

Circle Update

January 2016



CIRCLE OF
WINE
WRITERS

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Front cover: Juan Carlos López de Lacalle of Artadi, Rioja. Back cover: In the village centre of Puligny-Montrachet. Photos by Jon Wyand, this issue's featured photographer.

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Book news and reviews

News by Wink Lorch

With the obvious exception of Jancis and Julia's OWC4, the book that seems to have been most reviewed and mentioned in the lead up to last Christmas was Suzanne Mustacich's *Thirsty Dragon* (see also my interview with Suzanne on page 19).

Rather than review *Thirsty Dragon* myself, I have chosen to extract a few choice comments from reviews already published by CWW members. This follows on from David Copp's review of deputy editor Robert Smyth's book on Hungary. We also include two reviews of books by non-members that I believe will be of interest. Reviews follow on the next page.

Below is news from Tom Stevenson about his recently published books, plus insider information from members on the very few titles that are due to be published in the first part of 2016.

Members, please don't forget to keep me informed of your forthcoming book publications. In our July issue we will include a list of books to be published in the autumn.

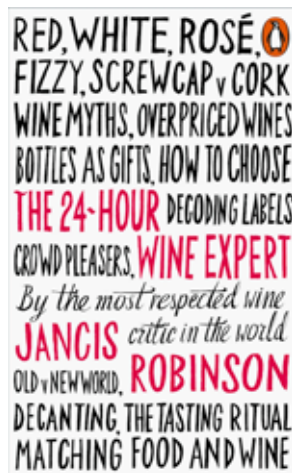
Tom Stevenson advises us about his latest two books that we failed to mention in previous editions of *Update*.

Spit & Scribble was published on 1st January 2016 (£19.99, Price-Sinclair Publishing). Described in the blurb as 'The wine taster's essential, non-digital companion!' Tom says that *Spit & Scribble* is more than a wine tasting notebook, it's an invaluable wine and vineyard visiting tool that he has been using in a gradually evolving form since 1989. "Having been asked by friends and colleagues for copies over the years and dished out a fair few in response, I have now made it available worldwide." Apart from being able to record 500 tasting notes it includes the International Wine Taster's Rescue Package with all the

most basic tasting terms in French, German, Italian and Spanish (complete with phonetic pronunciations) and vital conversion tables (ever wanted to convert tons per acre into hectolitres or vice-versa?).

"In November 2015 I also released *Tom Stevenson's Champagne & Sparkling Wine Guide 2016* (£25.99, Price-Sinclair Publishing, 248 pages), which can be used by novices as a simple, annual guide to the best fizz on the planet (full notes of all gold and silver medal winning wines from the 2015 edition of the Champagne and Sparkling World Wine Competition). For the geekiest of fizz geeks the introductory chapters and micropedia contain everything they could possibly want to know about the technology, science and other technical aspects of sparkling wine production (honestly, a lot of this stuff just cannot be found anywhere else)."

Jancis Robinson MW tells us that her new book, *The 24-hour Wine Expert* is to be published on 4th February.



"[It's] for people who wouldn't dream of buying a wine reference book but want to learn all the most important practical stuff in 24 hours," says Jancis. She describes the new book, which was inspired by her 24-year-old daughter Rose and her friends, as "one of the most difficult books to write because I've had to keep answering complete novice's questions!" More information on the book, which is being

published by Penguin Books in the UK at £4.99 and later by Abram Books in the US (due out in September), can be found at: <http://24hourwineexpert.com>.

The second edition of *Wine Production and Quality* by **Keith Grainger** and **Hazel Tattersall** will be published by Wiley Blackwell in March. "This is a totally updated and expanded edition of the previous works. I believe it to be unique, in comprising in one combined volume a detailed consideration of wine production, and a discussion as to how quality in wine may be achieved and assessed," says Keith. He and his co-author hope that, like the first edition, it will become recommended reading for wine study programmes in several countries. It will be published in hardback at £58.50.

Caroline Henry's *Terroir Champagne: The Luxury of Sustainable, Organic and Biodynamic Cuvées* is planned for release in early March. Her book is a collection of stories about winemakers who all share a passion for their terroir and want to protect it, and this is translated in their soil management, explains Caroline. "All the wines in this book originate from vineyards where herbicides have been eliminated. Herbicides, more than any other chemical wine growing product, kill the soil by compacting and eroding it." She likens herbicides to chemotherapy, which is hardly the best treatment for minor ailments. "And just as we do not use chemotherapy to treat a common cold, it makes no sense to use chemical herbicides when alternatives are available," she asserts.

Caroline used crowdfunding to self-publish the book, which is available for advance purchase at €25. For more details see: www.terroirchampagne.com.

Liz Palmer's first book, a 400-plus page extravaganza titled *The Ultimate Guide to Champagne*, will be published in March by her own publishing company, with launches planned in London, New York, Toronto and other cities. Liz also has two other Champagne-related books in the pipeline: *The Most Powerful Women in Champagne* and *The Champagne Cookbook – Traditional and Modern Recipes*.

*Reviews of recently published books***Robert Smyth: Hungary: A Tasting Trip to the New Old World**Review by **David Copp**

Blue Guides, £12.95, 300 pages, softback

Disclaimer from David Copp:

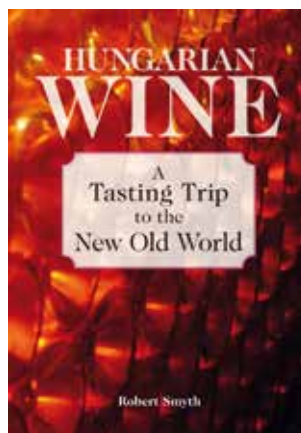
Robert edited my first wine book – Hungary: Its Fine Wines and Winemakers. We worked together at the Budapest Business Journal and on other projects and we share a passion for cricket.

I liked everything about this book: its size, shape, feel, layout and illustration. The writing is sharp, succinct, and as good an account as you will get about what is happening in Hungary today.

Robert was endowed with an enquiring nose for wines, but practice has given him an extremely discerning palate. What he really gets across very well is that Hungary's world-class winemakers have inspired a younger generation to make very good, even great wine. These are young winemakers ready to try new approaches to old, established, indigenous varieties rather than ape the well-known international varieties, which can be produced on a much larger scale elsewhere. Hence the New Old World of the title.

Robert is as keen to identify the established greats as he is to direct us to these gifted younger winemakers, who are learning how to handle and develop indigenous varieties. In many cases they are the sons or daughters of successful winemaking fathers. But others from a variety of backgrounds have been enticed into the trade by the prospect of learning to tease interesting wines from their native landscape. The author makes the point that the new breed of winemakers is bold, fearless and confident. Their seniors keep an eye on them and I can vouch that most of them remain modest and keen to learn more.

Starting with Furmint, those of us lucky enough to taste István Szepsy's 2000 Úrágya, made for Királyudvar, realised



at once that the master had shown the future for Tokaj was as much in great dry wines as sweet. Over the years Szepsy has attracted enough disciples to fill a bible, but one of the newest and most successful is Károly Barta, who took note that it all starts with the land. His quiet and patient approach to finding the best available site paid off, not least because he found a talented young winemaker able to express it so subtly. Attila Homonna works his own land, as well as making wine for Barta, and is just one of a dozen or more, not just good, but brilliant young winemakers getting the best out of Furmint and Hárslevelű, the latter which until now has played second fiddle to the orchestral leader of the former.

Anyone seriously interested in wine who has not yet visited Tokaj is like the person who claims to love Scotland but has only been to Edinburgh and Glasgow. As a lovely old Scots lady pointed out to me when I admitted I hadn't been to the Highlands, "your education's bin neglected".

Olaszrizling is the most widely planted white grape in Hungary and until recently, it was considered a workhorse variety useful for quenching the thirst on a warm summer's day. Now, the author informs us, several producers are making extremely attractive, if not classy, Olaszrizling. He introduces us to Philipp Oser, the Swiss owner of Villa Tolnay, to Pannonhalma Abbey, István Jásdi, Ottó Légli and to other experienced winemakers such as Hilltop, Huba Szeremley, János and Dániel Konyári, Vencel Garamvári and their younger protégés.

Moving region to Sopron, Robert sets out to show how and why it has become such a good producer of top quality Kékfrankos. When I first went there in 1993 I found the wines thin, acetic and decidedly sharp; the very type of potion Falstaff advised Englishmen to forswear. Then, the Weninger family came over the border from Austria to lead

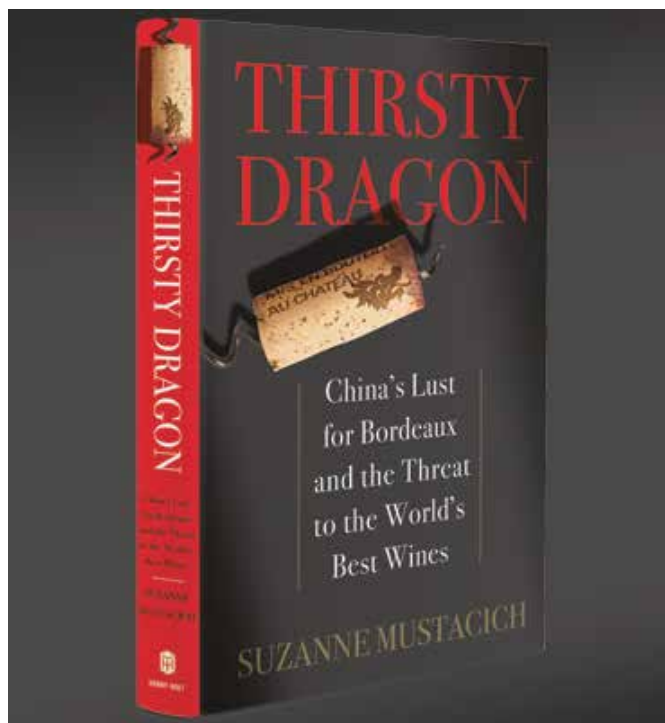
the way and now there are a host of good growers aiming for the top. Robert shows how progress has come from better (often biodynamic) farming, higher quality grapes, the use of wood to soften tannins and unremitting care in the cellar.

Michael Broadbent MW first alerted me to the potential of Cabernet Franc in Villány, and Caroline Gilby MW, a true expert on Hungarian wine, has consistently expressed her enthusiasm for the performance of this variety in Villány. Robert now confirms that Franc's share of vineyard is up to 15% and rising. Attila Gere and József Bock have been the pacemakers with Csaba Malatinsky quietly making the point that he too has a lot to offer. However, the author puts his nose into many new glasses – not least those of Sauska – a relative newcomer, who has helped expand the reputation of the region.

The author is also good on Szekszárd, the other established southern region, which is refining its own highly approachable style with Bordeaux varieties. However, Robert pinpoints the likes of Takler and Heimann, who are developing Kékfrankos and the delightful Kadarka, a Balkan variety introduced by Serbs fleeing in advance of the Ottoman armies at the turn of the 16th century.

He then takes us up north, to Eger and the Mátra. Eger, synonymous with Bikavér, has a problem trying to shake off the mass market image created by inexpensive Bull's Blood, which is Bikavér's English translation. The best producers try to avoid using the name Bikavér because there are so many producers with yields of 100hl/ha wanting to take advantage of it. But while there are such superb winemakers as the softly spoken ampelographer Tamás Pók, as well as István Tóth and György Lőrincz at St. Andrea, there is hope that the wines, if not the labels, will continue to get better. Robert is just as excited about Mátra because 'bubbling below the mass production surface is a band of dynamic and daring winemakers prepared to push the limits... proving how good their terroir really is.'

This is a timely book to remind those in the trade that although the international marketing of Hungarian wines leaves a lot to be desired, there is a huge body of exciting talent working in Hungarian wine regions which deserves our attention.



Suzanne Mustacich: *Thirsty Dragon* (subtitle: *China's Lust for Bordeaux and the Threat to the World's Best Wines*)

Henry Holt/Macmillan, £20, 352 pages, hardback

The Financial Times named Suzanne's book as one of its books of the year for 2015. Described by the paper as a business book, the original review was written by Jancis Robinson MW and a longer version appeared on her website.

Near the start of the review, the book is described as 'riveting', while Jancis explains how qualified Suzanne was to write this book.

My favourite part, which really reminds me to buy this book now, is this:

'She [Suzanne] is also drily observant about the legion of Chinese "interpreters" who flooded in to Bordeaux to

negotiate between the two factions. "As a whole the women spurned the staid, local style – a Hermès scarf and driving moccasins – preferring a tiny miniskirt paired with six-inch stiletto heels" (improbable vineyard wear). Their translations always took far longer than what they were translating, apparently. "More and more, the translators were adopting the role of gatekeeper to Chinese buyers and demanding a sales commission, often from both sides."

Access the full review here: www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/china-v-bordeaux-games-people-play.

On *Palate Press* Simon Woolf describes the book as, 'an exhaustive study of what happens when two bullish trading cultures meet head on for the first time'.

He writes that 'Mustacich is to be credited as it's very rare indeed to read in such detail about the inner workings of "La Place", Bordeaux's extraordinarily self-protective, closed ecosystem of châteaux, négociants and courtiers.' Perhaps to temper his praise, he writes:

'If there is a criticism with the book, it is that the vast array of personalities and detail sometimes threatens to overbalance the narrative thrust. One could not accuse Mustacich of glossing over any detail or angle, however slight.' See full review at:

<http://palatepress.com/2015/09/wine/thirsty-dragon-deftly-tackles-chinas-effect-on-bordeaux>

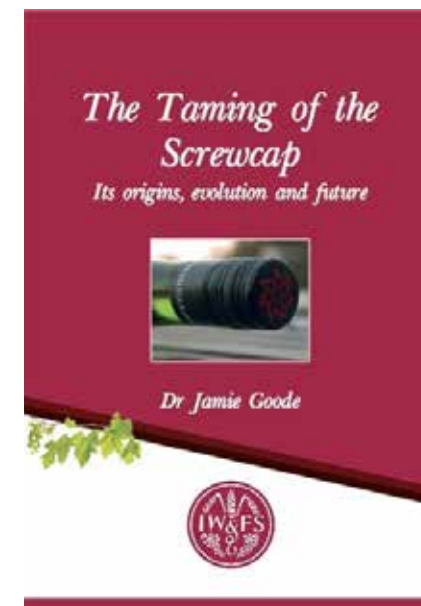
Bordeaux-based member Jane Anson reviewed the book for *Decanter* and was also full of praise in the main, writing that parts were, 'a cross between a detective story and a darkly comic tragedy'.

She finishes the review with this:

'The overall feeling at the end of reading is one of unease for the future, even as the Chinese market continues to grow and opportunities multiply. Mustacich wisely doesn't try to wrap things up too neatly, choosing instead to point out that, 'China challenges the rules of the game, but the game will still be played'.

Click here for her full review:

<http://www.decanter.com/wine-news/opinion/news-blogs-anson/china-wine-book-makes-tough-reading-for-bordeaux-chateaux-272282>



Dr Jamie Goode: *The Taming of the Screwcap* (subtitle: *Its origins, evolution and future*)

Review by **Wink Lorch**

The International Wine & Food Society, £10, 62 pages, softback

For the society's 16th monograph it turned to a subject that remains, on a world scale, both topical and controversial. The commissioning editor was none other than our CWW administrator, Andrea Warren, who is also administrator for the society and the person to contact to buy a copy of the monograph. The tightly-structured work was deftly edited by CWW member Susanna Forbes.

Jamie Goode has written widely on the subject of closures, so he was certainly the obvious choice of author to commission for this monograph. After an introduction come six chapters starting with 'A brief history of wine closures' and ending with 'Final perspective', followed by a short glossary of essential terms, and a bibliography and reference section.

What Jamie decided to include and exclude in the history chapter surprised me a little. There's a rightful mention of Switzerland's early adoption of screwcaps and a brief mention of Penfolds' customer trial on Bin 2 in 1996, but no discussion at all about the once widely distributed magnums of cheap wines closed with screwcap. Two-litre bottles closed with screwcap of Soave and Valpolicella (or *Valpolystripper* as it was known by some people), in particular, were prevalent right up to the 1990s and in my view led to the initial public reluctance to buy wines under screwcap.

Otherwise, it's an extremely good overview, in particular of the technical side of screwcaps, including much detail on the trials conducted in Australia and New Zealand. The technical chapter covers a quarter of the booklet, though the subject returns again with force when the topic of reduction is covered in the chapter 'The arguments for and against the screwcap'. Although a necessary discussion, this part went a little too in-depth and off the point of screwcaps.

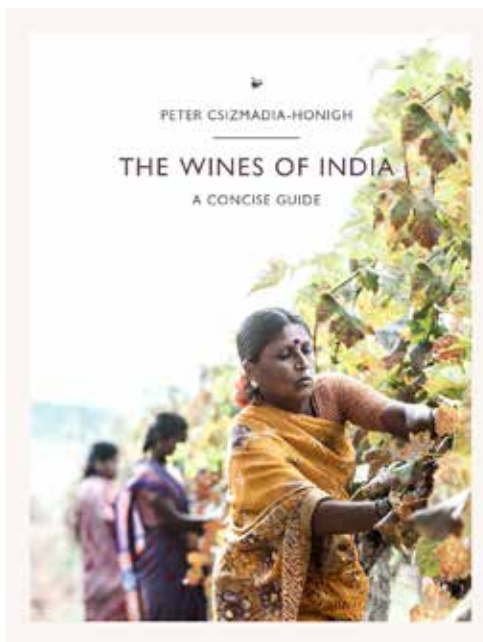
The chapter on the pros and cons, followed by one on the future cover most aspects in an objective way. One glaring omission though was no proper discussion about the environmental impact of different closures.

My small gripes aside, this booklet is perfect for any wine lover or professional who has not read much literature before on the subject – particularly someone who wants to be able to put across some solid points in either an educational situation or hold their own during an argument on the best wine bottle closures. Oh yes, and congratulations to whoever thought up the monograph title.

Peter Csizmadia-Honigh: *The Wines of India, A Concise Guide*
Review by **Brett Jones**

The Press Publishing, £25, 452 pages, softback

The Geoffrey Roberts Award is an international wine-related bursary of £4,000, given each year to someone who can demonstrate to the judging panel a genuine commitment to New World wines. Peter Csizmadia-Honigh was a worthy



winner of the award in 2014, enabling him to publish this interesting book about a country that has started to produce wine as recently as the early 1980s.

Named 'A Concise Guide', it is actually a lengthy, but worthy tome, which starts with detailed information about the history of contemporary Indian wine, subtropical winegrowing, grape varieties and wine styles. Modern winemaking began with Indians who had enjoyed wine on their travels abroad, in particular successful entrepreneurs and businessmen. There were already established vineyards in India, but for table grapes, so some realised growing grapes for wine wouldn't present a problem.

However, the subtropical climate is more difficult for wine grapes. Although many better vineyards now have *vinifera* varieties planted on phylloxera-resistant rootstocks, the delightfully named 'local' hybrid varieties Bangalore Blue and Bangalore Purple, with their foxy and musky notes, are still used for cheap, sub-standard wines for the local market.

Following this scene-setting is a detailed explanation of how the author reaches his conclusions as to the wine

quality and ratings in the context of Indian wines, leading into a classification of the country's producers.

Peter classifies 36 wine producers: two with five stars – KRSMA Estates and SDU Winery, 12 with four stars, 16 with three stars and six with two stars – 'wineries that produce modest wines... but often in styles palatable to the rural Indian consumer only'. Further lists follow in the next chapter with his highly recommended wines, divided up by grape variety.

The bulk of the book, in fact three-quarters, with more than 300 pages, is where the author really gets into his stride! He travels through eight regions in five states from landlocked Madhya Pradesh, where Ambi Vineyards reaches to just short of the Tropic of Cancer, via Maharashtra, which accounts for two-thirds of the national production, to Tamil Nadu 1,500 kilometres south, where the, possibly unfortunately named, Cumbum Valley Winery is the only producer in this state.

There are good descriptions of each area with details of geography, soils, grape varieties, as well as the all-important climatic conditions. These are followed by pithy descriptions of the individual wineries with, if they are good enough, a couple of wines singled out for praise in Peter's Picks.

Fifty wineries are profiled – however the author only actually classifies 36 of them. By writing about wineries that he didn't classify, he shows the Indian wine business, warts and all, justly damning the sub-standard businesses. And, making this book a complete overview.

I was pleased to see this book is well endowed with photos, but too many of them are textbook-like and some are downright ordinary. Some of the photos are captioned, but many are not, which is an oversight as I would love to know who or where we are looking at. The maps are attractive, but a tad vague with no key, apart from distance.

But, these are minor quibbles as Peter has written a well-researched, thorough and honest book about a wine producing country, which is entirely new to most of us. The book is imbued by his innate enthusiasm as well as an exacting personal criticism – it has inspired me with yet another reason to visit India.