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1. Is a desire to experience the world of wine in ways that only a few can and in ways that one could not otherwise afford (i.e. the benefits in the form of samples, events, trips, press junkets, etc) acceptable as part of a career in wine writing (so long as one avoids conflicts of interest and maintains journalistic integrity)? Please provide a reason for your answer or some elaboration.

Desire? There's nothing wrong with desire. Accepting is the problem. This is a difficult question. Writing about wine is poorly paid and expensive. Best suited to those with independent incomes or fools who do it for love. But, the whole press giveaway is such a slippery mountainside. I've sat next to people who told me they became a wine writer because of the freebies. I walked away from him as soon as I could.

It's easy to see who only writes about what comes to their door. All you have to do is look around at the recycled material on blogs or in the media to see who has been on a press trip. And as far as samples, who only writes about them is pretty transparent as well. I'm not sure those writers understand that they are no more than underpaid advertorialists—not journalists. The added pity is that most of the public can't determine which writers are being used as mouthpieces for the industry. Maybe that's why so many commercial wines are celebrated in the press.

However, that said, if worked properly, the trips (given today's dwindling resources from magazines), can increase knowledge, allow a journalist as a way in to the vines or to see a country and widen a perspective. They are often a way to begin. But they come with so many strings, a journalist must be hypervigilant and pack sharp secateurs to clip them.

Now about the samples:

I find the subject of 'free samples' kind of funny, as if the bottles were packets of Tide. I do sometimes request samples on assignment AND my budget doesn't cover them. But I often give the magazine or my editor the job of asking. I hate to ask. I also find it very difficult to write a negative note on something I requested. Most likely I'd ignore the bottles rather than saying something negative. But, an unbidden sample? Those are fair game to me.

Events? I've been lucky enough to have attended events which have tremendously increased my knowledge, especially when it comes to drinking older vintages. I am grateful for them. If you're lucky to have friends with deep cellars, those are just as good.

2. Is it possible to fulfill one's desire for these experiences through the benefits mentioned above and avoid conflicts of interest and maintain journalistic integrity? Please provide a reason for your answer or some elaboration.

Not exactly sure what you mean here. Desire for these experiences? Do you mean a press trip? Oh, I suppose one year when I was lost in Bordeaux at 3am, in despair of ever finding my chambre d'hote, contemplating sleeping on the side of the road, I had a moment of wishing I was being taken care of. It is best to fulfill the desire outside of the press trip. But I can see ways of making it work and preserve one's reputation. What about adding on a few days at your own expense to flesh out the experience with reality? I could also see explaining to your host that you can't write about it, you'll take it as preliminary research. 90% of the time the host will say, thanks for telling me. And thanks but no thanks.

3. Considering all the resources necessary to produce a wine publication (which relies on new content with every cycle), is it acceptable for the writers to accept free samples, trips, etc as (so long as one avoids conflicts of interest and maintains journalistic integrity)? Please provide a reason for your answer or some elaboration.

Some of the most popular magazines in this country only write puff pieces. I know of at least one food magazine that doesn't even care if the writer fabricates, as long as the piece is celebrity driven and upbeat. So, why couldn't they take a press trip? Oddly enough, their publishing house stopped allowing trips three years ago. Another poorer publication, known for authentic stories, needs the support of trips and country tourism, but they carefully choose their writers for personal integrity.

4. Can a wine publication remain competitively priced and maintain a healthy revenue stream while paying for all samples and 100% of its reporters' trips and expenses? Please provide a reason for your answer or some elaboration.

I think the current economics will be changing some attitudes towards the press trip. But the absolute best experience is when I am on assignment with an expense account and GPS.