have continued to change and evolve. The main engine of change is consultation with the winemakers, which means for the committee the VWIA. The wine show committee has a formal meeting with the VWIA technical committee soon after the wine show each year and exchanges letters of suggestions and recommendations for change. Also on the committee are two former chairmen of the VWIA and a member of their executive, as well as two former presidents of the national wine industry body. The wine show committee tries very hard to ensure that the schedule aligns with current industry thinking, which is another reason it has welcomed the ASVO proposal for this seminar.

In more recent years a number of changes have been aimed at stabilising the number of entries. This year the show has incorporated the classes for Victorian wines into appropriate open classes for judging, relying on the magic of the computer age to identify entries worthy of receiving trophies relevant to Victorian winemakers. However, the committee is running out of ideas on how to keep the number entries within the show's competence. Serious suggestions are needed from this seminar.

It is clear that other major wine shows also appear to be grappling with the matter of rapidly increasing entries. It is rumoured that Sydney's huge increase in entry fees two years ago was an attempt to apply price control on numbers. This did not seem to work, but it did appear to make a lot of money.

Adelaide went the price point/labelled bottles route. It is not known if Adelaide's objective was achieved, but it certainly made it easier to conduct public tasting.

Panel of judges

A condition applying to all competitions conducted by the RASV is that no exhibitor is to be a judge in the section they have entered. This restriction does not apply to associate judges or stewards who participate in the wine show for training and for the experience, as well as for providing numerous pairs of hands. The panel of senior judges is of high calibre and has been for many years. A list of this year's judges appears below:

Bill Chambers (Chairman of judges)
Gary Baldwin
Nick Bulleid
Darryl Beeson (USA)
Andrew Corrigan
John Ellis
Mike Farmilo
Steve Guy
Ray Healey
Chris Killeen
Chris Pfeiffer
Randall Pollard
Ben Riggs
Peter Scudamore-Smith
Tony Royal
Tim White

The judges are unpaid, but do receive travel reimbursements. They are provided with accommodation in the city environs and travel to and from the showgrounds (arriving at 8 am and departing around 5 pm for four and a half days including a week-end—not for the faint hearted). Recently there have been discussions amongst the show societies about remuneration for judges. This, amongst other issues, raises matters such as PAYG tax and compulsory superannuation. To this time it has been felt that proper reimbursement of expenses is a more comfortable route. It is not an easy task to put together each year a panel of willing and able judges. The wine industry itself has a responsibility to provide training to potential wine judges, and the committee congratulates the AWRI and Adelaide University for their initiatives in this matter.

Is it a competition or an exhibition?

The RASV has always taken the view that the show is both. James Halliday has been a supporter of the view that 'the show system should be about improvement of the breed' and to that end the committee has always encouraged entries in classes for new vintage wines and for one year-old wines still undergoing bulk maturation. These classes seem of particular relevance to red wines and fortified wines, white, red and muscats. It is said that results in these classes are not relevant to 'customers', which begs the question of who these might be. It is worth remembering that for maybe a third of each new vintage, the customer is another winemaker, since trading between wine companies has always been an important feature of the Australian industry. This is also a feature of other world wine areas, although the trade in young wines tends to be more towards the shippers and wholesalers (and these days the huge retailers as well). This is where the Jimmy Watson Memorial Trophy had its origins.

Jimmy Watson, together with others such as Seabrooks, Rhinecastle and Harry Brown, bought one year-old dry red for bottling and marketing under their own labels and for distribution through their outlets. The RASV does not claim to have made the Jimmy Watson famous in the public domain. Most of those attending the seminar are responsible for having created the public's perception that the Jimmy Watson is the most important trophy in the Melbourne Wine Show. The committee understands, as does the industry, that it is a winemaker's trophy. However it also understands that all publicity is good, and is thus resigned to the media hype, good and bad, that accompanies the award of the trophy each year.

Why does the show award medals for so-called 'unfinished wine?' (One point of view is that a red wine in bottle is still 'unfinished' until the cork is pulled, even if that event is 10 or 20 years down the track. All accept that the great Muscats from the northeast are still in cask). Melbourne Wine Show gives medals in bulk wine classes for the same reason that junior athletes receive gold, silver and bronze in under-age competitions. They are the best in their class at the time.

Richard Haselgrove concluded his paper with the following remarks.

'I thank the committee of the Australian Society for Viticulture and Oenology (of which I think I was a founding member) for the opportunity of presenting to you today. I look forward with interest to the remaining contributions and the discussions today and in the months ahead. We don't need to re-invent the wheel, but we do need a more streamlined show system to cope with a rapidly expanding wine industry, which will serve us well into this new century.'

Reference

Speed the Plough, compiled and written by Frederick Noble and Robert Morgan; printed by Wilke & Co. Ltd. 1981 copyright.

Stakeholder presentation – wine committee, Royal Adelaide Wine Show

Brian Walsh
The Yalumba Wine Company, Angaston, SA

This paper is presented on behalf of the wine committee of the Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society of South Australia Inc. (RAHS, the Society). Wine shows, in particular the Adelaide Wine Show, are currently facing the following issues:

- How the Adelaide Wine Show sees its role.
- To whom is the Adelaide Wine Show responsible?
- How the 'agricultural exhibition' role reconciles with the 'consumer awareness' role.
- Growth—should it be curtailed and, if so, how?
- Does the RAHS of SA have a role in judge training?
- Is the RAHS of SA in it for the money?

Reference is given within this discussion to:

- Aspects of the history and evolution of the Society, including how it came to be running a wine show.
- The financial aspects of running a major agricultural show.
- Some of the major challenges facing the system and the Society's response.
- Possible future developments.

The proposition is put that the show system is in fair shape, albeit bulging at the seams, but it needs active support and involvement from industry to maintain and enhance its effectiveness. The current major task is to appropriately address the issue of industry growth. A larger ongoing challenge is to ensure that the wines that are the major recipients of accolades reflect styles that the industry collectively wishes to encourage.

The history

The RAHS of SA was founded in 1839. A non-profit organisation, its major activity is the staging of the annual agricultural show, which attracts about 600,000 people in an average year. Additionally the grounds are used for 340 days per year, with 180 individual events.

The RAHS manages a 28 ha site close to the Adelaide CBD. The property is leased from the State Government on a 60-year lease, although all infrastructure and improvements (book value approximately $25 million, insurance value approximately $100 million) are owned by the Society. Annual maintenance costs are around $1 million and the Society typically invests more than $2 million in capital projects on the site annually. Revenue from entries to the wine show represents about 1% of the Society's annual income stream.

The first Adelaide Wine Show was held in 1845 and through until 1871 the show was held in conjunction with the other 'produce' of the agricultural show. The show was part of a raft of programs including lectures and tastings of interstate and overseas wines, and despatch of local wine to international competitions—all aimed at improving the wines and growing the wine industry.

The agricultural societies performed the role that some 60–80 years later was partly taken up by the various state government departments of agriculture. The Society was the first exporter of wine from the colony and for more than 50 years played an agricultural support role similar to that subsequently assumed by the State Government Department of Agriculture.

The RAHS of SA was also the principal lobbyist for the establishment of Roseworthy Agricultural College.

In recent times the question 'Who is the show system there to benefit?' is often posed, particularly through the wine media. The roles and responsibilities of the RAHS of SA Inc. are embodied in the mission and action plans of its wine committee.

The mission

- To encourage and reward the **pursuit of excellence** in Australian winemaking by the staging of an annual wine competition.
- To **support the sales and marketing** of Australian wines by the promotion of the Royal Adelaide Wine Show and associated activities.
- To utilise the show as an **educational** resource, most particularly in sensory evaluation for Australian wine practitioners.
- To ensure the Wine Show has relevance to the **wine consuming market**.

In summary, competition, exhibition, promotion and education.

The wine committee is accountable to the council of the RAHS of SA, but its stakeholders include Australian wine companies and their employees, wine consumers, current and aspiring judges and wine-related educational institutions.

The actions to fulfil the committee's mission are:

- The use of highly skilled and **suitably qualified judges**, under the guidance of an experienced and visionary chairman of judges.
- The provision of a high quality tasting environment and a judging structure that minimises judging fatigue and **maximises the reliability of the results.**
- The annual review of the prize schedule to maximise its **relevance to exhibitors and consumers.**
- The annual review of a marketing plan to **promote and publicise** the event to exhibitors, media and consumers, both national and international.
- The **liaison with** major, appropriate wine-affiliated **educational institutions** to explore ways of assisting with sensory evaluation training.

The financials

It has become common to suggest that show societies are interested in expanding entry numbers (principally) because of the money-making potential.

The following 'dummy' Income and Expenditure table provides some realistic numbers on the costs of running a capital city wine show.

Income		
2,500 entries @ $47.50	=	$118,750
Sponsorship	=	$x?
Expenditure		
Judges expenses (16 judges @ 4 days @ $300/day	=	$19,200
Judges travel (1 international, 5 interstate, 10 local)	=	$10,000
Facility rental* (15 days @ $5,000/day)	=	$75,000
Salaries – admin & marketing, setup & management	=	$33,000
Printing, publications, promotions, postage	=	$22,250
		$159,450

* Typically facility usage is longer, say 21–25 days.

To break even the show would need approximately $40,000 in sponsorship. No provision has been made for up to 2,500 tasting glasses, tasting benches and other equipment and infrastructure.

Clearly the Society is not in it for the money, but it necessarily would seek to recover costs and hopefully show a modest return.

The challenges

Too many wines!

> '… judges should be limited to tasting 150 wines per day.'

> 'We consider it unfair that we are expected to judge 188 entries in 5–7 hours.'

Both comments are from the Royal Adelaide Wine Show—the former from James Halliday, immediate past chairman of judges, following the 2000 wine show and the latter from the judges' comments following the 1867 wine show.

The committee takes the view that an appropriate balance must be found between catering to the needs of an expanding industry, while not compromising the quality or integrity of the judging process. It has accepted the past chairman's advice to attempt to limit judging to 150 wines per day, and to not extend the judging duration beyond three and a half days, but not at this stage his recommendation on limiting the number of panels. Five panels will be introduced at the Adelaide Wine Show in 2001. This has been done in consultation with the new chairman and only after taking additional precautionary measures. To relieve as much as possible any undue strain on the chairman, a deputy chairman has been appointed and panel chairs have been asked to take extra responsibility.

This can only be done safely with high calibre panel chairs, and at Adelaide each of the panel chairs will have had chairman experience at a major show. The five panels have been introduced in advance of an absolute need to test the effectiveness of the system in a less pressured environment.

Enough judges?

In Adelaide at the 1871 show, there were four teams of five judges, with numbers increasing in 1872 to 27 judges. In Adelaide in 2001 there will be 16 judges plus 10 associates. It could be argued that judging has not kept pace with industry growth.

The committee agrees a larger pool of judges from which to draw panels is needed. It is suggested that it could be appropriate for the ASVO to be the custodian of a database of current and aspiring judges. In addition to listing their qualifications and experience, preferences for shows and availability by calendar could also be listed.

In 1992 the Australian Wine Research Institute commenced its Advanced Wine Assessment course and the Adelaide Wine Show has used this as a method for selecting associate judges. Since the commencement of the program some 50 people have entered the system through this method with less than 10 proceeding to full judge status at Adelaide.

In continuing to seek a balance of backgrounds in judging panels, there is a move to source more associates from the retail and restaurant sectors of the wine trade as well as from the media. The recently announced Len Evans Wine Tutorial is another positive move towards investing in the moulding of future judges. Programs such as Negociants Australia's *Working With Wine Scholarship* are further examples of areas for seeking future judges and associates.

It is critical that a way is found to identify these future judges and that:

- Show societies are prepared to take a few calculated risks on new entrants, and
- Established judges are prepared to step aside from time to time to create the space for the new entrants.

Associate training

This is a critical area of focus. It is indeed a valid criticism that the increase in exhibitor numbers can impact on the amount of time available. At Adelaide this year the panels are also being instructed by the Chairman to devote a specific amount of time to associate training, by way of suitable discussion time. The additional panel will assist in this process.

The Chairman has sought and received funding from the Society to invest in wines for a masterclass to be conducted by the international judge on one of the evenings during the judging. This initiative will serve to reinforce in a more focussed manner the palate training that continues after the wines have been judged.

Remuneration for judges

The Society takes the view that this is not a situation that can be looked at in isolation from the other activities of the Society. As they have constituencies far beyond the wine industry and as judges of no other class of exhibit are paid, it is reluctant to introduce payment for wine judges.

Until recently, remuneration was generally not an issue as many judges' salaries are willingly covered by their employer. However more and more judges are sought who may be self-employed, and it is acknowledged that the four days of unpaid leave may impose a financial impediment. This burden would be less significant if there were more judges in the pool, which would limit the amount of time any single judge was used. The Society will continue to monitor this situation. In the interim, the Society is moving further to ensure that it appropriately reimburses out of pocket expenses incurred by judges.

Exhibitor judges

It could be argued that if the sole purpose of the competition were to achieve commercial success through awards, then the use of exhibitor judges could be inappropriate. Given however that the show system has other aims, including 'improving the breed' and education through stakeholders, then the argument for not using exhibitor judges is less profound. The main task therefore is to ensure that no single judge can unduly influence the results in favour of his or her

company. At Adelaide this scenario has been addressed by limiting the number of judges from any one company, and by ensuring that no more than one judge from any company can be on a single panel.

Who IS running this show?

The wine industry has tended to be critical of the show societies, claiming that they are only interested in bigger and bigger shows, making money and having plenty of leftover wines to take home. However this is not the situation. Shows are generally volunteer organisations (with paid employees) which are interested in the active participation in, and promotion of, primary and secondary industries. Although not begrudging volunteer councillors having access to the leftovers, work must still be done in exploring a more sensible use of some of the excess wines, particularly in education.

For the wine industry to build on the existing platform, a good starting point would be more people offering their services to the show societies via wine committee membership. The societies have experience, facilities, resources and the desire to run wine shows for the benefit of, and in partnership with, the wine industry. Perhaps the partnership needs strengthening and the ASVO could be a conduit for a more aligned future.

Uniformity of structure between the majors

This issue was raised in 1872 by the Adelaide Society with a view to establishing judging uniformity at all the 'colonial' shows. The quality of the judging should be of the highest possible uniform standard across the country, and again the ASVO may be able to take a lead role here. Beyond that, it is appropriate that each show develops its own point of difference.

At Adelaide, the decision was taken in 1992 to make the show more oriented to the consumer, with approximately two thirds of all classes being dedicated to wines that are commercially available at the time of showing. To some this is seen as contrary to the 'improvement of the breed' ethos of shows. However the committee does not understand this argument.

Judging in the future?

Over the years there has often been criticism of the types of wines that appeal to both wine show judges and other wine critics.

> 'Thus influenced, even in their local exhibitions, the vignerons who organise them, forgetful of past lessons and indulging in self-glorification, instead of favouring clean, dry wines, as light as their climate can produce, adjudicate the greatest number of prizes to what their list of awards calls … full-bodied red, … – abomination of desolation.'
>
> Hubert de Castella, 1886, from *John Bull's Vineyard*.

Those who have been active in the judging system will acknowledge that successful show wines are not **always** thought of as great wines. Wine show organisers will continue to be challenged to address this paradox.

At Adelaide, while retaining the 20 point score system, the 3, 7, 10 point scale for colour, nose and palate has been abandoned. It is possible that to ensure the judges' scores reflect the attributes that the industry is seeking, a new scoring system will need to be provided where balance, length, structure, texture, concentration (as examples) are more formally assessed.

This point has been raised to reflect on how much more robust and educational the system would be if those companies who do not enter because their wines are 'not suited to the system' could be encouraged to do so, knowing they were going to get a fair review.

The Sydney International Top 100, where wine is judged with food, has presented another variation to the previously accepted method of wine assessment.

Conclusion

The Royal Adelaide Wine Show is keen to play a pivotal role in staging an annual wine show. It recognises that the current growth in the industry is putting strain on the available resources, but commits to liaising with stakeholders to meet their collective needs in the interests of enhancing the industry.

Although not 'in it for the money,' the industry is likely to have to face ever-increasing entry fees (or royalties on medal use?) as demands for higher performance outcomes from the show organisers necessarily ensue.

The committee encourages criticism of the existing system, particularly when improvements are recommended.

The author, on behalf of the Wine Committee of the Royal Adelaide Show, would like to thank the ASVO for the opportunity to participate in this forum. The committee believes that the ASVO could have an ongoing role to play in judge development, establishment of common judging standards and liaison with the major show organisers.

Stakeholder presentation – the Cowra Wine Show: a snapshot

Terry Coates
Cowra Wine Show Committee, Cowra, NSW

The Cowra Wine Show does not consider itself a regional wine show or a national wine show, rather it exists to service the Australian wine industry as a whole. To do this it has not limited itself, and aims to service big and small producers, new and established companies, and both the top and bottom end of the quality spectrum. Although the producer/marketeer-cum-exhibitor is the primary customer, increasing recognition of a Cowra Wine Show award in the domestic market demands that relevance and integrity be retained to the consumer also.

The Cowra Show Society is an integral part of the agricultural society system. The show has evolved through the encouragement and guidance of the Royal National Canberra Agricultural Society (RNCAS), National Wine Show of Australia (with particular input from its chairman, Bill Moore), and now has strong links with the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW, Sydney Wine Show. Equally the show has provided advice and encouragement to smaller regional wine shows that have recently evolved in Cowra, Forbes and Bathurst.

The Cowra Wine show commenced in 1983 to create a focus for an emerging local industry and promote improvement, education and debate within the industry at large.

The 2001 Cowra Wine Show judged in the last week of July was therefore the 19th. The show attracted 2,400 entries from 318 exhibitors covering all states and the ACT. A chief judge and five panels, each incorporating three judges and one associate judge, worked over three days judging an average of 160 wines per panel per day.

The schedule is designed to encourage all segments of the Australian wine industry to enter. The low quantity entry requirement, minimal restrictions and a low entry fee ($20 + GST), effectively casts a wide net and allows the industry to decide what is relevant.

The 2001 Schedule consisted of three distinct sections:

- Sample classes (lab. or tank, comments and points only = 240 entries).
- Industry classes (bottled, comments and medals only = 720 entries).
- Retail classes (labelled and on sale, comments and medals and trophies = 1440 entries).

Cowra has a number of assets that enhance its ability to run a successful wine show:

- Outstanding community support which allows the job to be done in an efficient and effective manner, whilst keeping the cost to exhibitors at an acceptable level.
- An enthusiastic, young and progressive local industry which provides constant encouragement and feedback.
- Access and credibility in the greater Sydney and Canberra marketplace, enabling successful exhibitors to gain advantage, and ensuring the public tasting is well attended and profitable. One thousand committed consumers support this event annually.

The strength of the Cowra Wine Show lies in a committee willing to maintain independence and integrity, whilst responding to positive industry suggestions. At Cowra the committee members organise and work at the show, providing direct contact and maintaining focus with exhibitors and judges. The committee is pleased with the results and stands by the quality of judging. In the last decade Jim Brayne, Iain Riggs, Tim James and now Geoff Merrill have undertaken the chief judge's duties and their credentials need no apology. Equally, the panel chairs are experienced national judges. Feedback from judges and exhibitors alike suggest there remains strong industry demand for the show's services.

The Cowra Wine Show owes its development to:

- The timing of the show in the industry calendar;
- High quality judges with a mix of youth and experience;
- Increasing demand from a rapidly growing industry;
- A simple and responsive schedule;
- Helpful attitude to new, inexperienced exhibitors; and
- Good value for money.

Whilst relatively comfortable with the current situation, the committee does have a number of ongoing concerns, namely:

- Retaining high quality judges in the face of time constraints;
- Restricting entry costs for exhibitors;
- Guaranteeing the integrity of entries and how results are utilised; and
- The lack of communication between wine shows generally.

Cowra intend to respond to these concerns by:

- Retaining high quality judges by remaining relevant and ensuring that they individually benefit from the experience;
- Improving the service to the exhibitors by
  – better feedback
  – better promotion of results
  – testing better judging systems (i.e. information / bench marking);
- Implementing an auditing system; and
- Supporting improved communication both between wine shows and with industry.

The opportunity was taken on behalf of the Cowra Wine Show committee to suggest improvements to the overall

wine show structure that may assist in achieving some of these goals, namely:

- The creation of a governing body within the agricultural society system to improve communication, both between shows and with the existing Australian wine industry bodies. It is hoped that this body would immediately consider creating a national auditing system and the development of a database of judges for all to use. Potentially, an effective governing body could also lead to a national accreditation process for all Australian wine shows.
- Promoting the National Wine Show of Australia to be the 'Exhibition of Excellence' in the Australian wine industry. This would be easily achieved by deleting all but premium and museum classes and forgetting about New Zealand wines. The national show should only accept gold medal winning wines sourced from any credible Australian wine show. For a National Show to remain relevant, it must remain relatively small in entry number so judging quality is maximised. It should be a showcase of the 'best of the best' that Australia has to offer.
- Encouraging capital city shows to tighten schedules (i.e. only bottled product) and be seen as a second tier of excellence below the national show. This would maintain relevance to the marketplace.
- The creation of a rigid auditing process. The prestige of the awards from capital city shows already exists, but the integrity of the system needs to be assured if this is to remain.
- Allowing service shows whether they are national, state or boutique focused (i.e. Cowra, Seymour or Stanthorpe) to continue to individually respond to the needs of the entire industry, whether big or small, high or low quality. These shows also have the ability to be very effective educational venues by providing the ideal environment for the personal development of emerging judges. This educational theme would be further promoted by providing constructive and useful feedback direct to the exhibitor. The show's ability to work with the lower quality producers and effectively lift overall industry standards should not be underestimated.
- Continuing to encourage regional shows involving individual GIC regions so as to maximise the focus on the relative strengths and weaknesses of a particular soil / climate interaction. There seems no apparent reason to attempt to limit the number of such shows as long as the standard of judging is maintained, and the awards retain relativity with other shows.

In summary:

- The Cowra Wine Show is not suggested as a model. It works now and the mix is constantly changing.
- Cowra simply aims to meet current demand and intends to strive to service the whole spectrum of the Australian wine industry.
- Cowra seeks continual improvement through innovation, communication and co-operation.
- Cowra wishes to remain a part of the Australian wine industry.

The Australian wine industry should avoid the temptation to dictate and potentially move towards a tightly structured system that would eventually stymie innovation and progress. Alternatively, the industry should seek to encourage improvements within the wine show system through increased co-operation and communication. The ASVO seminar is an excellent start to this process.

Stakeholder presentation – judges

Brian Croser
Petaluma, Crafers, SA

Contrary to some media hype and conjecture the Australian wine show system is alive and well. So well in fact that it is proliferating at plague rates.

There is an ever-increasing number of shows; of potential and actual winemaker exhibitors; of exhibits per class, and there is no shortage of aspirants to be judges or associates. Even sponsors seem to proliferate as major global corporations appear as sponsors of some fairly parochial and small regional shows.

Raising entry fees does little to slow the appetite of exhibitors for classes to match their wines, or to find wines to fill out classes.

The contemporary commercial relevance of wine shows cannot be diminishing if the reactions of the major sponsor of one of our prestigious national wine shows are used as a guide. Being a good retailer, its disappointment is palpable when awards are announced for wines in very limited supply. Its joy is spontaneous when a freely available commercial wine carries off an award.

More exhibitors, more wines, more shows, more judges, more awards. If failure is imminent it is from demand overload, not from lack of relevance to the stakeholders or their lack of interest.

Most of the big challenges in commerce are centred on the creation of demand. This is why there is a proliferation of marketers in the universe. The real issue for the Australian show system is containing demand so that the system does not die of overload.

The Australian wine show system can be regarded as a biological system or species. Every show can be recognised for its similarities to another (although interbreeding is an untried concept). Each is however, individual in its class profiles, time of year (hence the judging conditions) and the composition of its judging panels. Just as individuals make good, mediocre and bad judgements, so do panels and wine shows. The more elevated in the system the judgement, the less chance of aberration emerging. Averaging three judges in a panel may eliminate aberration, both good and bad. Similarly at the trophy level, 10 or 13 judges can collectively settle on the average wine for the trophy that nobody regarded as outstanding.

It should come as no surprise that a top wine in one show misses an award in another show. Nor does the occasional emergence of an obviously inferior wine as a trophy winner surprise. This is a reflection of the spectrum of wine show traits and the biological variability inherent in the subjective show system. Often surprising however is the degree of unanimity about the very good wines in a class judged by people from different continents, with different levels of experience, and from a diversity of backgrounds.

Judges as a group are consistently in greater agreement with each other than the associates, and have more point separation between terrible and great wines. This is simply the reflection of another biological variable—experience.

What to do then with all this biological variability within and between wine shows? To eliminate it would be impossible. To discipline it by training all judges to judge the same would eliminate one of the essential forces the show system exerts on wine quality and style—evolution. Biological variables should be recruited and encouraged. Judging panels should be diverse in background, opinion and even experience as long as all judges have had sufficient experience.

To an extent, and certainly from an excitement and marketing viewpoint, the more variability between shows and their results the better, as long as all top awards are credible in that role. Furthermore the recognition of diverse styles encourages the production of diverse styles. This is another blow to the national cellar palate that threatens to emerge at times.

There are a few covenants attached to this advocacy of diversity. These are that judges, panels and shows must be consistent unto themselves. That is, given the same show, panels, exhibits and conditions, the same results would be more or less achieved on successive judgings. This is a concept rarely tested.

How then is the system to be improved given the danger of overload and the potential for loss of credibility?

Recommendations

- Allow the system to flourish and proliferate. It will anyway.
- Encourage diversity of schedules between shows and in composition of judging panels.
- Individual shows should establish their own charters of responsibility to exhibitors.
- These charters should address:
  - the composition of judging panels
  - a commitment to the education of associates
  - the environmental conditions of judging (glasses, temperature, noise, light)
  - the maximum entries judged per panel per day
  - the maximum entries in a class
  - the auditing of exhibitors' entry claims.

The contemporary Australian wine industry which has harvested so much from what was sown by those who have gone before, should invest thoughtfully in the future of the wine show system. The current commitment of resources to the wine show system is enormous. Including the seven major city shows there are in excess of 20,000 entries, 100,000 bottles or 8,000 cases of the nation's best. These represent $1.6 million in value, $1 million in entry frees, 600 free-of-charge person-days per annum from the nation's best as judges and associates (value at least $0.5 million) plus travel and accommodation for winemaking teams to the

awards tastings (approximately $0.3m).

The total bill to the industry for the seven major shows is conservatively $3.4 million. Combined with regional shows it is probably in excess of $5 million. This does not include the value of the sponsorships to the various shows.

As an indication of this quantum, a $5 million injection into Australia's viticultural and oenological research and education system would more than double its current annual resources. The industry monitors and influences that investment very carefully. It should also be aware of its investment in wine shows.

It is important that the Australian wine industry, through its formal organisational structures, puts a collective effort into the administration of the Australian wine show system where it invests so much money. To support the style and conduct of the wine shows (in which they annually invest so much unaudited, uncoordinated funding) the Winemakers Federation of Australia should establish equal funding with the venerable Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Societies.

This would ensure the establishment of charters of commitment to the exhibitors without robbing the shows of their individuality. It would also put more resources into the national development of the AWRI Advanced Sensory Assessment Course, to serve as a cornerstone of the education of aspiring judges.

Stakeholder presentation – marketer/publicist

Stuart Gregor
Liquid Ideas, Melbourne, Victoria

A Coonawarra winemaker, when asked what was wrong with the show system, replied 'Marketing and PR people.' The same winemaker, when asked what could be done about it, came back with a simple reply—'shoot them!'

Whilst shooting the messenger may be one of the more controversial methods of fixing the show system, the author would be surprised if it were not one of the most popular.

It seemed that everything was fine, until Wolf Blass turned up. The show system was turning out good wines, medals were being awarded to nice wines, and everybody was toddling along quite nicely. It must be noted that at this time there were no listed wine companies, no export markets, no Vision 2025, no Wine Australia and no complaints about the show system. This changed when Wolfgang Blass won three Jimmy Watson trophies in a row. Suddenly wine was in the papers. It had become something that the mainstream media could get interested in. There was a sense of anticipation about who might win next year. The noisy little German went on to build an empire based on the foundations of winning those awards to what is now a multi billion dollar business. Damn publicity!

This paper does not explain whether the Jimmy Watson should be awarded to a finished wine, or if a wine should have to win a medal at a local show before entering the capital city show. Nor does it explain how to convince agricultural societies that any of these may be a good idea. What this paper intends to explain are a couple of things about publicity and shows.

Stuart Gregor claims 'gold medals work—they sell wine.' In an increasingly competitive marketplace, with 20,000-plus labels on the market, any point of differentiation is a good thing. Gregor spoke with marketing directors of major wine companies to find they universally agreed that gold medals work, particularly on wines in the $8–$15 price brackets. Apparently any colour medal works on wines below $10.

The public's understanding of show medals

The public realises that a gold is a gold, but may not know the difference between a gold from Griffith or Adelaide, if indeed there is a difference. A gold medal does make a wine better than one without a medal at the same price. People know that a gold medal means a wine has come first in something. In swimming, they appreciate that for Ian Thorpe, winning gold in the Olympics is better than winning gold at the Pan Pacifics.

At the moment, people take a gold medal on face value, but they do sometimes wonder how a cheap wine can win so many gold medals.

'Where can the consumer find out whether Ljubljana is better than Rutherglen or that the International Wine Challenge is more authoritative than the International Wine and Spirit Competition?' questions Gregor. Many people within the industry find it hard to decipher these shows, let alone the consumer.

Gregor suggests a wine consumer group be set up to answer these questions, not only on gold medals but on many issues, from additives to different regions and how to read wine labels. He warns 'as consumers become more savvy, and as the consumer and information generation grows up—we cannot continue to pull the wool over their eyes.'

The Australian consumer, wine shows and publicity

Australians love to hear of Aussie triumphs overseas. The 'Aussie wine beats the world' is a favourite of news editors and readers across the country. International medals should be proudly displayed and press releases sent to news desks across Australia.

Despite the best intentions of publicists and marketers the only trophy with real resonance in the domestic show circuit is the Jimmy Watson. The average consumer does not know that this trophy is for an unfinished wine, and in Gregor's opinion 'no-one would notice if this detail were changed.' He believes the criteria for the Jimmy Watson should be changed, for while the average consumer is ignorant of the details of the trophy, consumer interest is growing. With this growth comes cynicism and an increase in attention from consumer watchdogs. It would only take one Four Corners program or one *Choice* magazine article on 'The Deceit of Australia's Greatest Wine Prize' to cast a shadow across the entire industry.

While most exhibitors are honest and most wines are finished as they are entered, there is a degree of transparency. As an industry, Australia has led the world in truth of labelling and should not be left open to exposure via the shortcomings of allowing unfinished wines to win Australia's most important wine trophy.

The Australian wine industry is currently seen as the golden child—an industry of which most Australians are terrifically proud. This trust must not be abused, but further enhanced.

Conclusion

The Stuart Gregor Plan for the Jimmy Watson Trophy

Aim: For Australians to drink 25 litres of wine per capita. To do this, wine needs to be made sexier, more relevant, more contemporary, more Gen-X! As a publicist, Gregor believes we should also make more out of our wine shows. The best way to do this is to generate more mainstream publicity. When Wolf Blass won the Jimmy Watson in 1999, Gregor took the trophy (actually a replica) along to a Christmas lunch attended by many members of the mainstream media. He poured them the Jimmy Watson winning wine from the trophy. 'You'd have thought it was the Claret

Jug itself,' he later said. A well-known Melbourne sports journalist still recalls the moment and considers it a highlight of his life. For people interested in wine this is akin to a punter drinking from the Melbourne Cup, or an Essendon fan sipping beer from the premiership trophy. When Punters Corner won the trophy last year its owners declared it was 'better than winning a Group One.

Gregor suggests the industry should leverage the JimmyWatson and turn it into something big -bigger than it currently is. He believes that it must be given both credibility and a lot of publicity.

Method: Make the Jimmy Watson public property.
More should be made of the finalists before the announcement of the winner, incorporating a people's or stewards' choice.

The packers' choice in the Archibald Prize is usually for the painting that actually looks like someone, rather than the often-abstract winner. Australians love an argument, love competition and love an event where a roughie can get up against the superstars.

A 'taste off' of the final wines in the public eye
'The Montgomery Trophy or the Tucker Seabrook can be the WS Cox Plate of the wine world but the Jimmy Watson must be the Melbourne Cup,' says Gregor. 'The tasting could be in Bourke Street Mall with Bert Newton as master of ceremonies; the public would hear that James Hird thinks the Punters Corner will win but Naomi Robson quite likes the Cape Mentelle because of the pretty label.' Stuart says 'It's all about bringing wine to the people.'

The Jimmy Watson presentation night made the biggest and best party of the year
Celebrities would be clamouring to be seen there. Ray Martin could do the hosting; it should be like the Brownlow, with a live cross to the Football Show.

Compulsory tastings of the Jimmy Watson winner around the country after the Melbourne Wine Show
The winner would have the opportunity to showcase their wine to thousands of adoring Australians every year. Retailers would grasp the opportunity to have the tasting in their store.

To be the very core of Australian society, people need to be able to bet on it, or at least vote on it (*Big Brother* being the most recent example of this obsession). The Jimmy Watson Trophy needs to be to the wine industry what the Archibald Prize is to the art world. Gregor questions 'whether the art industry likes the Archibald.' Not unlike the Jimmy Watson, many question its credibility, and few 'industry' people actually believe the Archibald winner is the single best painting of the year. Edmund Capon, when asked what he thought of the Archibald, claimed it to be 'the best thing that happens to art every year.' There is controversy, everyone disagrees, the judges are idiots, the paintings are hideous and only designed for show, but the Archibald Prize does put art on television and the front pages of Australian newspapers every year. Art may be a more visual form than wine, but Gregor contends there is a more latent interest in wine than art in mainstream Australia. The fact that the public may never get to buy the winning wine is not an issue as 'they aren't likely to own an Archibald winner either.'

Result: Huge media exposure → increased wine consumption

'The name of the Jimmy Watson wine would be on everybody's lips. The winner should get more publicity than they could ever imagine—radio, television, newspapers—and they should sell out of all their stock and make lots of money,' says Gregor.

Wine should be seen as sexy and fun, not full of serious old men. People should dream that one day they might get to taste a Jimmy Watson winner, or perhaps even get together in their idyllic vineyard and form a syndicate to have a go at it themselves.

Stakeholder presentation – retailer

Philip Murphy
Toorak, Victoria

The author was asked to comment as a retailer on the value of wine shows, and in particular their relevance to the consumer and whether or not they should be of relevance to the consumer. He was also asked to consider whether medals help sell wine, and whether they cheapen the image of some. Finally he comments on whether the trade and consumers understand shows and medals.

Before explaining why wine shows should be important to consumers and what must be done to make them relevant, this paper will describe how medals influence a consumer's purchasing decision, and goes on to describe the general lack of understanding amongst wine trade and wine consumers of shows and medals.

Do medals sell wine?

'You bet they do!'

There is no better example than the Jimmy Watson Trophy award at the Royal Melbourne Wine Show for the best one-year-old red wine in the show. The winning wine is immediately sold out on its release and the industry is often quoted as saying that it is worth $1,000,000 to the winner. To a large company it is worth a lot more. The scramble for the wine by consumers is really quite extraordinary and there is no other award that comes close in its drawing power. Yet it is doubtful that many consumers could say exactly what the trophy is awarded for. Significantly, the winner can ask a lot more for his wine and the consumer happily pays this premium.

Wolf Blass (undoubtedly one of the greatest wine marketers this country has seen) is the most successful user of wine show success. He proved that it did not matter where you won the medal; you just had to make a big fuss of it. Nobody could forget those early Wolf Blass labels emblazoned with medals from the Ljubljana wine show. Most were unaware that Ljubljana had wine shows, let alone which category the wine was in and with whom it competed. To cap off his early success Wolf Blass won the Jimmy Watson three times in a row. Rest assured, being a master blender he deliberately set out to win this award knowing how valuable it was. More importantly, he continued to tell everyone how important it was, and that he was the greatest winemaker in the country. Many other makers have followed in his wake and tried to emulate his success.

Another overnight success was Taylors of Clare who put three gold medal stickers on their first release red. It was then an easy job to convince retailers to stock the wine. They also placed large advertisements in the national daily press proclaiming their success. The wine sold like hot cakes, and Taylors continued to do it year after year.

Today virtually every winemaker worth his salt will make a big 'song and dance' about winning a gold medal. Most will acknowledge this by putting a gold sticker on the label. There was a time, however, when one of the major producers was so successful at the national wine shows that it withdrew from competition for a few years. This is not the case today as the shows are a very important forum for assessing the quality of the competition. They give the winemaker a unique opportunity to have a good look at what the guy next door is doing. The shows are also a predictor of change, and the judges play a very important part in determining what styles will be developed when they award medals to a particular style or grape variety.

By and large the public are oblivious of this. The benefits of show success mainly flow to the larger companies as they are in the position to boast how many medals they have won at a particular show. This reinforces in the public's mind that a particular brand must be good as the company wins so many medals.

Why do gold medals sell wine?

It is quite simple. Any well-trained shop assistant will tell you that the easiest way to recommend a wine is to say that it won a gold medal. The consumer takes this to mean that the wine is of first class quality. The down side to this is that it is very hard to then recommend a wine that has not won a medal. It is for this reason that Murphy has always taught his staff that a personal recommendation is always best. Consumers are always impressed when the assistant can recommend an 'excellent' wine he/she has tried, and then give a personal description. For example: 'the flavour is rich and full bodied with overtones of chocolate and cassis and should age beautifully in bottle over the next five years…'

A lot of time and effort must be put into training staff, but it is worth it. Then the fact that the wine has won a medal is simply another form of recognition that the wine is worthwhile.

It is interesting to note that Australia's single biggest wine retailer, Cellarmasters, are 'masters' at using medals to sell often 'own labelled' wines. Phrases such as 'Gold Medal Dozen' are familiar to most.

There is no doubt that the single most important selling phrase apart from 'you will save 75% off retail' is 'gold medal winner'.

In today's increasingly self-service environment there is no doubt that a consumer will be attracted to a bottle with a bright gold medal near the top of the label. Most consumers invariably buy in a set price range and it is simply a matter of what wine to buy in that price range. The presence of a gold medal is going to weigh heavily in favour of the wine proud enough to display it.

Many years ago Peter Walker of Rhinecastle wines used to put a gold sticker on almost every wine he sold. The sticker had a serrated edge and imprinted on it were the words 'gold medal quality.' He put it on the early Redman wines, which were extremely successful. Murphy used a similar idea in his

own stores on wines that were highly recommended by his own tasting panel. The stickers read 'Philip Murphy Wines & Spirits Tasting Panel Award of Excellence.' There is something very compelling about a gold sticker on a bottle to the uninformed consumer, and that is because he has little or no recourse to other information. Hence the importance of the specialist retailer who takes the time to learn more about the products he sells.

There are obviously pitfalls for the producer as he cannot rely on winning a 'gold' every year. Furthermore, if a cheaper wine wins a gold medal and he/she wins silver or bronze they feel disadvantaged. From the consumer's point of view there is no obvious reason why one wine should be much more expensive than another is. Many smaller producers will not put medals on their wine for that very reason.

The other problem is that the stickers themselves are too small to contain much information about the award. The best one can get is 'Gold Medal Class 25 Melbourne'. Unfortunately most retailers do not understand the judging system and do not go to the trouble of getting the results from the major shows.

One way to overcome this is to invite enthusiastic staff to be stewards, or even associate judges as they do at the Victorian Wine Show. Another would be to produce a book that lists every show in Australia and describes every class in the show. Then a retailer could reference the class number and show on a sticker, and inform the consumer that a wine has won for example, 'best full bodied dry white' at the Adelaide Show.

A large poster could be produced that would be displayed in liquor stores across Australia listing the major shows and awards.

As a judge and associate at several shows over the years, the author has the greatest admiration for the skills and ability of the judges. He believes it is a pity that more people are not aware of the process that takes place, and how a gold medal is awarded. The points system universally practised should be included on any material used to promote the shows. It should be explained that so many points are awarded for colour, bouquet and flavour, and that it takes years for a judge to learn the skills necessary to qualify for a seat on the panel.

Murphy feels the 'regional shows' do not get the attention they deserve. Everybody would like to know who produces the best cabernet in Coonawarra over a number of years. This is very relevant to consumers who consistently prefer wines from specific regions, as is often the case. The significance of this cannot be understated for the smaller producers and it should support the price of their wines if they continually win medals. It will also sort out those producers who charge exorbitant prices for their wines but never win medals.

The major shows seem to concentrate on the varieties or styles and not the regions. This is possibly appropriate, as some consumers just want to know what is the best Cabernet regardless of region.

What is of utmost importance is this: the more the consumer understands the show system, and the different classes, the more he will understand about wine.

There is too much 'mystique' and not enough information for consumers. Back labels should be a valuable source of information, and are a great idea if they are used intelligently, and not used to talk about somebody's grandfather. A lot more can be done to make the show system of more relevance to the consumer and in the main this can be done through the retailer. Booklets on shop counters are very helpful. Historical references to past winners of some of the more important trophies are fascinating and reinforce the value of these awards.

Information about the shows themselves and their timing each year is important. Advance publicity of upcoming shows will attract more attention, and increased accessibility to the winning wines will encourage more people to visit the shows themselves.

The results of shows are published, and major producers take advantage of this the day after with advertisements that do not hide their light under a bushel. However, it would be more beneficial if large advertisements were placed in the daily newspapers describing the classes, and giving the full show results of the major shows. It would certainly increase sales of some of the lesser-known wines if consumers were able to see who won the medals, and seek out those winemakers they had not come across previously.

In conclusion, the wine shows of Australia have an important and ongoing role in the promotion of wine. The more relevance they have to the consumer, the more discerning the consumer will become, and the quality of Australian wine will continue to shine around the world.

If medals are a measure of the quality of wine, then surely this message must be clearly conveyed to the consumer. Presently, there is no other benchmark of quality apart from the international ratings systems that are extremely selective, and not predicated on the same thorough analysis as the Australian show system.

Some of these suggestions will require significant amounts of money, but if the consumer is made a more informed drinker, it is the Australian wine industry that wins in the end.

Stakeholder presentation: the wine writers' views

Max Allen
Author and wine columnist for *The Weekend Australian Magazine* and contributor to international wine magazines, including *Decanter* (UK), *Wine and Spirits* (US) and *WINE* (Japan).

Wine writers, apparently, are the vocal chords of the wine industry. This is how a large company winemaker/brand ambassador recently described them, and certainly there is a strong view among many in the industry that the media—through newspaper articles, magazines, websites and elsewhere—is nothing more than an extension of the public relations arms of Australia's wine companies.

While some wine writers would disagree with this view of their craft/profession/vocation/art, or hobby, many seem happy to go along with the analogy. This will be covered later; but for now, let us take it to the logical conclusion, and say that, if they are indeed vocal chords of the industry, what are they saying about wine shows? How are they telling the story of the Australian wine 'show system?'

If you search through any of this country's extensive newspaper and magazine archives you will find hundreds of articles on wine shows. They will range from regurgitated press releases, praising the success of 'Windy Creek Ridge Estate' at the Wodonga Small Winemakers Show, to scathing attacks on wine shows and their failings, penned by vitriolic opponents of the system. However, on the whole, Australia's wine writers are telling a fairly critical story about wine shows.

Many wine writers were contacted by e-mail in the preparation of this paper, and the responses received generally echoed the criticisms aired by other speakers at this conference.

Most writers acknowledge that the show system, in its purest 'improvement of the breed' form, has done a lot of good for the industry.

Tim White in the *Financial Review*, 4 August, 2001 wrote, 'The golden era for wine shows began in the late '60s and continued to the late '80s. I don't think anybody out there, even the sternest critics, would deny that the show system in this period had a profound influence in lifting the standard of Australian wine across the board. Without the show system, it is unlikely that Australian wines would have taken off in the way they did at the start of the current export boom. It should be remembered that the wines which led the overseas charge a little more than a decade ago were not $50-a-bottle super-premium Shiraz (there was only one at this price point back then, anyway) but 'value-for-money' sub-$12 bottles of wine.' (1)

Most wine writers agree that the shows are too big, although one writer was proud of his ability to 'slug it out with 180 wines for five days straight' (2).

Lester Jesberg, editor of the consumer magazine *Winewise*, said, 'At the big shows, class size and the make-up of classes is obviously a major issue. Some judges feel they can whip through 100 two-year-old reds and feel that the 16.5 they awarded to wine 99 was as spot-on as the 17.5 they gave wine number one. You and I know that this is complete bunk.' (3)

Many wine writers feel that the shows are dominated by large companies and show societies.

The most vocal of these is Philip White, of *The Advertiser* in Adelaide. He says,

'Australian wine shows exist to satisfy two major groups. Firstly, the organisers, who are usually agricultural and horticultural show societies. They make a profit from the entry fees, and end up with hundreds (or thousands) of leftover bottles for their 'club rooms'.

'The other beneficiaries are the wine companies. These enter their wines, then offer their winemakers, fully-paid with airfares and living expenses, to go and judge them, hoping they're smart enough to bring home a trunkful of booty. If their PR team is on the ball, the results are then fired vigorously at wine journalists, who are expected to promote them.' (4)

The irony of the system is pointed out frequently.

Tim White again. 'Those for the show system talk about its function of "improving the breed", while those against point out that many of Australia's finest producers—wineries such as Bannockburn, Giaconda, Leeuwin Estate, Torbreck, Rockford—play no part in it whatsoever and yet are greatly respected for wines of the highest quality.' (5)

Many writers feel very strongly that no unfinished wines should get a medal.

Huon Hooke, in a wide-ranging article in the *Australian Gourmet Traveller Wine* magazine, said 'giving awards to unfinished wines is an absurdity which should be stamped out.' (6) This was one of Hooke's more hot-under-the-collar moments—and his is not the only temper being tested! Take for example Philip White's assertion, that 'winemakers down-point rival wines (i.e. some judges recognise the style of a rival maker and point their wines lowly, so they have no chance of winning') (7). This was defamatory, according to James Halliday (who, being an ex-lawyer, should know). (8)

One of the questions to be specifically addressed in this paper was 'Are wine writers influenced by medals?'

Wine writer and marketing consultant Drew Lambert answered this very well in his article for the **Australian and New Zealand** *Wine Industry Journal* (9). He posed the question to 55 wine writers and got the following responses:

'They are a waste of time (generally we bin them… they may have been a good idea once but it's now overkill with so many shows and so many medals).'

'The wine companies are crazy to be wanting to push out this stuff.'

'Wine show results are, I believe, irrelevant to the wine-drinking public.'

'Basically I think medals are bollocks.'

This view was echoed by Paul Clancy, publisher of the *Wine Industry Journal*. 'The shows look archaic,' he said. 'Stupid silverware and sumptuous suppers in silly suits.' (10)

Ultimately, though, the most pressing question for the Australian wine industry is summed up by Tim White: 'Who is the show system there to benefit?' (11)

It's not all criticism and questioning, though. Some wine writers are supportive of the system. Andrew Corrigan, Master of Wine and contributor to *Winestate* magazine said:

'I think there is too much of a tendency for wine writers to quickly jump on the bandwagon of criticising the overall system. Critics are forgetting two big stakeholders, firstly, the exhibitors (i.e. producers) and secondly the public. In fact, strident criticism of wine shows is just plain elitism! The public are fascinated by the process.' He goes on to defend the Jimmy Watson Trophy. 'This interest is still relevant. Many wine lovers talk about their happiest and most striking experience as being a visit to a winery and trying a barrel sample – the young wine. Even though it may taste a bit raw, there is magic in the experience. Therefore an award to a young wine is still relevant.' (12)

Chris Shanahan, writer for the *The Canberra Times*, also threw up an alternative view.

'There is no "wine show system." Australia's many independent wine shows, events, awards, competitions—call them what you will—complement each other in some ways but also compete for judges, sponsors, producer support, status and consumer appeal. No matter that some judges move from show to show and that various organisers watch what others do—and even swap or pinch good ideas—little about this gaggle of stubbornly competitive, individual events, viewed collectively, could be called systematic. There is no system. There is, thank God, no central control, no standard schedule and no formal ranking, just an intense, wholesome rivalry that tends to promote change for the better, via endless discussion of style and wine quality—and the rewarding of quite disparate wine styles over time. When was the last time we heard a wine judge say 'Australia makes the best wines in the world'? Some judges I know wish that we did, and worry that we don't. They compare Australian wines privately and in shows but drink French wines. It's not cultural cringe. It's reality. It's competitive. It whets appetites. It promotes the desire to do better. It stomps on complacency. It happens outside of the show circuit too. But it reaches great intensity during the social events surrounding shows—making shows, in a sense, the universities of wine style. Freedom of thought reigns. And not a medal gets awarded during the process.'

This last point – freedom of thought reigns – brings up three interesting issues.

If, as Shanahan points out, the strength of Australia's shows are indeed their almost chaotic, unregulated nature (a lot like Australia's essentially very free winemaking culture), then do we really want a more regulated system, whereby a central control is imposed, where a team of professional, trained, specialised judges roam the land, purple teeth and bad breath announcing their presence?

The image this conjures up is that of the Lynchbob cartoon: 'Attack of the Killer Wine Tasters' (They'll breathe on you! They'll bore you!)

Isn't this centralisation, restriction and control precisely the thing the wine industry is trying to avoid with the implementation/imposition of the GIs across Australia?

Or, do wine writers continue on the way they are and let things find their natural course? Does the industry let chaos theory reign and see the capital city shows become ever larger until, like Monty Python's Mister Creosote, they simply self-destruct, to be replaced eventually by regional shows and new alternatives? If it's the latter, you'd get most of the wine writers barracking for the new blood shows, straining at the leash to have a go. Look at the increasing number of shows either organised or strongly supported by the wine media. There are now major annual, or at least regular, shows and judgings run by *Winewise*, *Divine* magazine, *Australian Gourmet Traveller's Wine* Magazine, *Good Taste* magazine, *Wine X* magazine, *Uncorked* magazine (in *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*) and others, not to mention the growing number of annual guide books (at least seven at last count), which are judgings of a kind (albeit involving one or two judges—the writers). All these comparative tastings jostle with the wine show results for the consumer's attention.

Another question to be addressed was 'Can a journalist be objective and judge?'

The answer is that yes, he or she can. As journalists, they theoretically have no vested interest whatsoever in wine shows or their results. But then again, few of Australia's wine writers are 'true' journalists, writing without fear or favour, unfettered by commercial affiliations of any kind. Many are also intimately connected to the show system itself, through regular judging gigs.

Look at James Halliday (ex-employee of Southcorp, director of the increasingly commercially-focused Winepros website, chief judge at many shows), Stuart Gregor (director of a wine PR firm, Liquid Ideas), Chris Shanahan (an employee of Liquorland), or, until March 2001, myself, (an ex-employee of the wine e-tailer, Wine Planet).

No wonder Australian winemakers see journalists as 'the vocal chords of the industry'.

This throws up the age-old potential for conflict between participation and reporting. For example this author has been invited to judge at a number of shows this year. Is he being invited because of his reputation as an exceptional palate? Unlikely.

To paraphrase Groucho Marx, 'I'm kind of suspicious about being part of any show that would have me as a judge'. In other words, 'I'm not sure my palate is up to the job of really intensive show judging, or whether I'm being invited because the show organisers want some nice words about their show written in a magazine.'

There's nothing wrong with this, of course. But it does conclusively place wine shows in the realm of promotion and marketing, and away from pure 'improvement of the breed.'

Which takes us back to Tim White's question. 'Who is the show system there to benefit?' And leads to 'Who is the wine writer there to benefit?'

The Australian wine industry may see most of the Australian wine media as an extension of the PR machine (and many wine writers may be happy to collude with the industry on this). However, those writers who think more deeply about such things usually come to the conclusion that their primary responsibility is, or should be, to their readers and their editors. And if this is the case, if wine writers really feel strongly that there's something wrong with the system, then why don't they really use the power the industry keeps telling them they wield to ask the difficult questions?

It seems many articles have been published over the years that appear highly critical of the system. But are they really reaching the right people? It would appear not. So do we have to turn up the heat a little? Surely most wine writers with show judging experience have seen enough and heard enough to blow the whistle on the shonkier elements of the game. In this respect, getting wine writers in as judges is a potentially risky practice on behalf of the show organisers. We might learn too much about how things really work.

Perhaps writers should go on strike—not write about the

shows that lack credibility; not publish regurgitated press releases from 'Windy Creek Ridge Estate'; not write about what a sham the Jimmy Watson Trophy is. Just not mention the show system at all.

Seriously, perhaps more wine writers should start behaving like journalists rather than lifestyle content providers and, at the very least, report fairly and objectively on what appears to be the industry's most serious attempt yet at gaining more credibility for wine shows. In other words, it is not, or shouldn't be, up to them, the wine media, to help sort out the wine show mess. It's up to them to critically report on how you, the wine industry, sort out your mess. It's up to them to be the consumer's eyes and ears, to find out what the real story is, not the story you want the consumer to hear.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the writers who answered requests for views and gave their permission to quote from published articles.

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Stakeholder presentation – an alternative proposal

Tim James
Wirra Wirra Vineyards, McLaren Vale, SA

The inherent reasons for wine shows, the needs that they meet, the expectations of winemakers, marketers, consumers and agricultural societies have been, or will be covered in this seminar. The benefits that can in some tangible way be attributed to the system in place, have been well covered by previous speakers.

The proposal presented now will obviously not meet everyone's needs, nor does it claim to have answered many of the questions set. It comes from casual discussions from Brian Walsh, Len Evans, James Halliday, Huon Hooke and many other wine show judges at various times in recent years.

The proposal is not new, and is prefaced by the tabling of some views that are an inherent part of this whole discussion.

The primary function of a wine show is:

- To improve the breed.

Weaknesses of the present system are:

- The total number of entries in a show (some shows have now gone to five panels of three judges, plus associates).
- Increasing class sizes.
- Some shows awarding points and medals to unfinished wines:
  - Cumulative costs
  - entry fees
  - stock
  - attendance
  - preparation/dispatch
- What happens with remaining bottles?
- Lack of consistency with class descriptors/requirements.
- The number of shows.
- The lack of available time to be involved in discussions with other judges and, more particularly, associates.
- The lack of feedback to exhibitors.

The proposal seems simple enough:

1. Regional Wine Show
   - Medal winners, bronze to gold, to then go to the capital city of the state in which that region exists.
2. Capital City Wine Show
   - Medal winners, bronze to gold, to then go to the championship wine show.
3. Championship Show
   - Possibly circulated from city to city, year to year.

Regional results may have a tendency to be more generous than the capital city or championship show because the judges in the main may be more closely associated with the region and its styles.

Regional wine shows

In both the domestic and export markets the importance of regional differences continues to gain momentum. There have been leaders here including the Hunter, the Barossa and others.

- Regional strengths
- Regional styles
- Individual vineyard wines

Iain Riggs has explained in detail the way the Hunter Wine Show operates and the criteria for entry. In this seminar, it is best to concentrate on the regional show system, as its make up and ongoing performance is crucial to this alternative operating well.

The entry requirements would probably be:

- Wines made from regional fruit (AWBC Regs 20–22);
- Wines made by a winery in the region, but from other region's fruit, would be entered in the region in which the majority of the fruit is grown;
- There would need to be a section for regional blends where the greatest percentage by region dictates the selection of the regional show;
- Unbottled product could not receive awards, but exhibitors would receive comments on the wine (James Halliday, 2001); and
- In order to still satisfy the improvement of the breed criteria it may be necessary to quality rate these wines from 0–5 say, but include a clause in the entry requirements that precludes the use of this data in any promotional material including labelling. This 0–5 rating has been used before.

5 Point Scoring	
Very Good	5
Good	4
Fairly Good	3
Fair	2
Poor	1
Bad	0

While understanding the emphasis on regionality, the opportunities for wine blended across districts or regions needs to be preserved. After all, some of the great wines of the past have been made from regions hundreds of kilometres apart. There needs to be a mechanism to allow these wines to be entered into a regional wine show. As previously suggested, it is perhaps best managed from the major region in the blend as long as it is 20% or above.

The regional show strengths have been covered:

- smaller class sizes;
- great opportunity for ongoing regional quality focus;
- less cost;
- more attuned focus on 'regionality' of wines entered;
- greater opportunity for smaller companies to enter; and
- more time to fully assess all wine.

The difficulties are:
- Availability of judges;
- Timing; and
- Training of more judges.

Most alternatives would require some lead-time, and a significant amount of ongoing training.
- The Advanced Wine Assessment Courses at the AWRI
- The Association of Judges (Len Evans)
- Len Evans Tutorial
- Tertiary Wine Appreciation Courses

The need for more judges in the system has long been recognised. This must happen, for there are many capable palates out there who have yet to come into contact with the wine show system. A strong regional system is the best conduit for this to occur. It is vital, and the best regional shows already do this so that the judging standard at this regional level remains strong. Regions that present medal wines of dubious quality would be readily exposed at a capital city level.

Timing

All regional shows could be between July and September. This would mean that the capital city wine shows would be in October and November, and the championship show in December. It may be possible to have the championship show in February of the following year, but there are some stock questions that may impact on this. The alternative is to let them remain as they are with a few alterations.

In order to be more inclusive of separate subregions within a zone, some regional shows would probably need to alter. The McLaren Vale Wine Show may become Fleurieu Wine Show, and thereby include Langhorne Creek, Currency Creek, Finniss and so on.

James Halliday has suggested that eligibility may become an issue for regional wines to go to the capital city wine show. If this were the case, there would then be an opportunity to extend entry requirements to the previous 12 months rather than just the one regional chance.

Another question is that winemakers, and more so marketers, may rue the lack of opportunities for the collection of medals. Perhaps the answer lies amongst the following:
- The mid to long-term provision of a larger core of experienced judges will result in more consistent results.
- Smaller individual classes and overall show entries should result in more time and effort per wine. This would lead to better, more consistent results and more useful reporting.
- The criteria of bronze medals and above should ensure that an extremely high percentage of the better wines get through to the capital city wine show.
- The championship wine show could be restricted to silver medals and above, should class sizes and overall show size be a problem.
- Entry fees could be raised and judges paid for their participation.
- Judges' comments should be made available to the exhibitor.

The above should lead to an increased value for any award, but particularly gold medals and trophies won at any of the regional, state or championship shows.

The number of wineries continues to increase—there are now around 1,197—and the number of wineries exporting continues to increase. Therefore, there is not only a need to examine the efficiency of the system going forward, but there is a desperate need to ensure that value is retained in the results of the judging system. The continued study and understanding of the different styles and different markets within the competition is needed—the industry itself must exert a measure of control and direction on the overall show award system.

Although a program has been built that many people from overseas have admired, it is now time to look closely at the system and to improve it.

Questions and Discussion

Editor's note

This discussion was transcribed from a tape recording. The text has been edited to remove irrelevant details and to remove or revise comments which would only have been understood by participants at the time. Short parts of the discussion were lost on tape changeover and where these sections lost their context and meaning they were removed.

Questions and Discussion: Peter Høj started the discussion by summarising the presentations and proposing several issues, that speakers had raised, for further consideration.

Halliday

A strong message from James Halliday's analysis was that there are both marketing and wine quality issues behind entering wine shows. That was a very, strong message. There are some commercial imperatives that are driving that process. There are probably even salary bonuses for getting medals. On the other hand, there was this very honourable and laudable attempt to use the system to improve the quality of Australian wine.

One of the things we try to do today is to be all things to all people in all shows. I would like to consider that somebody sits down and thinks about totally alternative views. For example, is it appropriate that every major national show runs all classes of wine? And would it be more appropriate that you have feeder regional shows that feed into one capital show—let's call it Show A—which specialises in white judging, another one in red judging, so that you get through less wine because you actually don't repeat the judging exercise of the same product across the country? You can give the wines more time. You can get style specialists in, whether they be from Australia or overseas, to address the types and styles of wines that are relevant for that particular show.

These are some of the issues that have to be thrown up in the air, and that's what I refer to here as "more radical changes". I'm going to ask the audience whether the wine shows are worth retaining. It's my conclusion that everybody believes that the concept, with some review and modification, is worth retaining.

Are there further issues to be addressed? I think that will come up in the discussion. And how do we address these issues? I'm going to suggest to you that I see more and more well-meaning people in the industry that really want to do the right thing by the industry. But, increasingly, I also see that these people, because of the apparent pressure-cooker lifestyle that most of you are living, are not always able to deliver the goods, be that writing books for the industry on viticulture or oenology or handing in a paper in time for the technical conference so that we can get the proceedings out. It appears that people are sometimes too busy to apply their mind to something which they are not directly paid to do.

It would be my suggestion, looking at Brian Croser's back-of-the-envelope calculation, that if the industry invests $5 million per annum into wine shows, maybe the industry should also invest about $100,000 in getting somebody to sit down and think about this, run a lot of models about how you can do it, even with spreadsheets of judging availability. For instance, how could you set up a system where the 'three strikes, you're out' scenario that we have heard about could work?

I would like to suggest to you that we have to find a way forward from today, but we can discuss that when we come to the last part of the session.

One of the issues that have come up throughout these presentations is that the current pressure on the shows does not allow associates to be appropriately trained. Mention was made many times of people going through the training course at the AWRI and then very few of them make it through to judging. There could be two reasons for that: of the people that go through the AWRI course, only 10 per cent of them are any good, and therefore the system works. Or, if you're much more cynical about it—and I'm going to give James a hard time here—the view that you can only run three panels means that even if you wanted to take on more new people, because you have so many excellent people in the industry already judging, you do not have a mechanism for allowing new people to come in. It would be my contention that the view that James expresses—that you should have no more than four panels—needs to be discussed in a broader context with different models, maybe in relation to deputy chairs or a chair for the white judging panels and one for the red judging panels.

I think that training issue is absolutely critical. It must be addressed. It's quite clear that the current system, where one person [ed. Chair] has to handle everything, will not allow us to go to 10 panels. I think we need to think outside that square.

A thing that I thought didn't come up much was how we actually know that the judges that we say are the best maintain that capability? There are studies published that show, in general, that your sensory capacity goes down with age—no disrespect to any of these people here—but of course that is offset by experience. There are also studies that claim to show that females in many respects can outperform males. Now, we don't see too many females running the show, so to speak. So there are some issues there that I think the industry has to address.

Haselgrove

We subsequently heard from Richard Haselgrove. Richard outlined the current activities at the Melbourne Show, which of course is quite timely, and he also felt that, yes, the system might need revision but there's not necessarily a need for new wheels.

Walsh

Brian Walsh tried to put to rest one of the perceptions, that the wine shows make a lot of money from all the entries, and he showed some budget figures, which certainly I have seen, which would cast doubt on whether the Adelaide Wine Show would be in the black at all.

You might say that's because the committee members walk away with all these cases of wonderful wine. Well, certainly for Adelaide, I can tell you that doesn't occur. If I happen to get a case of wine—I think I've had two over the last three years—I have given it to somebody who can't afford to buy wine, because in general the best wine goes for tastes for the public. It doesn't go to the committee members. Is that a fair reflection?

BRIAN WALSH: I would think so, Peter. In fact, I haven't had a case; it was my choice not to take any. But I haven't actually seen the evidence of all this wine lying around and handed out to the councillors.

PROF HØJ: I just think that it's important to do a reality check on that one.

The other thing that Brian brought up was that it's time to revise whether we should have the 3, 7, 10 scores and, if we're not using them anyway, why not get rid of them and perhaps develop a focus on other things such as texture etc.

Riggs

Iain Riggs outlined that the Hunter Show was fully regional and very strong on training, and I thought that was terrific to hear. I also think that Iain said that unfinished wines only had a place at the regionals.

Coates

Terry Coates outlined what the Cowra Show did, and felt that it served the industry really well. Terry mentioned one interesting thing, which I think is quite clear. He felt that there should be a governing body. In other words, there does not seem to be a lot of interaction between the activities of the show societies. There might well be an opportunity for some synergy and even perhaps division of labour, but certainly proper scheduling of training needs and rostering of already stretched judges. I think that was a terrific idea.

I believe that if the industry really wants to sort this out, then an investment has to be made, but there has to be a governing body that sets the terms of reference for that investigation to be made. Hopefully, out of that one can get some efficiencies, division of labour and training schedules in place which are so vitally important, as we have heard today.

Croser

We heard from Brian Croser via Nick that he felt the system was good. He outlined how expensive it is—and it is relatively expensive—but one would have to assume that it's a business decision that is being made, like any other business decision. Personally, I am a bit dismayed that we spend as much on wine shows as on R&D, but that's a very personal note. That doesn't mean you're spending too much on wine shows. It means you're spending too little on R&D.

Brian was very strong in saying that, whatever we do, we must recognise style variation. Brian also outlined the fact that, because the industry is putting so much money into this system, in his view WFA (the Winemakers Federation of Australia) should play a role. Whilst I don't necessarily concur with that (because I haven't thought about it) I think it is important that there is an industry body that defines what the objectives are, and whether the objective is improvement of the breed or consumer relevance. Perhaps, instead of having a red show and a white show we could also have a 'Technical improvement of the breed' show and a national 'Look after the consumer' show. I think they are all the issues that need to be thrown up in the air and analysed very carefully. I think the one thing we're trying to do now is to fit everything into every single show. It's very, very hard if you also want to get home in three and a half days.

Dawson and Murphy

Peter Dawson outlined a large company's perspective—the commercial imperative for medals. That argument was sustained, from a retail point of view, by Philip Murphy. Philip was again very strong on the commercial importance of shows. The Jimmy Watson is claimed to be worth a million dollars; he confirmed that it could probably be worth more for a big producer. There was a suggestion that you need a book describing all show results in Australia, advertisements and so on. The communication message is coming through again. Here we are then, swinging not away from improving the breed but towards addressing the consumer. The consumer is getting increasingly more informed.

Stonier

Then there was Brian Stonier. Brian outlined quite clearly that, whilst in volume terms the large corporates are very significant, in number terms the small producers are just as significant.

Brian, like Tim James later on, was in favour of investigating a system where there is a qualifying round whereby you go from regional to capital to national. An additional thought… One of the problems with that model is: if for some reason you enter into a regional and for some unthinkable reason the judges get it wrong, and an otherwise gold medal wine doesn't even get a medal—and we all know that can happen—that particular exhibitor might have no recourse.

Jones

That brings me on to one of the things that the journalists talked about, and also our venerable researcher, Philip Jones, and that is accountability. It will not take long before the wine show systems will have to be much more accountable and prove to people that they have in place appropriate QA and even good laboratory practices if they become challenged. One can easily foresee, if medals are really that commercially important, that if somebody takes their wine to a regional and gets rejected and can't have a second go, people will want to know why and they will challenge that. We are living in an increasingly litigious society and the show societies really have to think about that one. There certainly have to be some very, very strong terms and conditions signed upon entry into the shows because otherwise it's going to go wrong.

The Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation undoubtedly can tell you what people do if their wines get rejected for export approval. They don't just go away any more and say, "Oh, better make it better next year."

There was also a suggestion of sliding scales. Perhaps it should cost you x dollars to get your first wine into a show and two-x for the next one.

Philip Jones was very strong on accountability. But he also felt that he actually didn't know what he could use a show result for. There started to be that distinction between wine that sells below $20 and wine that sells above, and perhaps we're again talking about two totally different objectives. In one case, entering into a show can be a liability; in the other, it's an opportunity. Again there was a very strong emphasis on the communication of what shows actually mean. The results need to be slotted into a total communications package.

Gregor

Stuart Gregor. You can probably all remember his colourful presentation, which all of us enjoyed. He again said that consumers are getting much smarter. It's a sign of things to come, so they are very important. These communications issues and accountability issues have to be part of a review.

Allen

Max Allen addressed many issues. One of them, again, was the accountability issue. You can imagine how you could generate a very good Four Corners story about the show system and, if nothing else, there has to be a risk management strategy in which various scenarios have been run through. (You can always blame it on random bottle oxidation!) Max outlined, a little facetiously, that there should be a boycott until there is a serious change in the wine show system.

James

Tim James outlined his view on how the regionals could be used, how it would be beneficial for the regionals to have the introduction of individual vineyard classes. Apart from Peter Dawson and Richard Haselgrove, it appeared that nobody was in support of unfinished wine at capital city shows.

INTERJECTION: And the exhibitors. They seemed to be in favour.

PROF HØJ: Tim outlined that there shouldn't be medals for them, but there could perhaps be a point-scoring system from zero to five.

Questions and discussion

PROF HØJ: It is time for us to take views from the floor. We must try to resolve whether we can come up with a good model for going forward. It's very important that the industry finds the mechanisms to define its objectives. If there are two sets of objectives, you need to employ a good consultant to think about this one very closely and to come up with some models. Then, once the industry knows exactly what it wants to do, it needs to articulate those views to the show societies.

It's quite easy to criticise a show society. Show societies get many mixed messages from the industry, and it's actually very hard to react unless there is a relatively uniform, authorised view of where to go. How you get to that can be difficult too, but it should be possible to communicate with the show societies and suggest a way to go forward.

What we have done first is recap on what has happened today. We now need to hear questions and direct them to the appropriate speaker. After we have taken all those views, we need to further summarise those views, and capture them for follow-up. Then there is also in the program a recommendation that we elect some people to take this further. We can talk about this when we have the discussion.

Could all the panel members now correct where they think they have been misrepresented. They can also each take an opportunity to say a few words about an issue that they feel is really important.

TIM JAMES: I tried to come at a point of view that was removed from where we might end up, but did that so we'd think about what methods we could use to change the direction we're going in.

During the break, it was interesting to discuss with people the problems of having a three-tiered system. Brian Walsh and I have sat down on a number of occasions and he's come up with exactly those same difficulties. But I think the driving force through all of this has been 'Let's clearly define exactly what we want the show system to do and use that as the best basis to go forward.'

While there's a mixture of views, I don't think the views are all that far apart. The biggest difference seems to be, just what is it there for? Is it there to improve the breed or are we talking about a commercial success? I don't think that they are mutually exclusive. I think most people could live with it doing both.

SPEAKER: I liked what I heard said about regional shows, and particularly the Hunter Valley, and I think there's a lot of merit in pursuing some of those principles. It also concerns me that the results of the show judging system, if they're to be used in the marketing arena, focused on less than $20 or $25 wines as far as purchasers and retailers are concerned. If you exclude bulk or bag-in-the-box wines, what percentage of the total domestic and international production of wine is that addressing? To what extent does the show system hope to deliver into the rest of the market?

SPEAKER: There was (sic) a couple of things that I didn't mention before that I think are probably worth bringing up and that is, that in the marketplace, perception is reality. The 15 judges at the Melbourne Show are all male. Sally McGill has been on the senior panel before, but even that doesn't send the right signal.

It is neither representative of the community, the wine industry or the able judges in our industry, and sets shows up for a bad bit of publicity. You know, 15 blokes. It reeks of some sort of Melbourne Club, and we know how much bad publicity they have been getting lately. This is an important perceptual issue.

PETER DAWSON: A couple of things. Certainly I'm very keen on the concept of the improvement of the breed and the evolution of quality in our industry. If we can maintain that as the principal focus and deal with the other side issues, which relate to organisation, credibility, effectiveness of the judging process, then those things should all come together to fulfil the needs of the consumer.

One thing that hasn't been touched on which is relevant to all exhibitors is the potential for some specialisation in judging—the direction of judges with specific expertise to the appropriate wine classes. There's always a raffle to see who's going to judge—the extreme example is who's going to judge brandy classes—but it's something that increasingly impinges on fortified wine classes and on sparkling wine classes. You could argue that it even applies, to some extent, to cabernet classes. That's something that could be brought into the consideration of how we evolve the system.

As Peter Høj pointed out, I did support the continuance of

judging unbottled wine, albeit with no awards, and I guess I'm coming very much from a winemaking perspective. Certainly within our company, I find it most informative and look forward to the situation at the end of a vintage where I can look across all of the rieslings that have been made in our company, across all of the chardonnays from all different regions. Similarly I look forward to going to the Brisbane Wine Show and seeing what rieslings have come out of the Eden Valley as opposed to the Clare Valley as opposed to Western Australia, and if an exciting new style of riesling or some new development has come out of Tasmania. That certainly is of benefit in the improvement-of-the-breed side of the exercise and that would be difficult in a regional format. You'd have to attend a lot of regional shows to get that sort of feedback.

PHILIP MURPHY: I'd like to support Tim James's model. I like the three-tiered approach and I think it's easy for consumers to understand. But, being a retailer and a marketer, I'd like to say again that, whatever we do, we have to advertise it and promote it to the end consumer, because he is the one who consumes the wine and he is the one who's influenced by the results at the shows.

WALSH: I don't think we've come far enough in the last 150 years. I did a bit of research on the Adelaide Wine Show in the 1880s, and then they had to send in an additional six samples. This wasn't for the councillors to take home; this was to see how the wine was going to age. It was judged in 1878, and in 1884 the wines were rejudged. So there was a bit of forward-thinking there, saying, "What are we trying to encourage and what are we trying to do with this show?" I'm not suggesting we should do that. It's a logistical nightmare with two and a half thousand entries. But, as I mentioned in my address, I think we're not doing enough about our approach to judging to ensure that we can select wines which would encourage entries of those benchmark wines which don't currently enter the show. This would be for the benefit of the whole industry.

Now, we can't force them to enter, but we'd like them to think they would get a fair go—that Bass Philip would be happy to enter the show knowing he's not always going to win a trophy, but knowing that it's going to get a really good showing. That is a big challenge.

MR RIGGS: Peter, to answer your question about the Hunter Valley: with three trainees, nine associates and three on the judging panel, that's 15 locals heavily involved in the show. Generally they have a three-year stint and then, obviously, we would like to think that those local judges that have been on the full judging panel then can go on to other shows, as they do currently. We tend to keep this sort of rolling 15 people going through the show.

My other point is for the exhibitors—and we're all exhibitors. Just ask yourself, "Why do we need to have enough wine shows and have, say, a wine entered 10 times each year to get 10 to 15 points?" It's like we're wine show junkies. We get the bit of paper and we fill it out and we send off the money and then we send off the wine, and the next result comes up—another 15 points. Yet we still send it off again and again and again. You know, I don't like to admit, but I am a reformed wine show junkie. I have been to Wine Shows Anonymous! I can highly recommend it, and am down to five shows a year. So I do apologise to those committees that send the schedules to Brokenwood every year, but most of them, I'm sorry, hit the bin.

MR HALLIDAY: A couple of issues. First to Philip—accountability. I think the Australian show system is more accountable than any other show system in the world. I don't think; I know. Most of the international shows are judged—and particularly OIV shows—on one wine at a time on the table. You fill in the mark, off it goes into a computer, and that is the absolute start and finish of the judging process. The computer averages the scores. There is no discussion. No-one knows what the other person gave to the wine in question. Contrast that with Australia, where the three judges will be expected to justify his or her points. If they're out of whack with the other one or two judges on the panel, we don't have acrimonious arguments these days but there is certainly robust discussion, and that's where the chairman comes in. So I think it is highly accountable—sure, within a peer group—but I don't really know how you could get greater accountability than that. Yes, you can have whatever it is—AS2002, whatever that stupid international accreditation thing is. You can dress it up in any way that you like. So that's one comment.

The next is directed to Peter. Yes, you can have 10 panels and have three chairs running around the room, but that is only exacerbating the problem that we've got at the moment. That is just simply creating more and more judges, more and more functionaries, to deal with ever more entries. And again, on the question of gold at regional and no gold at national—well, we might get sued; that's an injustice or could be seen to be an injustice. I put to you that it's an equal injustice if you get a gold at the regional and no gold at the national. In a real world you do not expect the same wine to get the same points when it's entered multiple times. As to Tim James's pyramid suggestion, I believe that the qualifying medal can be won in any 12 months prior to the show into which it's going. You don't actually need to move all your shows around.

You don't actually need to have the regional shows in one part of the year and the national shows following them. You could leave the shows exactly where they are, but to get to your state's qualifying show, it must have won within the previous 12 months, and obviously that does cover every period. The reason I suggest that is because if you try to move the wine shows, the Royal Agricultural Societies are going to scream like stuck pigs, because the wine show would be suddenly divorced from their [main] show. In Sydney it's the Royal Easter Show. They always like to have the wine show before the show proper.

One of the other questions on the pyramid issue which wasn't discussed is "What is your volume required for entry?" In the small shows, of course, in the regional shows, typically it's a very low volume required. Back in 1880, George Wyndham, who was the largest producer in New South Wales, suggested that a dozen bottles is all that should be required for show because it was about excellence. He was turning his back on the commerciality issue. Can I just state on that issue emphatically, there is no incompatibility or mutual exclusivity between improving the breed on the one hand and commercial outcomes on the other. They are not—repeat, not—incompatible.

Lastly and most importantly, Peter says we haven't gone far enough. I totally agree with that. The pyramid system probably goes closest, but all of the other things that we have heard, like a fifth panel at the Adelaide Show, will buy a year or two's breathing space—only that. We are really headed to a meltdown. I think the problem is that it's all very well the wine industry coming up with a model as to how it can take the system forward; that's from the view of

the wine industry. Really, at the end of the day I think we will be blocked by the agricultural societies, who might lose sovereignty, lose control, see other losses flowing. I'm not saying that if I were in the Agricultural Society I wouldn't act as I anticipate they will.

I think they will be a very significant bloc for obvious reasons. So I suspect that it will take not a strike by journalists, it will take a strike by the major wine companies, who will just say very politely, "I'm sorry, we can no longer support the show system as it stands at the moment. We are going to now henceforth become involved in an entirely new system, an entirely new structure."

STONIER: I don't have any objection with James's view on the objectives of the whole system. I think both of the purposes are reasonable and can suit, at different shows, both the improvement/assessment element and the marketing. I think today is emphasising over and over the two problems of not enough judges and too many wines. The small producer can certainly help in both of those areas. On not enough judges—small producers should think, "If we complete the advanced assessment course, do we then have a responsibility to act as an associate judge?" This is the sort of experience that the small producer could contribute. I've already suggested lots of ways of limiting the number of entries and I think that will very much suit the small producer.

MAX ALLEN: I've learnt something today from Tim James. I thought that, after I'd judged a couple of hundred wines over a wine show, I just had sore teeth, but apparently I have terrorised gingival margins!

I do agree that the industry needs to take more of a grip of the way that the show system is heading.

I think there is a potential danger, in that if it's a too centralised approach and if it's too rigid and too restrictive, you can lead to disenfranchising those shows that will, by their very nature, fall out of a more structured system. In that respect, you have the potential to head down the same route as drawing GI boundaries, and we know what kind of fuss that's made.

Also, I would agree with James absolutely that the power is in your hands. And if, as Brian Stonier suggested, the industry needs to reclaim the show system, then it can only do that by deciding not to enter. As Iain Riggs said, you're wine show junkies. You don't have to enter all these shows, and you don't have to send your winemakers to judge at them. In that respect—and I bet you never thought you'd hear Nancy Reagan invoked—like Nancy Reagan, just say "No".

MR HASELGROVE: Firstly, I must defend my committee against the attack of sexism, I think it was. We have on our senior panel and on our associates panel, females in about the same proportion that they are in the technical side of the wine industry. I'm sorry that this year one of our senior ladies is just in the process of selling her business and was otherwise occupied, and another one was sick at the last minute and wasn't there. But we do take seriously trying to reflect what the mix of people out in the industry is and, as females increase in the winemaking field, I would hope that they will increase in the judging panels as well.

The other thing that I want to raise—and if we had had time for questions after the presentations I would have done this with Tim before it all got too fixed in your minds. I've spent 40 years trying to convince Australian wine industry people that they are "Australian wine industry" and they don't have very many state allegiances. The wine industry consists of regions that then form part of Australia. They do not form part of wine regions called states. So please, please, delete immediately any suggestion that in a tiered system you are going from regions to state shows.

It is impossible. Have you thought that through? It cannot work. There are no such things as state wine regions.

If you think through this a bit further, currently the capital city shows are national shows held in a number of capital cities. Canberra could perhaps claim to be different because they require a qualification, but all other capital city shows—and it includes Hobart—accept exhibits from all over Australia. So you have to somehow jump from regional. I like the ideas that Tim is putting forward, but you have to go from regional to something. Now, what is that something? That's going to cause a problem.

Somebody said the wine industry should reclaim the show system. The wine industry has never owned the wine show system. It has been owned by the agricultural societies from the beginning, and the agricultural societies have invested a tremendous amount in these shows, with the cooperation of the industry. What we've got to do is address that problem. You can have a strike if you like. We tried to do something about the Jimmy Watson entries, but they have grown and grown, and not encouraged by the RASV. It's you people, the exhibitors, that are doing that. So don't come and claim that our show is a bad show and keep exhibiting.

TERRY COATES: I don't particularly want to raise any new issues, but I would encourage you not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

A lot of people here today are involved with shows and they'll go away and look very closely at their shows, and in some ways that's a good result. I'd be disappointed if we as a group don't get together again and talk about the show system amongst ourselves. At the same time, I'd encourage the industry to do that, too. You've got plenty of bodies there. You've got the ASVO. There's an opportunity there to go away and look a bit more closely at what's been happening and work towards improving the system. There have been some emotional things said across this table. I'd caution you against getting too carried away about it.

PROF HØJ: Thank you very much, everybody. I now would like to give you the opportunity to raise issues. If it's quite clear to whom the question should go, you can address that person directly. If you're not quite certain, or if it's a general one, you can direct it to me and I will try to distribute it in the best possible manner. Could you please, when you stand up, state your name and affiliation.

STEVE ROBIN: Steve Robin from the Mornington Peninsula Cool Climate Wine Show. I'll address my question to Tim James, who came up with the pyramid model. It seemed to me a reasonably restrictive model, in that regional wine shows should stick to entries from their own region. Now, if that were the case, there would be a number of wine shows which wouldn't be viable because the region is too small, without enough sponsorship. There are also some regions that don't have wine shows. In our case, a third of our wines come from New Zealand. It's a great benchmarking opportunity for the vignerons. On the model that you're proposing, what is the future for those smaller wine shows?

MR JAMES: That's a good question. I had thought about it in relation, for example, to an area like Fleurieu, where there are smaller subregions in that zone and it would require the McLaren Vale show, to be more inclusive of subregions within that greater zone in a regional zone show. As for New Zealand, I'm not sure I had thought that I'd stretch a model that far in a regional sense. I don't know how you'd get over that, other than the fact that it doesn't fit with the pyramid model that I was talking about at all. But it doesn't preclude you from working out a way, within your own zone, to be able to do that. Those New Zealand wines wouldn't go on to the next level, that's all.

MR HALLIDAY: Can I just chip in here? Victoria has come closest to what I would see as the best regional model, because there is a Southern Victorian wine show. It used to be Lilydale; now it's Southern Victoria. You've got Ballarat taking in the centre, and if only Rutherglen would restrict itself to wines from the north, you've got the three. You just literally divide the state up into three zones. That's really not an issue. Then, you've got the Victorian Wine Show, which is effectively a state show, and you could go on from that to capital city. The modelling should not be an objection. It's just a matter of drawing lines on a map.

PROF HØJ: I think it's important to recognise that there will be issues that you can't do in a room with 200 people. You need somebody to sit down and say, "This is what we would attempt to outline," and then you try to get all the snakes out of that. Sometimes you just can't and in other cases you can. Any other comments?

MR HASELGROVE: To reiterate: for goodness' sake, forget states as regions. The Label Integrity Programme and Geographic Indications do not allow for states. If you're going to set up a system in the shows that has states to qualify, then you are heading for very deliberate trouble.

PROF HØJ: Could I just try to get you to focus on one thing, just for five minutes, and that is the issue of availability of judges. It would be good to get an indication from the floor on whether there are people that genuinely feel that they could judge if they were given the appropriate training opportunities. We are here assuming that the wine industry would be prepared to solve the numbers crisis, either by restricting the entries or where you train more people. I think it would be interesting to see whether there are people that you know of that would be prepared to judge, because if that were not to be the case, that's an option that you can strike off the list right away.

SPEAKER: Peter, my name is Brad (indistinct) from McLaren Vale Wine Show. In respect to that, how do we get training to become a wine show judge? We have regional winemakers who aspire to become judges. They work as stewards and help with the show set-up. They actually get the chance to be an associate. From then, we go into an exchange with the Riverland Wine Show, but how do you actually progress further? It seems like a real club. There is a broad spectrum of 20 really good top-end head judges out there that basically run through the entire shows, and all the regional shows fight to try and get their hands on some of these people to round out their judging. Are there any answers?

BRIAN STONIER: Could I comment that I think it's important to make it attractive for all judges and associate judges to go to a show. I am appalled to hear that, at Adelaide, associate judges will pay their own airfares and not be paid. If Adelaide would kindly put their fees up to $100 they would (a) be able to pay all these people, and (b) make a surplus.

RICHARD HASELGROVE: Could I say from the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria's point of view, yes, we do have a structured system of taking people through from clerks to stewards to associate judges, and then the next step very much relies on the chairman of judges. I suspect it does in the other major shows too. One of the duties of the chairman of judges is to assess his judges, his judging panel, and to write a report on the associates, and out of that we can then move forward. This year we brought one associate in as a full judge and last year we did the same, and that person has continued again this year. There is a structured system, but we also would like to draw more on the Adelaide University/AWRI system if we can. We don't quite know how to tap into it.

PROF HØJ: Perhaps I can outline that there is a need for a national database between shows, about who is on the books and who has expressed interest and what is their relevant experience. So once you set up your panel and somebody rings in sick two days before, you look at that national data sheet. You can use it for scheduling, saying, "This person is judging both in Hobart and at this regional show, and that's just too much work. We'll go for somebody else." I think we can be smarter. I think, too, as a national institute, the AWRI should make our services available to all shows. Perhaps we have to improve our game.
Peter Godden might be able to outline a little in that regard.

HYLTON McLEAN from the Orlando Wyndham Group. I'd like to ask James Halliday a question. If we go through this whole process of perfecting the Australian wine show system —and that hopefully will be a very positive process—what do you think our chances are of being more influential in international wine judging circles and promoting Australian wines in those forums. And, hopefully, through show success there, follow on the export success we have with our wines? What are your thoughts on that, please?

MR HALLIDAY: One of the more intriguing pieces of propaganda I got last year was from Rosemount, telling me about its success in the Mississippi River Wine Show, which I found absolutely riveting! I decided against writing a full-length article on it. I'm not really sure that you need to try to make the horse drink. What the marketers were saying was that, for Australian wine, right or wrong, success in overseas shows is more important than it is in Australia. I think we've got enough on our plate, quite frankly, if we're going to get the show system sorted out here. I don't think we should try to sculpt it so that it becomes more relevant to our overseas customers.

TIM KNAPPSTEIN: Tim Knappstein, Lenswood Vineyards, and a judge for some considerable period. It seems that Tim James's model would have to be somewhere near the preferred one for limiting numbers of entries. If 50% won medals in regional shows and the next tier up—whether you call it state or whatever—knocks it another 50%, you get down to 25% of the potential number of wines rolling up at one show. That's terrific. But you have to involve the agricultural societies in this, otherwise there's a big block in

the system. And even though we're not talking states, have you thought that Brisbane Show might go down the gurgler because they will have [only] three entries?

MR HALLIDAY: I actually pointed that out to Tim. He will bear me out on that, yes.

MR KNAPPSTEIN: I was just hoping the panel might like to comment there.

MR HALLIDAY: But you have no idea what's happening in the Gold Coast hinterland. There are 12 fine wineries in the Gold Coast hinterland.

MR KNAPPSTEIN: Well, that means we have 36 entries. But would the panel like to comment on the role of the agricultural societies, given that they have to be included?

PROF HØJ: Is there anybody who wants to answer?

TIM JAMES: I certainly will have a crack at that, Tim. Following on from Richard's suggestion about not trying to make this a state system at the middle level, I was more concerned initially with trying to get that regional focus sorted out in the model. There are many questions to get worked out at that level—one might be the Victorian Wine Show.

Yes, I had thought about Brisbane. I had thought about a couple of other areas, too, that seemed at risk if the pyramid was followed to the nth degree. We need to work through the regional system first and work that out.

PROF HØJ: Is it fair enough to say this, rather than talk about the specifics of Tim's proposal? Is it relevant to have a pyramid structure rather than starting to subdivide the country by various boundaries?

SPEAKER: (off microphone) Can I put the proposition that the pyramid should be driven from the top and not from the bottom? The concern is that everyone still wants to have a go at the top end, so I think leadership should be shown at the top end, as to where they draw the entries from. Then it can be worked out whether the regional shows have any relevance.

PROF HØJ: Yes, that's a good point. The end result will be the same though, won't it?

SPEAKER: (off microphone) Well, it might make the regional shows less welcome to exhibitors if they can't enter through, say, the Griffith Show to get to Melbourne. They may not even bother entering that show.

PROF HØJ: Yes, okay. Can we take a little bit of discussion on this? I know there are lots of people with comments who are waiting.

PETER GODDEN: Peter Godden, the (Australian ed.)Wine Research Institute. I wanted to make a couple of comments about the wine assessment course. It's great to have it mentioned so many times today. I think there are probably a few misconceptions about what the course is about. I'd like to make the comment that it was set up in 1992 under the auspices of the Adelaide Show, and the Adelaide Show has been very active in using the results and contacting us. I've been in the industry for four years and I've been contacted by only two or three other shows, with some interest in individual people who have contacted them, who have done the course. Or, more rarely, the show has contacted me saying, "Can we use the results?" and the answer always is of course, "Yes." The results are open to any show, and it's a bit disappointing that so few shows have actually actively used the results.

I'd also make the comment I think Peter Dawson raised earlier about specialised judges. It's very difficult for us to be proactive in promoting people from the course; I think both the shows and the participants have to accept that. But we do get people who are very good in either white or red wines, but very few who are good in both. And when you see who those people are, it's not surprising from their winemaking backgrounds that they're probably going to be very good specialist white wine judges and not red wine judges. We've certainly got all that data. If shows are interested in accessing it, we've got it.

But I would also agree with what Brian said: that the participants really have to go out and hassle if they want to be accepted. I get a lot of feedback from participants who have done very well, who are very frustrated that they can't get a go in any of the shows, or that the new associates in one show or another have not done the course. I obviously can't comment on why they have been selected as associates, whereas very good participants in the course apparently have not been given a go, even though they've contacted those same wine shows.

I'd finally say that we don't feel we can train wine show judges and we don't claim to do that. We say that we prepare potential new wine show judges. We try to put together an intensive course, now over four days, and give participants lots of activities that would simulate wine show conditions and stretch them. We also put them under conditions where we can collect data to assess their performance. But we're not training new judges. I think we can do that in conjunction with wine shows, but the wine shows themselves have got to take some responsibility.

SPEAKER: Can we ask the floor a question, because I'd like to know how many people go through that each year.

MR GODDEN: We've run 15 courses now since '92, so that means that 450 people have gone through. We have trouble keeping up with the demand. Peter and I have discussed several times in the last few weeks whether or not we run another one this year in December. We've certainly got more than enough demand to run two a year at the moment.

SPEAKER: How many of the people who go through it do you think are of a standard high enough to become an associate judge?

MR GODDEN: I think Brian mentioned earlier on that, of the people who have gone through so far, there have been up to 50 out of 450 who have been very good in both red and white. I haven't done that analysis but about six have become full-time judges.

BRIAN WALSH: Between six and 10 I think, Peter.

MR GODDEN: Yes. But if you look at all the judges who judged in the major shows in Australia last year, there's a lot more than six who have actually been through the course, but maybe there are only six from those top performers who have gone on to be judges. Zar Brooks is probably one of

them. I think he did the second course back in 1993. It's a long process to train judges. This is just a starting point. We also changed the course because clearly the market had changed. We ask a question on the first morning about how many people are there primarily to be a wine show judge.
I think it's fair to say that when the course started, it was everybody, and now it's a far smaller percentage. People are there for other reasons. They really want to tune their palates; they want to get training; they want to be exposed to imported wines; a whole lot of other reasons as well. So the market has changed and perhaps the shows need to recognise that there isn't a massive interest amongst a lot of the people who come to do the course in actually being a wine show judge.

PHILIP RICH: My name is Philip Rich. I write a wine column for the *Australian Financial Review* magazine. I'm also the wine buyer for The Steakhouse and Prince of Wales in Melbourne. In the interest of complete disclosure, I've also accepted an invitation from Michael Hill Smith to be an associate at Adelaide this year. Peter, you mentioned earlier about a lot of mixed messages today. The one message that clearly—and my question is for Richard—that clearly hasn't been mixed is the fact that nobody wants to see gold medals or, in particular, trophies awarded to wines that aren't finished and bottled. So my question to Richard is: when is the Melbourne Show going to bite the bullet and make the Jimmy Watson Trophy an award for a bottled wine, in the interest of consumers and in the interests of the Australian wine industry?

PROF HØJ: I think there is only one person who can answer that.

MR HASELGROVE: Look, the answer to that is: when the exhibitors decide that that's the way to go. If you have a look at the schedule for Melbourne, you will see that some classes have dropped out, some have been restructured. There have been a lot of changes over the last 12 years. Now, that's in response to what the exhibitors are telling us, by not entering. Now, the problem with the Watson classes is that they have trebled in the last three years. We don't do it—you do.

MR RICH: But the producer … I think Stuart summed it up perfectly before. It's like the Best Actor for the Academy Awards of the Australian wine industry. I would like to know how many producers here would still enter their wines if it was for a two-year-old wine that was bottled and was what the consumer was going to taste. I don't think anybody cares that it's not a finished product. You will still get just as many entrants. It will still be just as hallowed an award as it is right now. I don't think anything will change. But I do agree that if the consumers twig on one day that this is an award for an unfinished product, it just looks ridiculous.

MR HASELGROVE: Okay, it's ridiculous, but please let me—you must understand - - -

PROF HØJ: Can I just say that the title of this is Who's Running This Show? —and I am!

MR HASELGROVE: Peter, this is very important.

PROF HØJ: Well, you have your go, and I'll give you one line in response.

MR HASELGROVE: The Jimmy Watson Trophy is awarded from a trust fund. The conditions of the trust fund are set. Now, if you want to take it to the Supreme Court and get that changed—we're not going to do it. If you as the industry want to do it, then you can try and do it. But it is an award from a trust fund and the conditions of the award were set down at the beginning in the late '60s. So, okay, we can't change them.

PROF HØJ: Okay. Thank you very much, Richard. I think there's probably many reasons why there is still demand for that thing, whether it's right or wrong.
It's very hard to actually decide what is the right thing to do here, because you all have so many things you want to say. I'll allow you another five minutes for general commentary and then we will try to focus in on a few outcomes.

PHILLIP JOHN: Thanks very much, Peter. Speaking with some brief observations out of Brisbane this year from the chair—first of all, just to counter the arguments about small and large companies, there were four major trophies to small producers this year at Brisbane, including three to Majella and also one to Saddlers Creek, so I guess in terms of communication to particularly people like Max, that hasn't quite got through. Secondly, there were 39 per cent awards out of the total number of 2,800 entries, so that's going down, which is fascinating to say the least. But the most important thing I want to say is about judges.
We organised a list of 15 judges as of December last year, with 12 preferred for a three by four panel system. When we got to the show, we had nine. That's one week before. Now, to run around and find three judges—and I guess that the other shows have got the same problem—is a nightmare to say the least. We say that we're looking for more judges, but I think the responsibility really comes back to those people that are either here or in the industry that want to have a go. They have to put their names forward so that it makes it a bit easier to have a look at the depth of people that are coming through the system.
One more thing that Peter touched on. I'll venture into the murky waters and suggest that, whether I support it or not, there is still a lot of support in the industry for unbottled wine to be put into shows. I have had that communication from many small and large producers. We can sit here and talk about benchmarking. What are we really doing about it? Sauvignon blanc is not happening in this country, merlot is not happening. We need to be doing something proactive about what we are taking out of the show circuit.
Just one final observation on the Brisbane Show—there was not one gold medal to a blended white wine class, so we're almost to the point of saying, "Why do we need to pursue some of these blended white wine classes if they are of little relevance?" We could bring down the total number of entries that are really cluttering up the show.

PROF HØJ: Thank you, Phillip.

TOM NEIL TACKER: Tom Neil Tacker, editor with *Tourism and Hospitality Review*. I would like to pose a question to the panel—not a comment—about where you think the show system is going in terms of the consumer. Now, we've been addressing this structurally from the winemaker's point of view, but I haven't yet heard much from the consumer's point of view. There have been some very good comments that some of you have made about the consumers.
However, in addition to my role as an editor, I also speak on

the radio quite regularly, on 2BL in Sydney and have done in Queensland on the ABC for some years now. What I am beginning to understand from the consumers is their confusion about the show system in general. Just a simple example: they buy a bottle which has a bronze medal on it; nothing is there to explain to them that that bronze was awarded along with perhaps some others in that class.

Peter, your suggestion about founding a body that will eventually do a sort of a marketing audit and determine how the show system is going to continue: if that's going to happen, how are you going to get this message across to the consumers, to continue to establish credibility, to make it more easy for the average consumer to understand? At this point I don't think they do and there is an enormous amount of confusion out there. That's why marketers have been able to coerce and, to a certain extent, confuse the consumers. How are you going to address consumers and explain the show system in the future?

PROF HØJ: Nobody has mentioned this yet. One of the ways that this will happen is the Internet. The Internet is perfectly placed to provide you with as much information—more information than you could possibly want—about who won what, where. So we're not too far off a situation where you buy a bottle of wine and it's got a little chip embedded in the gold sticker that's attached to the label. You scan that past your general-purpose scanner that possibly is held in your mobile phone, and your mobile phone will download via WAP all the information you could possibly want about that wine show and its context etcetera, probably provided by Winepros in a nice sponsorship tie-up deal with the various Royal Agricultural Societies, who of course are jumping on the Internet bandwagon too. I think that's one way that is going to be very crucial to the future.

SPEAKER: Can I say one thing as well, about consumers? A couple of weeks ago, a guy from the American Wine Institute came out and delivered a really interesting paper at the Marketing Conference. The American Wine Institute is a body funded by industry, with a total consumer focus. We as an industry fund plenty of bodies, most of which are production focused. I think it might be time that we look at funding a body that's more consumer focused, so if someone does buy a bottle of wine with a gold medal on it, there is an Internet site and an info line where they can ring up and they can say, "Right, Rutherglen class 11. What is it?" I think a consumer-focused industry body sponsored by industry is the way to go.

PROF HØJ: Thank you for that view. To Michael now.

MR HILL SMITH: Michael Hill Smith, incoming Adelaide chairman. Some people were asking about how you get into the system. Well, it's very simple. You go through—you do your training, you become an associate and then you hope that someone dies. And they do die. And then you get invited to do 10 shows a year, and then you hope that you die!

I was thinking about the Advanced Wine Assessment course. I can't believe that you've trained that many people. I also can't believe that so few of the other shows have embraced the trainee. I might be wrong, but I think Victoria still only has Victorian associates, which I'd like clarified. There's clearly a system there which the shows are not embracing, and it shows how little conversation there is between the show committees. It's a sad state of affairs to my mind.

RICHARD HASELGROVE: The Royal Melbourne Wine Show accepts a list of recommendations from the VWIA. We think that they have the best access to the potential judges in the industry. Yes, I think preference is usually given to people that are working in Victoria, but it's not a prohibition if you're outside the state. We do try to think nationally.

PROF HØJ: Terry Coates—you had an interesting point on one of your slides about generating an overarching communication structure of shows in the industry. I think it relates to what Michael said and it also relates to communicating the industry's objectives to the show societies, so they know what to act on.

TERRY COATES: Look, I can only endorse the fact that we need to talk to each other more and more. As Michael has just said—it's surprising how little we have spoken to each other as shows. We talk to the industry all the time. I have had 21 judges in my back pocket for a week a couple of weeks ago, and I can assure you they were talking to me and they were telling me what they thought. So we're getting feedback from the industry fairly strongly.

It's not necessarily the same thing as you read in the paper, but it's definitely good feedback. If anything came out of me getting ready for this talk, it was that I was a bit embarrassed that we hadn't done it ourselves. So I applaud the ASVO for doing it, but the Agricultural Society systems have tended to break apart, and we need to talk about things.

When it comes down to the judging, access to judges and that sort of thing, it's not so much getting associate judges. We have that many we knock them back every year. It's embarrassing that we can't give them more chance. Russell Cody, who actually got to be a judge with us this year, tried for five years. There was no doubt that he had the ability; it's just there's not enough positions to go around. Where we really have a problem is at that panel chair area, and therein lies the problem within the system. Not enough of the judges out there are getting an opportunity at the next level. What you're suggesting about a smaller show system is probably going to make it worse rather than better, so I can only agree with Michael.

PROF HØJ: Thank you. And then we go to Gary.

GARY BALDWIN: Gary Baldwin from WineNet. A very quick comment and then a question. The quick comment is that I am a little concerned that the more we try and build a structure—and I go to Brian Croser's sort of model—what's going to happen is, another structure will pop up somewhere else anyway. So as soon as you build this beautiful pyramid, someone else will do something outside the system. I don't think that's necessarily bad, but I'd be concerned about that. But I'd like to put a question to you, Mr Chairman, and it's really probably to some other people sitting in this room.

The ASVO at the start this morning basically said, "This is a thing we're putting on for you to talk about and we don't want to have any responsibility for how it's going to happen or what the outcome is going to be." As I recall, the ASVO in fact put a set of ASVO wine show guidelines together about 12 years ago.

I was a little intrigued that they weren't mentioned. I thought perhaps some of the issues raised in that might have

been very interesting because a committee of people did a lot of work on that, and I think that the ASVO itself, the professional society of Australian viticulturists and oenologists, should be able to provide the framework either by themselves or as a subcommittee. In other words, I really can't see that anyone else is in a position to do something about this. If we've got to move forward from here, I'd like to suggest that in fact it is the ASVO's responsibility. So, Mr Chairman, perhaps you could elicit a response from an ASVO representative.

PROF HØJ: I don't have the authority, of course, to rule on this one! From what I have heard—and I think there might be differing and unresolved views on the ASVO—I think we should discuss that when we come to The Way Forward. First, I want to give others an opportunity to.

BERNARD HICKIN: Bernard Hickin from Orlando Wyndham. I've got a couple of questions, firstly to Tim James with your pyramid model. One of the issues that I have with that model is, when you have this regional wine show which is your first tier, if a wine actually misses a medal—for example, if the wine has low-level cork taint—what happens on the day if for some reason that wine just doesn't jump up? You often see issues where a wine may be flat or may have this residual low-level taint. The wine judges won't actually pick it up as a major fault. It then misses that round and that's it. Now, if that wine has a short lifecycle in terms of sales, really that's it for the wine. There is no second chance.

The second question I have is to Peter Dawson. The National Wine Show has classes where you have volumes up to 50 or 100 thousand litres. Those volumes have been set for quite a while now. I would ask the question, "Why can't they go higher?", because the industry is growing. Why couldn't we have classes of half a million litres or maybe a million litres, because that is where some of these blends are going. Tim?

MR JAMES: Okay, Bernie. The first question I'd probably put back to you. I think that every wine that's entered, in whatever wine show you're looking at, that has a cork is probably corked in some way anyway. How far do you take it? I know Chris Hatcher and I have had an ongoing discussion over the last 15 years about wines entered into wine shows. Should we ever really look at another corked wine? What do you do about something on the cusp which is marginally corked or not corked either side of 15? I'm not sure that your answer in having three or four goes at it, or 10 or 11, is all that fair. I mean, you're just picking out small opportunities. There's no way you're going to fix it a hundred per cent.

BERNARD HICKIN: Certainly. I have seen instances where wines that you know are good have just fallen flat on the day, and I guess you just take it as it comes. I guess we call it swings and roundabouts. A wine that has won a silver or gold can get nothing in the next show round. You just accept that. Maybe it's the fault of the judges on the day or maybe that bottle was just a bad bottle, for whatever reason, although you know the wine is better than that.

PROF HØJ: I think the issue is identified, and there are many ways you can cope with it. If you get a medal at a local show, you enter it into a capital show, it costs X dollars. If you don't get a local medal and you still want to get in, it costs 10X, and then you can probably cope with it. You've got to think outside the square.

SPEAKER: Mind you, if the judges are competent and they have awarded a medal on proper points at the beginning, then it can't be cut out from thereon. It's never going to get less than a bronze from thereon, is it?

JAMES HALLIDAY: Absolutely not. Canberra proves that a thousand times over, in the majority of classes. We regularly get poisoned in Canberra by wines which some poor benighted soul has given a bronze medal to somewhere. We'd like to get our hands on the judges who did it, I tell you!

PROF HØJ: There was one more issue I wanted to raise, and this is from a total layperson's view. What I would like to do is to expand on what James said: that our system seems to be much more robust than what we see overseas. That doesn't mean that we're doing it right, and I just wonder whether the people that have had senior judging experience are happy with the way that we conduct our tastings. Do we do them according to best practice? If we have 90 wines in a bracket, do we consistently start from number 1 to go to number 90 or is it statistically better for one person to start at 1, another one at 31 and another one at 61? Do we have some best-practice standards so that there's some objective credibility to implement across the industry? And if not, should we have them? Does anybody want to comment on that?

SPEAKER: Just a comment along those lines, Peter. I had an e-mail from Robert Hesketh a few days ago about the wine show system. He once said to me, "Don't let 'em ever talk you out of judging lots of wines in Australia in a day, because we do it so well," and I got him to enlarge on that. What we're finding now is that, where we might have been able to judge 188 wines 30 years ago, because we had eliminated a lot of faulty wines in that process, now the judging is a lot harder. His argument was in those days that, because you were working under pressure, you didn't dillydally and sort of say, "Is it a bit sulphitey? Is there a bit of VA?" or whatever. If you thought it was, it was out, so it was a really hard, rigorous process of lifting the standards.

Now I'd like to think we've moved beyond that and, hopefully, there is no real elevation in standards, so the judging is a harder task. That's why I'm sure James and others are suggesting 150 wines is the absolute limit. I'd like to revisit the guidelines Gary mentioned. I think that would be a wonderful starting point. Every show society should have the same set of checklists of saying, "Let's not forget these issues. Let's think about the wines in a far more structured way."

IAN McKENZIE: I've been judging in this country for a long time. One of the things I find the most difficult to overcome in this country is judging in Brisbane, say, on a hot spring day, where the temperature can be quite warm, and then judging in Ballarat in the middle of winter when it's just the opposite. This is something that the ASVO addressed in their exercise, in 1986 it was Gary, where we tried to put a standard forward for consistent judging conditions.

There's a difference in the way the wines appear on the bench and the way you yourself perform under those different conditions, so it's not surprising that we do get variability in the results. It would make the judge's job easier

if we could get some form of standard judging conditions. Now, I realise this is going to cost money. Richard was alluding earlier to the progress the RASV are making on trying to get an air-conditioned purpose-built facility for judging wines, but I really do think if we're serious about it, that's the way we're going to have to go.

IAIN RIGGS: For those of us who remember the infamous Nate Cronan and judging in the LA County Wine Fair—an American experience—it is so far removed from what we do in Australia it is not funny. You have to have a sense of humour and you do actually have to laugh, otherwise you end up crying all day. Part of the judging they instigated was having four per panel. The first part was whether the wine was in or out, and so you get two with it in and two with it out, and you sit and look at each other and then eventually you say, "Oh, okay, we'll turn it out." So then you can move on to the next one, and you get two against two again. So, it's a vastly different experience, and I came away from that thinking, "Well, as long as they keep doing that and we keep our trap shut, we'll be fine."

But we can't do that forever, because eventually the judging system will catch up to us. We do have to acknowledge that the quality of the wine in Australia is largely due to our current system of judging, but we actually have to be prepared to take it to the next step and move on. Whether that is having specialist style judges or specialist shows, we actually have to address it and move on.

LOUISA ROSE: Louisa Rose from Yalumba. Iain, I'd like to concur with what you're saying. If we're talking about judge numbers and the number of available judges that are appropriate for judging in Australian wine shows, I think we're fairly limited in the number of expert judges that we can have come in and judge any class in a show. But I think that there is a huge number of people in the Australian wine industry that would do really good jobs of judging specific styles, and possibly specific regions. If you've got a judge or a panel of judges who are confident in judging that particular style, then I think you're then going to be able to judge more of those wines quite confidently and get really good results. And you could do a lot of your training of your associates in the process. But if you've got a panel of three judges that have been quite comfortable judging their chardonnays in the morning but now come across 150 shiraz in the afternoon and don't feel as comfortable doing that, then there's going to be less ability to judge the numbers and to do the associate training. So I think the idea of some style definitions within shows and within judges and within panels has a lot of merit.

JAMES HALLIDAY: Brian Croser did it in Canberra last year, as I understand it, and it was terrific. If you are regarded as a chardonnay specialist or a shiraz specialist, fine, but—as I understand it—Vanya Cullen was regarded as a specialist in all of the odds and sods and dogsbody classes, and had a perfectly miserable show. I don't know what the answer is.

MR HASELGROVE: Peter, I have a further word on the facilities. They're a limiting factor, with the show system the way it's going. In Melbourne we can successfully cope with 4,000 entries. Ask the judges this year. They have done a tremendous job in four and a half days, and I think you'll find the results tonight are pretty good. But of course, what's happening at the moment is that we're having something like a 15 per cent increase each year, mostly from new exhibitors, and we can't cope with that. One of the things the industry might consider is providing this purpose-built judging facility. Maybe you can convince the ag. societies that they have a different role to play in the future. I was hopeful that something in the Wine Centre in Adelaide might be purpose-built, but it hasn't been. I don't know where you do it and you're going to have to put up probably 15 to 20 million dollars to do it. That would solve a lot of our problems, because once you move out of the capital cities, there are very few facilities that can cope with a wine show. You've heard Brisbane has its difficulties. Hobart certainly has. Adelaide shifts from barn to barn.

SPEAKER: No, it does not.

PROF HØJ: I don't think we need to go into the specifics. Your points are well taken.

(Tape changeover)

RICHARD HAMILTON: In my opening words this morning, the words I used were that the role of ASVO is to stimulate and support industry in viticulture and oenology, and particularly in this issue. We're very pleased to have Brian Walsh and Tim James work with our committee people to put this process together. I see a lot of issues have come out, and a lot of heat that's there. We didn't believe, once we put this together, that it was appropriate that ASVO then offer to be at the helm of it. To be successful, there are key stakeholders in this whole process that need to be together. Perhaps it is ASVO's role to facilitate it, but then to leave it to run in its future direction.

So, Gary, to answer your comment, certainly it's a role for ASVO and one that we are not going to step back from. One of the proposals is the organising committee be part of that process, but we'd encourage that others join in. The end result should be something that comes back to a group of key stakeholders for general agreement on an outcome.

PROF HØJ: Well, thank you very much for that. At least we have a mechanism by which to take the issue forward.

MICHAEL HILL SMITH: I was looking up at Brian Croser's recommendation about using the WFA. Perhaps it's just a question of picking the most appropriate vehicle, and if that is working with the WFA, fine. But if we could get some agreement today that a group be formed under one of those auspices, I think it would be great.

GARY BALDWIN: I was just going to suggest that we seem to be moving towards ASVO setting up some sort of subcommittee. Perhaps what we should do is go around the panel or around the floor and draw up a list of terms of reference. One term of reference—I'm not necessarily supporting it, but I think it's something that should be investigated—is Tim's model. So term of reference number 1: study the pyramid model system and report back. To whom they report is something I'm a little bit worried about, but can I just suggest that we put that as the first term?

PROF HØJ: Well, I think the first thing we have to agree is that we want to go that way. If we don't want to go that way, you can forget about your terms of reference. I'm trying to see whether people are comfortable with the proposition I've put forward, that a body be set up and I suggest, as the ASVO know how, that they would be the first people to

take it forward. I'm trying to give people an opportunity to say, "No, this is not the way to go." but I don't hear anything but support. I don't hear a lot of support, but I take that as being silent support, unless people would like to vote on it.
I think there are a lot of points to have come out of the discussion. I think you can distil them from the tape. But thanks for that view.

PHILLIP JOHN: To reiterate what was said earlier, a terrific amount of communication goes back through the chairman of judges of the shows, and I can only make reference to Brisbane and the limited number of meetings that are set up. There needs to be some sort of immediate take-out from this meeting that can at least be sent to the existing chairmen in shows, so that when discussions do take place, particularly with regard to future directions, we are all singing off the same hymn sheet. And talking about the RNA in Brisbane, the wine section is one of 21 sections of the show, so unless somebody is going to stand up there and make some significant input for change, it's got to come from a common forum.

PROF HØJ: Thank you. So I now take it that we have some general consensus that we need to move forward on this day. I assume that the organisers of this symposium would be willing to take it to the next step and articulate what the outcomes have been from today, and also a path forward. This probably will involve somebody applying their brains to the wine show system, to address the issues that have been brought up today. We can try to formulate those further, as Gary suggested, through some terms of reference. One is the pyramid structure. Another will quite clearly be recruitment and training. The third will be optimal judging structures. James has very strong views that you shouldn't have too many panels. You can't have more than four ideally. Others will say under a different structure perhaps you can. That would be the way that I read the meeting, without trying to impose myself on it.
David raised some issues which have been captured. The communication between the Royal Agricultural Societies needs to improve. So I will first ask, before I impose myself on people like Brian Walsh—Brian, do you think you would be prepared to take this forward?

BRIAN WALSH: I'd be prepared to participate in the process, Peter, yes.

PROF HØJ: Okay. So if I ask the president of the ASVO: are you confident that your organisation can take the first step?

RICHARD HAMILTON: Certainly we have had commitment from the working committee and the ASVO members. I'm very pleased to have Brian indicate that he would participate in that process. I think the answer very definitely is yes. The critical issue though is accountability. As Michael Hill Smith raised, who in the WFA, for example? I think, as you have indicated, we've got an opportunity to capture what's come from here, but I'm a little bemused. I've seen similar situations where people sit on their hands in viticulture, particularly the National Vine Health Steering Committee, and I'm hoping that we can get a bit more excitement and commitment to getting this forward. It is a big issue. It's clearly attracted a lot of interest in the press. It's something that I think we've generally agreed is important to the industry. I'd very much like to see that supported and for ASVO to drive that process, but clearly it needs some accountability and responsibility and that needs to be addressed.

PROF HØJ: Thank you.

TONY ROYAL: Tony Royal from Seguin Moreau. One thing that's come out of today is just how important this Australian wine show circuit is to the Australian wine industry, and that's a motherhood statement. But this is not a voluntary process, now that we have all come together to talk about it. We need to put professional money into this, to have somebody dedicate the time, because too often committees are put together and our resources are stretched and we don't actually come out with an outcome.
The ASVO members, the judges—they are the stakeholders, as are the show societies, as is everybody here. But please make sure that we end up with somebody who is dedicated to this cause, who is funded to come up with and then work the models through.

JAMES HALLIDAY: Seguin Moreau would love to sponsor it, would it not, Tony? It would be a really good sponsorship!

TONY ROYAL: I'm absolutely speechless. Speechless, James!

PROF HØJ: Tony, thank you very much for that. I think that's the view I have put forward all the time. That is the only way to make it happen. But I wouldn't rule out that there are other stakeholders that might want to contribute to the process as well at some stage. For instance, the show societies might well say, "Well, we wouldn't mind improving what we do and we might contribute to that process as well." I can't speak on their behalf, but I think they should be asked.
I think we have resolved that we will go forward, as a first step, by writing up the proceedings from this meeting. Then subsequently I am very hopeful that the ASVO will be able to put an interim group together that will try to push the right buttons. I would think that group would have to communicate back to the exhibitors, the exhibition societies in Australia, whatever the mechanism is, and also the judges.
That's where I want to finish my part, but I would just like the panel to have one last go at putting things on record if they feel that they have to do something.

TERRY COATES: Look, I'd be disappointed if we didn't talk a bit more about it, and let's hope that happens. I know I'm going to pursue it. So, yes, I think it will happen.

RICHARD HASELGROVE: Yes. We have a meeting of the patrons of the Winemakers Federation coming up next month, and I can undertake to take it to them, and that's not a bad way of getting it into the system of the WFA.

MAX ALLEN: I agree with Terry and Tony that it would be a real shame if this wasn't taken further. I said to a few people before this event that this had the potential to be the real turning point—for things to really change. I would like to hope that it doesn't just get lost in a committee and nothing actually concrete come of it. I would like to see something concrete come of it, because that would be a good story, as much as anything else!

BRIAN WALSH: I agree. I think it should be well organised, with funding; a small committee—a small, small committee —of efficient button-pushers.

JAMES HALLIDAY: Nothing to add.

IAIN RIGGS: I'd probably give today 17, but I could be talked up!

BRIAN WALSH: Two points. I know Brian Stonier has been worried about the financial viability of the Royal Adelaide Wine Show. We don't need to put up our entry fees to make a profit. That $5,000 per day is an opportunity cost, it's not money we pay out.

That was just an example. If anybody wants to go and run a show, that's the sort of money you will have to spend. You've got to find somewhere to work it. So we're okay, Brian, thank you. And secondly to Max. I think he underestimates the esteem with which he is held in the business and I don't think his invitation to judge at wine shows would be predicated on the hope of getting a story. I think he's regarded as a contemporary palate with a lot of contribution to make, and I think if you wimp out of the show system, we're the worse for it.

PETER DAWSON: I'd just like to say that people have been complaining about the Australian wine show system for probably in excess of 20 years and this is the first time there's been a forum to address the issues, and it would be a terrible shame if we couldn't make a positive change following this seminar today. The ideas that have come up and the contributions that have come from everyone have been tremendously positive and I think everyone does have a good feeling of the way to move forward, so let's try and do that.

STUART GREGOR: I think we'll go away from today with some concepts and, indeed, one model which a lot of thought has been given to, but is still very much in the conceptual stage. I think the next stage is very much for this committee to appoint someone to work through those concepts, to work through the model, so that we come up with the longer-term outcomes, so that people are making informed decisions.

PHILLIP JONES: I'm going to wear my old management consultant's hat, not my peasant winemaker hat. It seems to me, from many of the comments, that some people want change to the system in one way or another, that the system is heading towards—if it's not already in—a form of management crisis. If there is a committee formed, I think one of its tasks has to be to prepare a brief for outside help. I think the industry is going to have to commit about 200 grand to a good management consulting firm to review the whole damn lot. Because there are so many people with so many vested interests, I don't think it will be done properly otherwise.

TIM JAMES: I see a difficulty if we don't walk away with a couple of thoughts from today, being: do we need to look at the same wine 10 times in a year? I would really like to think about putting a model forward that will tell us how many wines we will be going to be judging in two, five, 10 years' time, and how will we cope with that if we don't change what we're currently doing. So I think it a very well worthwhile day.

PROF HØJ: Thank you. I think it's all very positive. I have just been thinking about the $200,000 and I think if we put a levy of $4 per entry to improve the system, for two or three years, we can do it, because I think it is important. We might try to find the money otherwise, but it has to happen. I think that's the consensus.

Stakeholder presentation – exhibitor

Peter Dawson
BRL Hardy, Reynella, SA

Introduction

The benefits of successful participation in wine shows for the large company are many, both from a production and a marketing perspective.

In effect there is a substantial overall corporate value in successfully competing in the wine show arena.

Businesses and companies throughout the world covering a full spectrum of pursuits are regularly judged against their peers on the basis of innovation, service, product excellence or performance.

Many successful businesses have been established based on early successes in competitions, be they Small Business Awards, or in this industry's case Wine Shows. How many people on earth had heard of Ljubljana, the Jimmy Watson Trophy or Wolf Blass prior to the 1970s?

Failure to perform well in competition may not directly result in failure of a business. However, it may well be symptomatic of an inappropriate culture or set of practices that tend to undermine the potential success of a business, and ultimately lead to its failure.

It is inevitable in an industry producing the most scrutinised product on earth, that wine shows are a prominent feature of the corporate wine world.

Australia's top 20 wine companies based on tonnes crushed, (Hallier 2001) representing more than 80% of the nation's wine production, are all active participants in Australian wine shows.

Production benefits

Production benefits from wine shows are ultimately quality benefits. Winemakers are encouraged to be more self critical of their efforts in the first instance, perhaps drawing some positive insight from judges' assessments, or having the opportunity to see potential 'benchmark wines' in the wine show forum.

It is indisputable that the wine show system in Australia has played a key role in the development of wine quality in this country.

For large and small wine company alike, at the very least, wine shows are a mechanism to avoid the possibility of becoming overly self-assured and inward thinking in a wine quality sense or, simply being out of touch with developments in the wine industry—be they developing wine regions or wine styles.

For the winemaker or winemaking team in a corporate environment, wine show success is a very tangible measure of performance. It will indicate that they are technically on the ball and are generally in tune with important elements of style within a particular wine type.

The competitive nature of wine shows is important in encouraging winemakers to strive harder for the final one or two percent of a blend, fining or acid addition that may be the difference between a wine being good or outstanding. Melbourne's Jimmy Watson Trophy has its critics, however, as Australia's best known wine award, it is doubtful that any other prize has winemakers as focused on their wines, as they are on their entries for this prize. This is not to say that without competition winemakers are not putting their best wine forward— it is to say that healthy competition helps, and that the competitive element of wine shows does promote a quality benefit.

The broader benefit to exhibitors is the educational/training element of wine shows.

Most large wine companies will have a wine show attendance program that enables winemakers to attend exhibitors' tastings, evaluate their wines alongside award-winning exhibits, and if they choose, seek direct feedback from a judge. It can be an enlightening or frustrating experience. Hopefully the award wines are outstanding examples of their type and the winemaker goes away with a much clearer picture of what is required to succeed at the highest level.

The best experience that a winemaker can get through the wine show system is to participate as an associate judge or judge. Most large companies are keen to support their winemakers into judging positions.

The issue of exhibitor judges will be covered later; however, let there be no doubt that judging experience for winemakers is a long term quality benefit to the individual winemaker and the organisation that they work for.

Marketing benefits

The incentive to gain marketing benefits from wine show successes is a key factor in the involvement of large wine companies in our wine shows.

A conservative estimate of costs for any one of the four major wine companies in Australia, entering all capital city wine shows would exceed $250,000 annually. Entry fees, cost of wine, transport and manhours involved in selecting and preparing exhibits, attendance at tastings and so on, all conspire to make this a costly exercise.

A gold medal or trophy success is positive feedback to the exhibitor that they are on the right track from a production viewpoint. Given the appropriate publicity this success can be turned into a profitable marketing tool. Publicity can take the form of a medal sticker on the bottle at the point of sale, consumer advertising or, sweetest of all, editorial coverage of an outstanding trophy success.

The subsequent cost of publicising wine show awards, particularly through paid advertising, can greatly exceed the costs incurred in participating in the show system. This in itself points to the perceived marketing value of achieving wine show success.

In terms of marketing power, gold medal and trophy results from capital city wine shows are most highly valued.

However, market research indicates that most consumers are attracted to a medal on a bottle regardless of where it was won. Gold medals for flagship, or so-called 'icon' wines provide useful brand reinforcement. However, they achieve relatively small gains in direct sales, as there is an expectation that these are 'gold medal wines' and availability is often pre-allocated. Few Australian wine show awards attract general editorial space in the media, the Jimmy Watson Trophy being the notable exception.

The greatest marketing benefit to be gained is a gold medal or trophy success for a commercial wine, or wine that is readily available and selling for less than $12 a bottle. Major retailers are particularly attracted to such wines, using the show results for promotional leverage, and being content in their own minds that they are selling a good product.

Early and consistent wine show success can be instrumental in the development of a strong commercial brand. Omni, Jamieson's Run and Jacob's Creek are common examples of commercial wines that have benefited from successful wine show performance.

As the quality bar is being raised, particularly in commercial classes, it is becoming increasingly difficult for commercial wines to win big awards. If the same judging standards are applied across all classes it is hard to imagine wines in 'value classes' achieving gold medal awards.

Corporate benefits

For publicly listed wine companies any good news is positive in terms of maintaining a company's profile and its perception as a successful, well-managed business.

Wine show awards are a regular feature of company annual reports, and have been known to generate just as much if not more enthusiasm from small investors than the financial results.

Corporate analysts place particular value on a good performance in international wine shows. Growth potential is seen to be greater in international markets, and wine show success in these key markets is most beneficial in promoting growth and profitability in these markets.

Wine show entry policies

Which show and which wine do we enter? Traditionally Australia's capital city wine shows, organised by their respective agricultural societies have been the focus of attention. They are typically well organised, attract the best judges and are judged to high standards.

The circuit of capital city wine shows satisfies local market and industry interest, and provides the exhibitor with an opportunity to have their wines judged over a period of time in differing surroundings. There are examples of wines that fail to be recognised at one show and go on to win a major award in the next. Most corporate exhibitors are pursuing consistency of awards throughout the wine show circuit to reinforce the pedigree of their product.

The capital city wine shows currently attract entries from all regions, hence for judge and exhibitor winemaker alike, these shows present the broadest range of styles within a class, and provide a valuable perspective on developing wine quality, style and contrasting regional characteristics. The insight that can be gained from this experience is particularly valuable to large exhibitor winemakers and the industry as a whole.

In recent years we have seen a proliferation of regional wine shows many of which invite entries of all wine types, from all regions. The relevance of such shows is questionable. What is the significance of a gold medal on a McLaren Vale Shiraz won in Townsville, or on a sparkling wine won in Rutherglen?

As a policy BRL Hardy decided two years ago to enter only regional wines in their respective regional shows and not to participate in regional wine shows as a general exhibitor.

The notable exception to this policy is that BRL Hardy continue to enter fortified wines, regardless of their regional origin, in the Rutherglen Wine Show, as this show is regarded as a particular forum for fortified wines.

While the average consumer may not place importance on where a medal is gained, the concern is that a proliferation of medals on bottles in the marketplace can only diminish the significance of wine awards in the long term. Added to this, participation in open wine shows is a costly and time consuming exercise for the large company, and there comes a time when enough is enough.

Regionality is a strong plank of BRL Hardy's winemaking philosophy. The company now operates wineries or has brands tied to all wine regions in Western Australia, the Clare Valley, McLaren Vale, Barossa Valley, Limestone Coast, Riverland and regions of South Australia as well as the Yarra Valley, Tasmania and Canberra regions. Thus BRL Hardy strongly supports regional wine shows associated with all of these regions.

What wine to enter?

The importance of having a show pedigree for all commercial wines presents a challenge to the large company with an armoury of brands and a significant share of a particular market.

Wine writer Huon Hooke (*The Wine Magazine*, April 2001) happily accused BRL Hardy of 'pattern bombing' tactics to gain success in sparkling wine classes. The inference being that the more entries in a class the greater the chance of success. Hopefully wines will continue to be judged on merit. The real pattern in the example cited by Hooke was that the same two wines shared the top award on 10 out of 14 occasions, indicating that the judging system is working well.

While there is a recognised need to control the number of entries in wine shows, it would seem unfair to restrict the entry of any bona fide commercial wine just because it comes from under the umbrella of a large company.

Exhibitor judges

The inclusion of exhibitor judges is crucial to the well-being and effectiveness of the wine show system.

Firstly winemakers add technical rigour to the judging process. Technical faults should not be tolerated and there is a higher probability that a practising winemaker will be more sensitive to yeast faults, volatility, bacterial characters and so on, than non-winemaker judges.

Hopefully practising winemakers are at the forefront of the development of wine quality and style, and are well placed to recognise subtle but positive influences in the judging forum.

Given the high participation rate of wineries in the show system, it would seem difficult to maintain a high standard of judging if the pool of available judges is significantly reduced by the exclusion of winemakers who happen to be exhibitors.

In terms of using wine shows to improve wine quality throughout the industry, exhibitor winemakers stand to benefit significantly from the judging process, and in turn be the most effective conduit of improvement. The use of winemakers from various backgrounds with other industry profes-

sionals would seem to provide the best balance of specialised skills and general wine understanding.

Unfinished wine in wine shows

The exhibition of unfinished/unbottled wine is a major concern to many people, particularly in the context of capital city wine whows.

Currently Brisbane, Melbourne and Hobart wine shows accept unfinished wines. In the case of Hobart, wines are awarded commendations rather than medals.

From an exhibitor's perspective it is important to have a forum where wines can be independently assessed on the way through, and for winemakers to be able to make their own assessment in the context of a new vintage (current vintage white wine and one year old red wine).

There is great value in getting wines out of the winery tasting room and looking at them in open competition.

The immediate benefit is that in some cases where a wine has not matched expectation, there is still an opportunity to make blend changes or adjustments and improve the quality of the wine before it reaches the bottle.

As a part of the 'betterment of the breed' concept, it is important for winemakers and judges to have the opportunity to recognise the complexities and essential qualities in wines at an early stage of development.

Within the majority of Australian wineries, a detailed assessment of the previous vintage red wines and the preparation of blends leading up to the commencement of the wine show circuit, is a permanent fixture on the calendar and a healthy part of winery culture.

The judging of unfinished wines is unique to Australian shows and has been an integral part of the 'betterment of the breed' process that has served the industry so well.

As such it would seem inappropriate to totally abandon the concept of judging unfinished wines.

Here is an aspect of the wine show system where the long-term quality benefits should be considered first and foremost. To maintain strength of competition and perspective, judging of unfinished wines should have a place in some but not all capital city wine shows. This could be a part of a rationalisation or specialisation process to differentiate and give specific shows a particular purpose.

Uniform adoption of the practice of not awarding medals to unfinished wines would remove exhibitors whose interests go beyond the quality factor, and at the same time remove the credibility cringe.

Australia vs rest of the world

The benefits of entering Australian wine shows versus international shows are quite specific.

Gold medals and trophies won in Australian wine shows are generally not understood and have limited value in international markets. Where commercial brands are involved, a consumer may be influenced by the presence of a medal sticker on a bottle at the point of purchase. However, major international buyers and retailers display little interest in Australian wine show results.

The International Wine Challenge in London is the most widely acclaimed and publicised wine show in the United Kingdom. The Wine Challenge has strong connections with the English wine trade at all levels, and a major success for an Australian winery in the Wine Challenge will be of much greater benefit than any award won in an Australian show. The success of Australian wines in the International Wine Challenge has made a very significant contribution to the growth of Australian brands in the UK market.

The United States market is probably the market most influenced by wine reviews and wine show awards in the world. In terms of marketing value nothing beats a 90+ review in the *Wine Spectator*. However, major awards from the San Francisco Wine Fair have been most beneficial in increasing sales and distribution for our wines in the United States.

As in the United Kingdom, Australian wine show awards are not understood and carry little marketing benefit in the United States of America.

The Australian wine show system's major contribution in the growth of Australian wine internationally has been its impact in fostering the improvement of wine quality generally. The importance of our show system with respect to international markets should not be underestimated on the basis that there are no apparent direct marketing benefits.

Summary

In summary the Australian wine show system has provided a major quality benefit to the industry. This has put Australian wines at a competitive advantage in comparison to the offering from other wine producing countries with less effective wine show systems.

Commercial gains from the promotion of wine show awards can tend to obscure the real benefit of shows. However, without some marketing rewards it is questionable as to whether wine shows would be as strong and well supported as they are.

In a wine quality sense the Australian industry is on a continuum. Wine quality has generally lifted to the point where many would say Australian winemakers are doing a pretty good job. However, as a producer of world class table wines Australia is still in its infancy. The bulk of vineyards in the best regions are immature, and there is ample scope for the improvement of viticultural practice and winemaking practice (oak usage for example). Scientific research has the potential to greatly improve understanding of factors contributing to wine quality.

How are we really going?

How many benchmark wines have been seen in Australian wine shows over the past 10 years?

Wines of purity, power, finesse and refinement. Wines that are bright and well structured when young, that will happily live for 10 years or more.

There are some Rieslings from the Eden Valley, some Semillons from the Hunter Valley, but no Chardonnays come readily to mind. A few Cabernets from Coonawarra, but surprisingly no Shiraz, and certainly no Merlots or Pinot Noirs.

In short, there is a long way to go and it is important if the Australian wine industry is to achieve its full potential, that the show system continues to seek out and foster quality improvement as its prime objective.

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Stakeholder presentation – small company exhibitor

Brian Stonier
Stonier Wines, Merricks, Victoria

Brian Stonier began his presentation as follows:
'As a speaker for small company exhibitors, I represent the most numerous class of exhibitor, the one with most to gain from a good show system, and I suspect the stakeholders most to blame for the widely agreed problems of the present system.

I believe my electorate is wine producers who are not one of the 50 big producers who produce more than 100,000 cases, or are non-exhibitors, so that represents, I estimate, at least 1,000 producers out of today's total of 1,318. We also know 1,030 are small producers (companies of individuals) crushing less than 250 tonnes.

I have of course no mandate to speak for this class, but then neither has anybody else, but if the hypothesis which I shall expound in a moment is right, then we will need a consensus of the smaller producers' approach to wine shows.

So my answer to the seminar's title is 'The Small Exhibitor' but I don't think it should be—I think the answer should be 'The judges should be running the show, and if they're not, they should be!'

Of all the stakeholders represented today, (show organisers, judges, exhibitors, publicists, retailers, and journalists), the exhibitors are the most important group of beneficiaries, and of this group of beneficiaries, the small exhibitor has most to lose from a failed show system.

The small exhibitor moves over a period of time through a progression of reasons for entering shows:

First for his own benefit, to obtain an objective comparison of his wine in relation to other producers; by the best palates available; by judges who instinctively understand his objectives; and by attending exhibitor tastings and talking to judges.

Secondly, for his region's benefit, based on the belief that great wine can come only from great regions, and that experts will understand a regional style and objective, and the market will take note of a new and emerging wine regional style or variety.

Thirdly, for the consumer's benefit by winning and promoting widely his medal or trophy wins and using these with full marketing force to draw attention to his winery through media comment and reports on show results.

Fourthly, having achieved success at home, by widening his horizons and entering the (expensive) international shows for his country's benefit and to increase the ratio of Australian wines that win medals. He may also expect to obtain a marketing edge to be used both at home and in the export market.

He agrees with Doctor A.C. Kelly's view of 1867:

> 'The time has now arrived when the wine growers of the colony must bestir themselves, and boldly face the difficulties before them. They must be prepared to take their stand on ground already occupied by the experienced wine growers of Europe, who have a name, and prestige of centuries, in their favour. We all have a direct interest in each other's success, for according to the quality of the wines produced for export will be our status as a wine growing country. No petty jealousies need stand in the way of that friendly rivalry to produce the best wine, which ought to be the endeavour of each wine grower.'

The small producer enters the wine shows:

- Believing that all the judges are experienced and skilled at assessing and comparing the class and styles. He does not realise the time commitment of a whole week out of a busy life, or the number of shows currently in Australia (almost one a week) so that often the best people are simply not available, and that at a major show there is almost no chance of discussing his wines with a judge. The number of alleged 'exhibitors' at such tastings is ruined both by the recipients of a large number of tickets, who invite their friends, lawyers and doctors, and the short time of the session, chosen so that tickets can also be sold to members of the general public.

- He enters in the belief and expectation that the show is organised ideally for the judges to properly assess each wine and that everyone enters their best wine. He may not realise that judges are required to judge too many wines in a day, suffer from palate fatigue, miss many wines of finesse, and however hard they try, award medals to big blockbuster over-oaked wines at the expense of his subtle wines. He assumes that the wines entered are a typical representation of each winery's style, and that they have not been specifically made for entering in a show in order to attract the attention of judges and so win a gold medal or trophy. He does not realise that in an exclusively medal-driven company, a winemaker may spend up to six months preparing show samples for specifically medal winning objectives.

- He believes that if he enters all his wines the judges will choose the best and the public will notice his medal wins. He may not realise that he is causing the system to break down by not limiting the number of entries. The PR media is also jaded and exhausted by medal announcements (despite Huon Hooke's calculation that in capital city shows less than half the entries receive a medal so even a bronze medal is useful). For example, the 2000 Royal Melbourne Show received 3,930 entries and total medals were 1,890 or 48%.

- He believes that the wines of others cost as much to make as his do and that value has nothing to do with quality. He

may not realise the huge disparity of costs and selling prices of wines. Yet one of his objectives should be to understand the relationship of his wine to the market, so he needs to know the recommended retail price of medal winners.

The show results when published should indicate the maker's proposed recommended retail price, which achieves the same result for the maker and consumer as Adelaide's division of classes into price points. Whether show results are being used for marketing or not, the consumer is entitled to know the price range for medal winners.

If the assumption is correct that the small producer has all of these reasons for entering, it makes the show system more important for it is doubtful the system has as many benefits for the other producers: Do large producers really want or expect to get useful quality assessment from their entries? Are not entries from some companies in the hands of marketers who have medal winning as their main objective and who annually analyse the pH, TA and alcohol of medal wins to establish a winning formula?

As the small exhibitor moves through the system, disillusion often sets in. For example when he discovers in a capital city show that a whole region's wine of its premium variety, produced in an exceptionally good year, has not produced a single gold medal in a class.

At this point he realises that he has entered a lottery, and the more tickets he buys, the better his chance of winning. So he puts all his wines in as many eligible classes as permitted.

The professional or experienced winemaker has always known this, but now the problem is being aired so widely it has become the established universal truth.

If the small exhibitor has most to gain from a good system he has a responsibility to help the shows limit their entries to improve the system. Small producers are sufficiently intelligent, objective and realistic to accept some fair system of restricting the number of entries. They can decide honestly if they are entering shows for assessment or marketing reasons.

If entering primarily for assessment, they should enter in the most appropriate regional show, but not a state or capital city show until that particular wine has won a medal at a qualifying show—regional for state, state for capital city.

If entering primarily for marketing reasons, and if the quantity of wine produced and on-hand justifies an entry with all the effort, time and expense those judges are giving the wine, then a state or capital city show would be justified, and greatly increased fees should be paid.

Other external, imposed restrictions should include a ban on entering unbottled wines at state or capital city shows, for there is not a level playing field here. The small producer seldom has the time or equipment to prepare unbottled wines for shows, so big producers who have both normally win the medals.

This in itself may be one of the causes of excessive entries because at The Royal Melbourne Show in the year 2000 there were:

- 580 out of 3,930 entries from the 2000 vintage.
- 650 reds from the 1999 vintage of Cabernet, Shiraz, and other non-Pinot Noir varieties.
- A total of 1,230 probable unbottled wines. This rule would therefore have reduced the Melbourne Show total by 31% to 2,770.

The reason for not judging unbottled wine at capital city shows is not in debate, for it is uniformly agreed to be sensible.

Unbottled wines for assessment purposes should be entered in the appropriate regional show (Cowra, Rutherglen, Red Hill Cool Climate Show) and since it is for assessment purposes only, no medals should be awarded.

For marketing reasons in shows, some existing limitations should be made uniform and stand:

- Each wine entered only once.
- Minimum quantity produced and on hand at show time.
- Sliding scale of fees whereby bigger companies pay more than the small producer per entry. A greater number of entries should attract a bigger fee per entry than a smaller number of entries. Alternatively, the cost of entering could be on a sliding scale, depending on the size of the company (the bigger the company the more per entry) and the number of entries the company makes to ensure that the organisers of the show system remain viable. Another option might be to relate the number of entries to the tonnes crushed or cases produced.

Conclusion

This seminar is important because it has aired many of the problems with the present system. It allows each stakeholder to see how the others operate and the problems caused by the industry's own actions.

We can see the overkill:

- Of judges
- Of wine writers
- By large exhibitors and by small exhibitors.

Unless future directions change, small producers should not enter capital city shows, thereby depriving those shows of many wines of diversity, and relegating such shows to perhaps a dozen large producer-groups only. This will surely eventually destroy the reputation, influence and credibility of certain capital city shows.

Are we not too imaginative for that?

The problem has been aired for many years. In 1998/9 an international judge says he told Melbourne Wine Show organisers they should be ashamed of themselves in acclaiming their quantity of entries rather than the quality. This was the stage at which the show organisers were boasting of their record number of entries.

Finally, to progress the issue, a series of genuine symposia from each of the stakeholders to solve the issue might put everyone in a relaxed, contented and constructive frame of mind. The sort of symposium that Jancis Robinson defines in her *Wine Companion* would be suitable.

Stakeholder presentation – non-exhibitor

Phillip Jones
Bass Phillip Wines, Leongatha, Victoria

Phillip Jones began his presentation with the following remarks:
I've only ever once before been asked to speak to a professional gathering in the wine industry, and that was about style in Pinot Noir, about which I know a few things but not enough. My presentation must have been so bad that now I've been relegated to the task of talking about a subject that I know almost nothing about and to give the reasons why I don't participate in a process which I know almost nothing about. In fact, I think it's most appropriate that I quote the famous Neddy Seagoon from *The Goon Show*, which sums up my position on some of these things:

> *'Little do I know of the little I know about the little I know about the wine show system—*
> *for if I knew a little of the little I know, I'd know a little.*

So I'm keeping my little ears open, and I've actually learned quite a lot this morning.

When Nick asked me to participate in this forum, I vehemently argued that I really had nothing to contribute. It's already been said this morning that it's difficult for somebody to comment on aspects of a wine show when he or she has never participated in it. There has not been any research for this presentation, as it was inappropriate to come in half-baked on some of the issues. It will therefore come in totally uncooked.

Introduction

This address will very briefly summarise the reasons why Bass Phillip doesn't participate in the show system and give you an impression of some of the key factors that are behind that view, although it's not a terribly well formed one. Hopefully an out-of-the-loop peasant farmer can make some generalisations which will contribute.

It has no particular notions about the show judging system, no preconceived ideas, no axes to grind. It is not anti the show system. There will be a lot of questions about it, but basically based on ignorance. There have been three or four days of thought—quite intensively—but no research into it, so what you get is what you're going to hear.

The show system deserves a great deal of respect for the achievements in quality control or developing the breed that have come out of it. It's very obvious, even to the non-participant. It has certainly had quite an impact in international markets and must be one of the basic contributing factors to international success of Australian wines, particularly at the commercial level—whatever that means—the tough low end of the business. All those people who have been involved in the system for decades deserve to be congratulated for that.

A number of the wine industry leaders who have been involved in the show judging system heavily inspired Bass Phillip's entry into the wine business, so any criticism that you might imply from questioning or poor understanding is certainly not personally directed. It would be wrong to offend these great people.

Bass Phillip's business operates about 40 acres of vineyards, yet still only releases something like a thousand cases of wine on the market. The vineyards have three and a half thousand vines per acre, so there's a fair bit of work. There is one full-time employee and some pretty crude facilities, so there is not much time for unproductive work. So if asked to list the 10 reasons why Bass Phillip doesn't participate in the show judging system, the first nine are that it doesn't have time. The unproductive time is either spent drinking burgundy or seeking permission to trade overseas from the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation.

Some of the other factors are that the wines—it's just the way it is—are pretty ugly in their first 18 months to two years and, in Pinot Noir classes, that basically counts them out of show judgings. The stipulated production limit aspects of the wine show system are a complete mystery. To give a parallel, a neighbour breeds Angus bulls. If they set up the same rules in his field as we do in the wine industry, he would have to have at least 50 dozen bulls in the paddock at home with the same DNA profile as the sash winner.

Now, the wines—you know, this is all very personal—the wines show many more dimensions when they're tasted with food. If they were to introduce that aspect into judging processes, well, the judges would have a lot of fun, but they wouldn't go back and do any more work for weeks. It's a difficult one. Also, there's the question of 'Drink now or drink later? Again, there are some uncertainties about that. It's commonly understood that the show judging system decides on the best wines on the day. What consideration is taken of keeping potential and so on—development—is not clear, so it's another reason to have uncertainties about the system.

Blockbuster wines have been talked about. There's no need to repeat those things, but certainly Bass Phillip does tastings in the winery and it occasionally has customers—both private customers and trade customers—in for a look at a batch of barrel samples, and clearly wines with a bit of personality have a big impact or produce a big response. It seems to be the same in the show system which is concerning. Bass Phillip doesn't make blockbuster wines. But aside from those basic reasons, it doesn't participate because in most cases the wines don't comply with the commercial production limits. So that's all very boring.

Now, if Bass Phillip did enter the show judging system and did achieve some good results, what would it do with that information? How would we market it? There'll be more about that a little further on. So, basically, there's a

mild lack of confidence in the system. It probably doesn't suit our business.

On the matter of scoring systems, it was really pleasing to hear Brian's comments before. There are descriptions like 'palate structure, texture, nature of tannins, etc.' and these factors don't necessarily primarily enter into the 3-7-10 system. Bass Phillip never uses the 3-7-10 system in assessing wines in the winery. So there's some background behind the uncertainties.

Let's go into this in a little more detail and look at the four contributing major parts or stakeholders or players in the business: the judges and producers on this page. You probably can't read there, but that's Professor Emile Peynaud judging a bracket of wines. I'm impressed so far with what I've heard about the professionality of the approach to technical judging, and I don't think that needs any discussion.

Comment should be made about fatigue and the impact of alcohol. These are addressed in the letter from John Middleton, which has previously been talked about. This spends several paragraphs explaining why ethanol produces fatigue and influences decision-making. In the Bass Phillip winery, no more than 35 to 40 wines are tasted without staff starting to lose the plot, there's certainly no swallowing. The OIV recommends a similar maximum number. Tasting 150 wines thoroughly should be a concern.

Style is an interesting issue. It's been touched on in a number of ways and it's a subject that requires hours—the definition of style and what you mean by style guidance or judging for style. Style is the realm of (1) the winemaker and (2) the critics who are competent to talk about it and who should be accountable. Whether judges at wine shows should be concerned with it is not immediately obvious.

On the matter of non-contestant judges or non-exhibitor judges, it's easy to appreciate very well in the Hunter Valley case why it's appropriate to have local winemakers involved in the judging process. But if the highest level shows involve contestants amongst the judges, then they're always going to be open to criticism.

As far as the producer is concerned, Bass Phillip has only entered shows—they were regional shows—twice, and that was 15 years ago, so we have almost no experience, as an exhibitor. There are no major expectations as a producer about the show judging system, excepting that there be professionality and accountability on the part of the judges, although there's room for uncertainty as to where the accountability factor comes in with judging in the wine show system. Would Bass Phillip get a fair go in the judging process? Firstly, there's the 'blockbuster versus finesse' factor. And then, it makes unfiltered wines. They don't have much hope in the wine show system unless they're decanted, and so it goes on.

What is the marketing value of medals? For a large company, that's been made very clear by Peter Dawson. At the beginning, this presentation claimed to have used no research. That was a lie! Conversations in the last two days with a couple of wine merchants and a restaurateur revealed this information. The interesting one is that one of the wine merchants said, 'Well, it's not so common for gold medals to be placed on wines that are more than $30 a bottle.' Now, this is not a survey, but that's an interesting factor. It was also said that medals are most useful in the supermarket-level wine sales context; also, that consumers would ask firstly what was the medal awarded for and secondly who awarded it, because it's not always clear when these things are marketed on wine labels.

It is not always absolutely clear what the basic objectives of the show system are, although this morning has helped us to understand this better. But there are quite a few uncertainties.

Now, the reason Bass Phillip was founded, which meant a change of professions quite a few years ago, was basically because a keen wine buyer and drinker wanted to have a go at it. That shows some understanding of where consumers are coming from to some extent. There are no consumers speaking today, and they're an important part of the equation, so let's look at this very quickly.

Firstly, the rocket scientist problem: to understand the class types and the designations and so on that may or may not be written on a wine bottle when you pick it up in the supermarket, you really have to have some special background. It's difficult to understand it When asked recently 'What about gold medals? How important are they?' the sommelier in a a popular restaurant a few two nights ago said, 'Oh, they're not important at all,' and he cited two examples. He brought the bottles out. One of them was a very nice Cabernet which had this large gold medal upon which was written 'Medaille d'Or Brussels 2000'—some wine competition in Brussels, absolutely meaningless to anybody. When asked, 'Well, have you had experience of people asking about that? he said, 'No. Two nights ago we had a group of Americans here. They had a look at the bottle. They didn't read the medal, they didn't ask about it. They just looked at the bottle and they said, "Oh, well, it's Coonawarra, it's 1998. Yeah, we want that."'

And so we come back to one of the comments of that wine merchant earlier, who said, 'Medals are not so important.' It's a small boutique shop, but a very experienced wine merchant, and he basically said the important factors for people buying quality wines were a question as to the region of origin, the performance of the wine, particularly the vintage, and some history about the wine production company and the winemaker. They were the three important issues for him.

The second example in this restaurant was a very heavy 14.5% alcohol Shiraz which had won some prominent medals in a regional show. In fact, the print on the two gold stamps on the label was so small that it was unreadable without a magnifying glass. The sommelier translated: 'It says class 11. What does that mean? The Americans were offered this wine a few nights before and they didn't want it because the region didn't appeal to them. This poses some questions about consumers' reaction to medals on bottles.

Other issues of concern—unfinished wines, cellaring potential and so on—have been handled quite fully. What's concerning is the position for consumers and how the results of the show system might impact on our marketing of wines, now that we're dealing with a global market. Now, Peter Dawson touched on some aspects of that earlier, and the Australian show judging results fit into a total segmented pattern of information that's available to consumers nationally and internationally. What are the priorities? What makes people buy wine internationally, because it seems that a very high percentage of our production in the next few years has got to go internationally and not just be consumed here. The Royal Agricultural Society show results are very low on the list. Now, this is basically in line with what Peter had said. If we're to present and promote and market our wines overseas—and if you see it as important that the show judging system contribute to the whole issue—then the show judging approach and the results need to be slotted into the right niche in a total presentation of information. Maybe that's

something for discussion further on.

Basically, there are three areas in which the show system has an influence, and the first is in technical quality control, benchmarking, improving the breed. That's being done very thoroughly. The second respect is in style guidance, and there are a lot of questions about that. How relevant is it? Style appreciation is a very subjective thing, and it seems that show judges are not personally accountable for their decisions about those things.

The third one is marketing impact. The wine market is highly segmented, the products are highly segmented and the available scores, rating systems and benchmarks are quite segmented, from show judging results right up to the scoring systems out of 100 that some of the journalists specialise in, and do very well. There is a need for a horses-for-courses approach to looking at the way in which we promote the results of these rating systems.

Just to simplify, there are three respects in which we need to look at that. One is for commercial/industrial wines or perhaps, just for argument's sake, wines that are less than $30 or $35 a bottle. That's clearly a realm in which the show judging results are contributing a great deal. In the ultra-premium and icon classes we have renowned experts who, whether they're doing masked or open label tastings, have a lot to say, and the international market takes note of that.

Lastly, there are rating systems around the traps based on the history of performance of wine producers. Now here's a disappointment. A few weeks ago, this little commercial lift-out fell out of a newspaper that was being used to stack between layers of bottles in a bin in the winery, and it shows Houghton's White Burgundy—one of the great wines of Australia at the low end of the price range, and probably one of the three best value-for-money white wines around—and it's written up here as having four bronze medals and becoming one of Australia's favourite BYO bottles. But there was no reference to the fact of its great heritage, background and the respect that we should be according it. So there's a history of great wines in this country which have been continued by the large companies.

Another measure is free market auction performance. We have a Langton's rating system in this country. Overseas buyers take note of that. How can we weave that into a total package for marketing ourselves?

Philip Jones concluded with these remarks:
That's virtually all I have to say. I guess, to finish the story about the times I entered the show system, my first vintage of Pinot in 1984 came last in the Lilydale Show regional show judging. It's still not a bad drink. And the '85? I did a lot better with the '85 vintage in the '86 show. It came second-last, but I have no axe to grind about this. A magnum of that wine sold six months ago for 400 bucks, so somebody must like it.

Thanks for your time.

Stakeholder presentation – regional show

Iain Riggs
Hunter Valley Wine Show, NSW

Iain Riggs opened his presentation with the following remarks.

'I am here feeling somewhat an impostor, as I am not a committee member of the Hunter Valley Wine Show. I am, however, chairman-elect of the show and have been involved in the show, on and off, for 16 years, and can pass on some of the raison d'être and ethos. I should also point out that some of the comments are personal and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wine show committee. This means I can get in the line about the difference between a terrorist and a wine show committee. You can negotiate with a terrorist!

'I will briefly address the history of the Hunter and the show, because the two are strongly linked, before I describe the regional show as it is today.'

History

As history records it, the English are to blame for our fascination with wine shows and, therefore, for this seminar here today. John Beeston notes in his *Concise History of Australian Wine* (1994, pp 13–14) 'Blaxland (in 1822) took up the challenge of the Royal Society of Arts, which had some years before offered a medal for the finest wine of not less than 20 gallons of good marketable quality made from the produce of vineyards in New South Wales,'

The wine, a quarter cask of red, received modified rapture, a silver medal and the comment 'flavour of ordinary claret.' Blaxland finally succeeded with a gold medal in 1927. Was he immediately besieged by the marketers of the day?

Beeston goes on to note that in 1824 James Busby received a grant of 2,000 acres near Singleton in the Hunter Valley, at the time on the extremity of civilisation in NSW.

The Hunter River Vineyard Association was founded by James King (also its first president) in 1847. Featured in the meetings were the comparative tastings of members' wines, with every facet of vine growth and winemaking disclosed. One of these tastings in 1848 had an 1843 Warren 'Brandon' Vineyard red and an 1846 James King red up against a Chambertin of an unknown vintage. The Australian wines were preferred.

A great asset to the fledgling wine industry was the *Maitland Mercury*, founded in January 1843 and the first permanent newspaper north of Sydney. Driscoll, in *The Beginnings of the Wine Industry in the Hunter Valley*, (1969, pp. 34–35), records 'the *Mercury* was an active advocate for local interest, of which it held winemaking to be one of the most important.' In its editorial it showed no fear or favour to local vignerons and farmers, reporting every dinner and tasting.

The first prizes offered for wine came in 1844, but the first judging took place in 1847 under the auspices of the Hunter River Agricultural Society. The Hunter River Vineyard Association introduced 'blind tastings' in 1850 and it was reported that the ensuing discussions were 'frank'.

Grape varieties of this era included Chardonnay, Black Cluster (Pinot Noir), Shepherds Riesling (Semillon) and Syrah (Shiraz). The foundations of the modern Hunter Valley were well established, but the path was not an easy one, with the vineyards of the Hunter hitting a low through the 1950s and early '60s.

The Hunter River Agricultural Society continued, on and off, to offer wine judging over the next 120 years. Max Lake was in charge of the last Maitland Show wine judging in 1963.

The current Hunter Valley Wine Show started in 1973 as part of Singleton Tourism Week, and was held at the Singleton Showgrounds. This was to coincide with the opening of the Singleton Infantry Centre, the logic of which is no longer obvious.

However, the association with the army camp has been, and is still, maintained nearly 30 years later with the wine show utilising facilities at the centre. Chairman of the first show was Doug Seabrook who, along with Bill Chambers and Graham Gregory, reigned until the early '90s. An early rule was to limit wines to NSW-produced grapes grown north of the Sydney GPO. This allowed Orange and Mudgee to enter but excluded the warmer irrigated areas.

The 1973 show had 100 entries from 12 exhibitors, whereas the 2001 show will have 1,107 entires from 129 exhibitors (Table 1).

As mentioned, the Singleton Army Camp provides the venue, staff and the officers' mess for lunches. The latter has provided a source of great humour over the years. A committee member once asked for a medium rare steak at lunch time, only to be told by a 'very pleasant waitress' that 'Youse gets it as it comes.' It was even tried, once, as an accommodation venue, but after three mornings of sugar frosties and raspberry cordial, the normally stone-like features of Phillip John became just a little animated. Also, numerous judges have nearly been lost to the MPs for walking on the parade ground.

Classes through the 1970s and 1980s allowed trophies for unbottled reds, and regional Hunter wines did not feature in

Table 1. Hunter Valley wine show history

	Entries	Exhibitors
1995	581	45
1996	622	65
1997	653	75
1998	705	80
1999	884	102
2000	994	110
2001	1107	129

separate classes. However, if you have ever had Len Evans lobby you for something you will know what the Hunter Valley Wine Show Committee was up against in the early '90s. So it was not long before the Hunter Wine Show promoted its own wine styles and became a 'Hunter Valley only' show.

Hunter Valley Wine Show structure

This seminar puts forward many questions, such as 'Who's running the show?' and 'Where are the shows headed?' Reality, responsibility and relevance are questioned. Tim White in the *Financial Review,* Saturday 4 August, asked, 'Who does it benefit?' It is tempting to put forward the view that the Hunter, as a purely regional show, is above reproach. Indeed, it stands up to scrutiny as a model regional show.

The current structure of the show is described below, under Committee, Chairman of Show, Judges, Classes, Awards and the Future.

The Hunter Valley Wine Show is run as a non-profit, non-aligned enterprise. The committee for the 2000 show comprised 11 individuals, drawn from the local community, with only three of the 11 having wine interests, and two of these three representing the Hunter Valley Vineyard Association. The other professions include solicitors, a chemist, a builder and Army representatives.

Why these people would devote so much of their time for no real personal gain is a bit of a mystery, but while they are prepared to do so the Hunter industry is on a good thing. The obvious gain from this is independence. The committee works closely with the chairman of show (currently Len Evans) and the winemaker members help to maintain its relevance, especially in the area of classes and judges. However, the show is not run by the industry. (Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that industry-run shows are inferior or biased.)

It is non-aligned in that the committee does not have a parent body to report to or, more importantly, one that is trying to get its hand in the till. It is physically removed, with the facilities at the Singleton Army Camp being used, although the wine companies provide pourers and general help.

Chairman of show

Some greats of the industry have been past chairmen—Doug Seabrook, Graham Gregory and Bill Chambers. Independent, yes, but were they able to push and define modern Hunter wine styles? The answer is questionable. Len Evans took up the chairmanship in 1994, at the same time as the decision was made to allow only Hunter Valley wines. His other contributions include the introduction of named vineyard classes, a strong focus on senior wine show judges and the introduction of trainees. He will leave the show in 2002 with it being one of the strongest and most relevant shows in the country.

Judges

The current chairman insists on all positions being held by senior judges and not, as is often the method, a strong panel chairman, competent up-and-coming second judge and the third a beginner. As a training ground, there is none better, with at least three of the nine judges being locals. Part of 'improving the breed' is to educate and inspire young winemakers, and this is hard to do if you exclude them from judging their regional wines and learning from their peers. They aren't going to learn about Hunter Semillon at Lilydale.

There are three associates per panel. Additionally, another of Evans's innovations was to introduce a trainee panel, in which industry people get an insight into judging and wine styles, and are assessed for their potential to move onto associate judging. The fact that, apart from normal responsibilities, Evans sits and discusses with—sometimes lectures—these beginners is a measure of his commitment.

Panel chairmen are senior judges from outside the region; James Halliday, Tim James, Geoff Merrill, James Godfrey, Phillip John, John Glaetzer and Ian McKenzie are familiar names.

The panel chairmen don't always get it right. James Halliday's panel gave a young, herbaceous Semillon a gold medal in 1995. Evans did not give him a young semillon class to judge for another five years.

Classes

Table 2 shows the classes for the 2001 Hunter Valley Wine Show. As you can see, 10 current vintage, four one-year-old, 11 premium and two museum classes make up the 85% Hunter GI section. (After all the show must have relevance to commercial reality.) There are twelve 100% Hunter Valley classes, including three for named vineyards.

The big four varieties of the Hunter Valley—Semillon, Chardonnay, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon—make up 66% of all classes (Table 3). There is a strong focus on regional styles. The importance of Cabernet Sauvignon raises an amount of debate, in its relevance to both the Hunter Valley and the wine show. In the speaker's opinion, you should rip it all out of the ground! In the 2000 Hunter Show, this variety contributed not a single gold medal and only one silver.

It could be argued that there is too much emphasis and repetition with the other three. Not so. Firstly, Chardonnay is Australia's largest single variety and this is also true in the Hunter Valley. Recent figures show 12,200 tonnes of Chardonnay to 6,200 tonnes of Semillon and 3,200 tonnes of Shiraz for 1999 Hunter Valley harvest (Hunter Valley Research Foundation, 'Hunter Region Wine Industry 98/99, March 2000). The consumption of Chardonnay is still increasing.

Shiraz is the region's only red to achieve national and overseas recognition. Historically it has been the dominant red variety. This leaves Semillon, and here the value of a regional show is emphasised. The Hunter Valley is enjoying success in terms of tourism, the recognition of a unique wine style and also what may be called the 'stay-put factor.' The region is attracting and keeping young qualified winemakers. They are enthusiastic contributors to wine quality and regional wine styles (and a significant contribution to Heineken sales). Semillon (and Shiraz) is benefiting. Styles vary from 'drink now', herbaceous, vanillin and floral wines to aged wines, and are all attempted. Even a small winery could end up with three or four different Semillon wines, whether vineyard based or style based. Add to this the bottle-maturation factor and there may soon be six, eight or 10 Semillon wines for that winery to enter.

As an illustration, in the 2000 show, Reg Drayton Wines, a small producer (less than 50 tonnes), walked off with three trophies for its 1994 Hunter Valley Semillon, including Best Commercially Available White and Best Dry White Wine of Show.

Finally, the region abounds with a significant number of single plot vineyards, some of considerable age, that have been known by their vineyard name for years. Len Evans could see no reason not to promote these. Names include Stevens, OP and OH, Rosehill, HVD, Graveyard,

Tallawanta, Brokenback and Roxburgh, to name a few. These Single Vineyard Classes have recently been added to the Sydney Wine Show schedule, too.

Awards

There are five classes for current vintage dry reds. These get points, with commended and highly commended notations. Unfortunately, current vintage white wine, although unbottled, is still entitled to medals and trophies. One year-old reds and all other white wines must be in bottle.

Award rates at the Hunter Valley Wine Show do not vary greatly from those at capital city shows, with generally 40% of wines being awarded medals. The Hunter, being climatically challenged, can have dramatic swings in numbers of medals at the show. Table 3 shows a comparison between 1997 and 2000. At a first glance, it is the warmer years, 1998 and 2000, which heavily swayed the judges to a plethora of golds. In fact, it is only the 1999 and 2000 semillons which have the edge on their predecessors. Nine golds from 164 entries—5.48%—compare with three golds from 87 entries for 3.45%. The judges maintained the strike rate for gold and silver over the two shows at approximately 5.8% and 9% respectively. (John Flannery, pers. com.)

As should be the case in any wine show, a gold medal should be well earned.

The future

How do you improve on a wine show so long in the making and, in most cases, meeting the criteria of the industry? (I do not include consumer relevance because I feel that regional shows, more than any other, should be about the industry and not the 'glittery bits').

Does the Hunter Valley Wine Show have some faults? Yes, certainly; the awarding of gold medals and trophies to unfinished whites is an aberration that needs to be fixed. Entries need to be curtailed. I concur with James Halliday in

Table 3. Summary 2001 Hunter Wine Show classes

Chardonnay (including 1 unwooded)	8
Semillon	7
Shiraz	7
Cabernet Sauvignon	7
TOTAL	26
Total classes	39
Main four equals	67%

Table 4. Comparison of medals for Semillon, Chardonnay and Shiraz, 1997 v 2000

1997 Show entries				
1997 Semillon	49	G 1	S 1	B 8
1996 Semillon	38	G 2	S 3	B 15
1997 Chardonnay	60	G 3	S 5	B 16
1996 Chardonnay	38	G 2	S 3	B 17
1996 Shiraz	38	G 3	S 5	B 10
1995 Shiraz	19	G 3	S 5	B 6
TOTAL	242	G 14	S 22	B 72
2000 Show entries				
2000 Semillon	97	G 5	S 8	B 30
1999 Semillon	67	G 4	S 8	B 23
2000 Chardonnay	69	G 4	S 4	B 23
1999 Chardonnay	102	G 1	S 9	B 29
1999 Shiraz	68	G 5	S 7	B 23
1998 Shiraz	76	G 9	S 5	B 33
TOTAL	479	G 28	S 41	B 161

Table 2. Schedule of classes

Current vintage wines

Class 1	2001 Dry Red Wine – Shiraz
Class 2	2001 Dry Red Wine – Cabernet Sauvignon
Class 3	2001 Dry Red Wine – Merlot
Class 4	2001 Dry Red Wine – Other single grape varieties and blended wines
Class 5	2001 Rosé
Class 6	2001 Dry White Wine – Semillon
Class 7	2001 Dry White Wine – Chardonnay – Unoaked
Class 8	2001 Dry White Wine – Chardonnay- Oaked
Class 9	2001 Dry White Wine – Verdelho
Class 10	2001 Dry White Wine – Other Single Grape Varieties and Blended Wines

2000 vintage wines

Class 11	2000 Dry Red Wine – Shiraz
Class 12	2000 Dry Red Wine – Cabernet Sauvignon
Class 13	2000 Dry White Wine – Semillon
Class 14	2000 Dry White Wine – Chardonnay

Premium vintage

Class 15	Dry Red Wine – Shiraz – - 1999 vintage and older
Class 16	Dry Red Wine – Cabernet Sauvignon, 1999 vintage and older
Class 17	Dry Red Wine – Merlot, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 18	Dry Red Wine – Other Single Grape Varieties and Blended Wines, 2000 vintage and older
Class 19	Dry White Wine – Semillon,1999 Vintage and older
Class 20	Dry White Wine – Chardonnay, 1999 Vintage and older
Class 21	Dry White Wine – Verdelho, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 22	Dry White Wine – Other Single Grape Varieties and Blended Wines, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 23	Sweet White Table Wine, any vintage
Class 24	Sparkling Wine, any vintage
Class 25	Fortified Wine, any vintage

Museum wines

Class 26	Dry Red Wine
Class 27	Dry White Wine

100% Hunter Valley wines

Class 28	Dry Red Wine – Shiraz, 2000 Vintage
Class 29	Dry Red Wine – Shiraz, 1999 Vintage and older
Class 30	Dry Red Wine – Other Single Grape Varieties and Blended Wines, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 31	Dry White Wine – Semillon, 2001 Vintage
Class 32	Dry White Wine – Semillon, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 33	Dry White Wine – Chardonnay, 2001 Vintage
Class 34	Dry White Wine – Chardonnay, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 35	Dry White Wine – Other Single Grape Varieties and Blended Wines, 2001 Vintage
Class 36	Dry White Wine – Other Single Grape Varieties and Blended Wines, 2000 Vintage and older
Class 37	Named Vineyard – Dry Red Wine, Shiraz
Class 38	Named Vineyard – Dry White Wine, Semillon
Class 39	Named Vineyard – Dry White Wine, Chardonnay

his *Wine* magazine article (April/May 2001 issue) that 150 to 160 wines a day per judge should be the maximum. The 2001 Hunter Valley Wine Show should, with trophies, be finished inside three days. It is ludicrous that a regional show would go beyond three days; it should preferably be only two. The exhibitors should have brief comments on their wines, an innovation at the Cowra Wine Show this year, but these comments must be meaningful.

This is a bit of spoon-feeding to the exhibitors, but there is no need for judges to hang around for the exhibitors tasting. This is a waste of time; it is one of the great myths that the judges need to be there. What for? To answer two questions about a volatile, oxidised spatlese Traminer Crouchen that sells like hot cakes at cellar door? Give the exhibitors a snapshot of the tasting notes if it warrants it; otherwise don't bother. Half the exhibitors don't want to know why they got 14 points and the rest vary between 'I was robbed' or 'I'm happy with any medal.'

Conclusion

James Halliday has suggested that regional shows should be the building blocks of the industry and the springboard to state and national shows. The Hunter Valley Wine Show is building a perfect platform in its promotion of the Hunter's unique wine styles, through competent management and judging. More shows should follow this example.

The following words from the past seem to fit with today's ever expanding industry. They are taken from a letter to the editor from the *Maitland Mercury* of 10 February 1844, in which a 'Hunter River wine grower' argues that the 'only qualifications needed are common sense and common intelligence. It will be a mark, ere long, of a want of intelligence, if not of actual imbecility, on the part of the resident proprietor, if he does not possess his plot of vineyard.'

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