

eVIEWS

An interview with Peter, online retailer.

GLOSSARY

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| direct sales | a sale without intermediaries (in this case an importer) |
| boom | substantial increase |
| write-up | report |
| further afield | in more distant places |
| case | a box of usually 12 or 6 bottles |
| encouraging | positive |
| wine tasting notes | written comments on a wine |
| barrel | large round wooden container used to store wine |
| tannin | tannic acid |
| blackcurrant | small edible black berry (fruit) |
| Priorat | one of Spain's wine producing areas (near Barcelona) |
| vineyard | property where grapes are grown |
| soil | top layer of earth |
| slate | type of soil influenced by slate rock content |
| yield | amount/ quantity produced |
| Penedes | one of Spain's wine producing areas (near Barcelona) |
| imprint | identifiable and identifying characteristics |
| to be cellared | to be carefully stored (usually in a cellar) |
| plug-in | small software programme |
| semblance | appearance or resemblance, similarity |
| sweet | one of the four basic tastes: e.g. sugar, cola drinks |
| sour | one of the four basic tastes: e.g. lemons, vinegar |
| salty | one of the four basic tastes: e.g. peanuts, anchovies |
| bitter | one of the four basic tastes: e.g. strong coffee, beer |
| delivery | transfer of goods |
| palate | capacity to enjoy good food and drink |
| kit | set of articles |
| to deaden | to become insensitive |
| to evolve | to develop |
| astringent | harsh |
| to overpower | to dominate |
| guideline | indication, rule |
| stew | meat cooked slowly in liquid |
| game | wild animals and birds sometimes hunted for sport |

COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

1. What countries does Peter mainly sell to?
2. Why are there some countries he cannot sell to?
3. What type of people buy wine from the Net?
4. What does an introductory case consist of?
5. What are the advantages of an introductory case?
6. What do Peter's "wine-tasting notes" consist of?
7. What are the peculiarities of the Priorat as far as wine growing is concerned?
8. What are the 3 factors that affect you when tasting wine?
9. What's important to Peter about wines?
10. Ten years ago there was a movement towards _____ wine . Now there is a move back to _____ styles of wine.
11. Is a good palate something you're born with or something you learn?
12. How might a 1994 Priorat wine evolve in 18 months?
13. Do wines change with different foods?
14. Which of the following would be suitable to eat with a Priorat wine?
fruit, red meat, a thick stew, fish, duck, salad, desserts

ANSWERS

1. European countries.
2. Because some countries do not allow direct sales of alcohol to individuals.
3. People who are genuinely interested in wines and interested in trying wines from different regions.
4. Six different bottles of wine.
5. If you don't like one particular type of wine, it's not the end of the world.
6. He describes how the wine is made, the area it's from, the grape varieties and how long it's been aged in what type of barrel.
7. They have a slate imprint, are rich, high alcohol levels, strong fruity aromas, and tend to be "complex".
8. The visual aspect, the aroma and the taste.
9. He likes the wines to be different, and to taste according to the region where it has been made.
10. Ten years ago there was a movement towards standardised wine . Now there is a move back to specific styles of wine.
11. Something you can learn.
12. It would become less astringent, less harsh, smoother and more rounded.
13. Yes.
14. Red meat, a thick stew, duck.

LESSON PLAN

1. Have students ever bought anything via the Internet? What? What products can be bought via the Internet? What could students imagine buying? Why? What could they not imagine buying? Why not? For both the buyer and the seller on the Internet: What are the advantages of working this way? What could be the risks involved?
2. What countries / states are well-known for wine production? (e.g. France, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, Argentina, Chile, California, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa...). Have students tasted wine from any of these countries and if so, which? Do they like wine? What preferences do they have e.g. red, white, sweet, dry...?
3. Go through glossary, checking for pronunciation and that meaning is clear. Contextualise words if necessary.
4. Put each item of vocabulary on a separate piece of paper. Give each set of papers to groups of two or three students. Play the interview and the students should try and put the vocab items in the order that they hear them.
5. Go through the comprehension questions, predicting the answers where possible.
6. Play the interview again and students try to answer the questions. Repeat and pause as/ where necessary.
7. List as many foods / drinks as students can for the 4 tastes: sweet, acid, salty, bitter.
8. Group the following words according to "smell", "taste", "sight":
mouth, nose, eyes, vision, colour, flavour, texture, lick, odour, swallow, look, bite, glimpse, see, sniff, stare, tongue, sip, aroma, scent.
9. Let students try to explain any or all of the following in terms of smell, taste (not always appropriate, I hope!) and sight:
a rose, dirty socks, a truck, the zoo, freshly-ironed sheets, Coca Cola, a coal mine, a glass of water, the sea on a windy day, fresh coffee in the morning, a dairy farm, a dry-cleaner's, a fish market, the rubbish bin, bleach, a freshly-painted room, a baby's nappy. (Feel free to add to this!)
Encourage students to give as full descriptions as possible. Help them with vocabulary as and when necessary.
10. For classes of adults only: you may like to take up a collection and buy a good bottle of wine for students to comment on, or get them to bring in a bottle of their favourite wine occasionally to taste and describe.

11. Students (in groups or pairs) decide on something they would like to buy via the Internet. When they have decided what that is, they devise a form which would be suitable for ordering the product or service and pass it to the next pair or group to complete.

TRANSCRIPTION

- eV I'd like to talk about your business. You sell wine on the net?
- Peter Yeah
- eV That's a challenge!
- Peter Why I can sell wine on the net is because I can sell wines that are usually not available in your High Street store. I have a serious limitation which is that because of the laws of the United States and Canada, I'm effectively limited to Europe, and so I can't sell to the States or to Canada. There are a number of countries that don't allow any direct sales of alcohol to individuals, but beyond that, it's not that difficult to connect with people who are genuinely interested in wine, who are interested in trying wines from regions that they don't know, or have tried a wine from this area and can't find it regularly in their local shops, and I think that's the basis of my business.
- eV So are people generally prepared to buy a bottle, try it, and come back for more, or are they just interested in discovering wines, as you say, that they can't get in their local?
- Peter Often they've read a review of the wine, or they've heard about the area... There's an area locally called Priorat which recently has been experiencing a real boom and internationally with very good critiques and very good write-ups on the wines, and so it's not surprising that a lot of people then say "Right well let's see what I can get from this area". And if you only have one or two brands to choose from in your local shops then you may look further afield. So that's an obvious point where people can go onto the Internet and look for a wine or look for a wine from an area, and find my site. I also do a series of introductory cases, a mixed case of six different wines from the Priorat, of six different wines from the area as a whole, so people can try and see which styles of wines from here they like. They've only got one bottle of wine each so, maybe if, out of six they like four and don't like two, it's not the end of the world. And what is currently most exciting about the business is I'm getting a number of repeat customers, of people coming back a second or third time, which is very encouraging, so obviously people have tried something, liked it, and come back to me.
- eV How do you describe the local wines?
- Peter Wine tasting notes have a whole vocabulary of their own, which in some ways is very personal, and in some ways is quite difficult to get across. I think for the repeat customer, once they've learnt how I've described a certain wine, and then they've drunk it, then they have more information to come back and to identify things they might like. I don't have very big tasting notes, I don't put great importance on the actual tasting notes as such, I tend to put more importance on how the wine is made. What area it's made in, and what grapes it's made with, and how long it's been aged in what kind of barrel. So that if you like a certain type of wine from a certain area that's been made in a certain way, I think people will maybe identify more for that, than because I say, "this wine has terribly aggressive tannins" or "has a wonderful black currant bouquet".
- eV If you were trying to describe the style of wines that come from Priorat, what general terms would you use to describe it?

Peter If you asked me about the wines of Catalonia, that would be very difficult. Specifically about the wines of Priorat it's actually slightly easier, because Priorat is a very special area. The area itself is limited basically to vineyards that are grown on a special type of soil, which is a slate based soil. It gives very low yields of grapes. What would be normal in the Penedes of five, six, even more, kilos of grapes per vine, you'd maybe get one, less than one kilo per vine in the Priorat. And so it tends to be a very concentrated grapes that give very rich wines, quite high alcohol levels for the wines, with very strong fruity aromas, but also they tend to be really quite complex wines, which is why I think they've been so successful internationally. Almost all have a sort of mineral kind of imprint to them. It's very difficult to actually describe, and put your finger on, but, and it's very easy just to say "Oh, they smell of slate" because they're on slate soils and it's not that simple, but it is true that all of the wines from that area, they're all big wines, they're all great for cellaring for a long time, very powerful concentrations of taste and they all have this kind of mineral imprint to them.

eV Do you think we'll ever see a day when it's possible to download our wine taster plug-in and get a reasonable semblance of what a wine is like?

Peter I've seen two things like this. One was an absolute joke, and another one, I think, was serious. Some people in Silicon Valley who'd been very active in the early days of the web, also in biotechnology companies, so real computer whiz kids, were developing a way to be able to transmit smell. Basically when you taste a wine, you're worried about three issues which is: the visual aspect of the wine, then the smell of it basically, and the mouth sensation, because actually there are only four tastes. You've got sweet, sour, salty and bitter, and those are the only four tastes that the mouth can identify. Everything else is to do with aromas, and so, if you could transmit aromas across the Net then you could give much better ideas. Currently it's something that's very difficult to get across. The day when we can have a tap on the front next to the CD-Rom drive is a long way away.

eV Is that your secret project at the moment?

Peter It would make delivery much easier!

eV What's important to you in a wine?

Peter Personally I like wines to taste different. I don't like everything to taste the same, so I look for variety, I look for... not always for complexity because you can have very enjoyable wines that are not particularly complex, but just enjoyable on a very simple level. I think good winemaking, you don't want... you want the wine to be free from any obvious defects, and then I hope to find something new, something different. I think it's important that wine should taste different depending on where it's made. I think climate, even very locally, can make an enormous difference to the kind of wines you can produce and to an extent the wine world is moving back to identifying very specific tastes from specific areas or specific styles of wine that maybe ten years ago there was a move to everybody making very standardised wines and I think when a Chardonnay from California and one from Australia and one from South Africa and one from this part of Spain taste then same, I think that's actually quite sad. I'm not saying that there isn't a place for good quality, supermarket wine, but I think that wine should look to be different.

eV To have a good palate, is that something that people can learn or is that something that people are born with or not born with? Or is it a combination of the two?

Peter I think there are people who may, naturally, be more sensitive, but you can absolutely train your palate just through practice, through drinking lots of wine. Not through the fact that you're drinking lots of wine but actually... concentrating on the different sensations, the different aromas that wine gives off. They sell little kits to practise identifying different smells for example. I think in this day and age, a lot of our sense are sort of deadened in the same way that you can get fit, and you can get your muscles used to working again, you can get your nose more in tune with identifying different smells. There may well be a large natural element to it but you can practise.

eV Can you identify wines that you've had many months ago or many years ago?

Peter To an extent, you can. It's not that easy in the sense that this wine tastes exactly the same as this wine that I drank 18 months ago, because in that time the wine itself may well have evolved. If I drank a 1994 Priorat 18 months ago, I would have found it much harsher, much more astringent, than if I drank it today, because the same wine in the bottle has matured, the tannins have matured, it's a smoother, rounder experience, so you wouldn't necessarily identify it in the same way, but you certainly have a recollection of smells.

eV How much importance do you place on food, on what goes with the wine?

Peter I think a wine can taste completely different if you drink it by itself, or with different foods. A young Priorat with salad... you will probably think it's disgusting. You'll find it very harsh. Certain foods can completely overpower the wines so you have to look for a balance, and your enjoyment of the wine can be very different. People often say of Rioja that it goes very well with food.

eV So do you do as so far as to suggest meals to have with your wines?

Peter I give sort of guidelines, sometimes it's a very generic thing. Most Priorats will go well with rich stews, with game, with red meats generally. Sometimes it's something that specifically I've drunk it with. I have a wine by Albet i Noya, a Chardonnay that I drank with duck, and it was wonderful, so it's not something that would have occurred to me but having tried the combination and enjoyed it, then I do recommend a couple of dishes that could go with each wine, on the site.

The wine Peter says goes well with duck is by Albet i Noya Col·lecció Chardonnay.

Peter's wine site is El Celler Catala.

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