

Max allen writes about wine:

“BACK TO THE FUTURE”

Organic screw-cap sherry anyone? Max Allen predicts what we'll all be drinking in 2007

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THE modern wine world is changing so fast. This time next year we'll probably all be guzzling a whole new range of wines, from new regions, made by new producers, bought from new shops. So now's the perfect time to do some crystal-ball gazing (or should that be crystal-glass gazing?) - to make some bold predictions for the next twelve drinking months.

This year's trendiest wine is going to be **SHERRY**. That's right: the wine your grandma used to sip out of a tiny glass with the vicar every Sunday is finally going to be embraced by a whole new generation of groovy young things in cool bars and restaurants across the country.

Okay, maybe not a *whole* new generation - but sherry, especially the very dry, refreshingly crisp styles such as manzanilla, from southern Spain, *is* pretty cool at the moment. Not only that, but the sherry producers are falling over themselves to re-brand and re-package the daggier styles like sweet, cream sherry in a major effort to attract younger consumers.

We'll see a lot more of this **MARKETING TO YOUNGER PEOPLE** across the wine spectrum in the next year: more labels with cute animals or suggestive, double-entendre names. And, just like most of the 'yoof'-marketing of the recent past, many of the new brands that will crop up from nowhere are just as likely to rapidly fade into obscurity. Why? Because wine consumers are savvier and more intelligent than the wine marketers make them out to be.

Look at the almost universal acceptance of **SCREW CAPS** on wine bottles (another thing we'll be seeing much more of this year): the only reason why producers have been so reluctant to ditch the cork in favour of the metal for so many years is that they thought we wouldn't approve. Then a few brave souls bit the bullet and made the change - and we said: thank you very much, more please.

Same with **ORGANIC WINE**. After an early burst, then a lull, green grog looks set to continue its soaring popularity this year as more and more people take a greater interest in the cleanliness and healthiness of what they drink. With 'ethical eating' being the buzz-phrase 'du jour', don't be surprised if people start thinking about **ETHICAL DRINKING**: how much precious water was pumped onto those warm-climate vines to make that cheeky little chardonnay? Were the grape growers paid a fair price for their labours? Do we really want to drink wine made by a large, multinational woodchipping company that clearfells old-growth rainforest?

Climate change is changing the world of wine, and we can expect another hot vintage this year. This is a double-edged sword: the warmer places will produce **WINES WITH MORE ALCOHOL** (and perhaps less subtle quality) than they used to, while the cooler regions, which used to struggle ripening some grapes, will be able to make better wine. This prediction is much longer-term, of course, than twelve months, but we have, arguably, already begun to see these dramatic changes taking place.

We will also see the wine world become more **POLARISED** this year. We'll see more consolidation at the corporate end of town as Big Brewers buy up more Big Wineries and other Medium-Sized Wineries merge to become Big Wineries which the Big Brewers will then buy (and so on and so on). But there will still be a host of **NEW WINES FROM TINY LITTLE WINERIES** creeping onto your off-licence shelves - despite the fact that world has far more wine than it can drink, there are still plenty of crazy fools out there willing to plant vines.

Talking of crazy: expect to see more **DEEP DISCOUNTING** going on this year, with buy-one-get-one-free offers (or BOGOFs as they're known) and similar promotions forcing the prices of the cheaper commercial wines ever downward. At the same time, though, the **POSH WINES WILL BE EVEN MORE EXPENSIVE** this year: red Burgundy and Bordeaux are still very much in-demand by those who can afford them, it seems.

No wonder one of the biggest trends among wine buyers is the move away from those 'classic' regions to, well less 'classic' wine-producing areas and countries. This year, expect to see more wines from **GREECE, SOUTHERN ITALY, PORTUGAL, SOUTHERN SPAIN** and, yes, thanks to global warming, even **ENGLAND**.

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