

Steve Heimoff

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.

No wine writer I know has such a desire. Our desire -- mine, anyway -- is to make a living through the reporting and reviewing of wine. I fell in love with wine long before I was paid to write about it, and when I decided to become a wine writer, it had nothing to do with "benefits." It was a way to pay the bills by combining two of the things I loved most in the world: creative writing, and the study of wine. The "events, trips, samples" etc. surprised me when they came along -- it was never about that. To this day, I don't particularly enjoy them. I've never been on a junket, and I say "No" to 99% of invitations for meals, trips and events.

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.

As I explained above, I don't have a desire for these experiences. My journalistic integrity -- assuming people think I have any -- is because the industry knows that I work hard, tell the truth as I see it, and can't be bought or influenced.

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.

As I said in #2, of course it's acceptable to accept free samples. There wouldn't be any reviews if there weren't samples. I don't think sports writers pay to go to sporting events. I don't think tech writers pay to review the latest devices. I don't think travel writers pay to report on all those cruises and resorts. And restaurant reviewers don't pay for their own meals; their publications do. Reviewers of any kind do not make much money, so free samples are necessary.

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'm not aware of any wine magazine that pays 100% of everything. Keep in mind, some magazines have deeper pockets than others, so they can afford more on their own.