

21 April 2009

TO: Arthur Przebinda
FROM: Tom Matthews
RE: your questions regarding wine writing and ethical issues

Rather than answer your specific questions, I have decided to write a statement that sums up Wine Spectator's positions on some fundamental issues in wine-writing, specifically when it comes to ethics.

The foundation of any wine critic's success is the trust he or she builds with readers. That trust, in turn, rests on readers' evaluations of two key qualities: expertise and integrity.

Expertise is built through tasting, interviews with winemakers, visits to wine regions and accumulated knowledge about viticulture, winemaking, sensory evaluation, history and culture in general. Wine Spectator's eight senior editors together count more than 125 years of experience with the magazine.

Integrity is established when readers believe a critic is fair, impartial and independent. Wine Spectator has adopted specific policies in order to maintain credibility with readers.

1. Blind tastings

Many scientific studies have shown that judgment is strongly influenced by awareness of brand or price. Blind-tasting helps to remove a critic's bias. At Wine Spectator, all reviews of newly-released wines result from blind tastings (any reviews not based on blind-tastings are specified); in 2008, we reviewed nearly 20,000 wines in blind tastings.

2. Financial independence

Accepting financial favors can compromise a critic's judgment and lead to the perception of a conflict of interest. Wine Spectator staff members are not allowed to accept financial favors from the wine industry. We pay for our own transportation and accommodations; we arrange our own itineraries; we set up our official tastings in independent locations. This results in significant costs to us, but ensures our financial and logistical independence.

3. Ethical behavior

In order to earn readers' trust, critics must always strive to act ethically. Every member of the Wine Spectator staff is required to accept our Code of Ethics, which offers specific guidelines to avoid any conflicts of interest, and to ensure our actions are guided by principles of truth and fairness.

Wine Spectator has been publishing for 33 years. Our readers are the ultimate judges of our expertise and integrity, and we are pleased to report that, according to independent research, Wine Spectator now has a readership of more than 2.5 million people.

Thomas Matthews
Executive editor
Wine Spectator