

The “ideal wine”: why it’s different in London, San Francisco, Berlin and Beijing

Is there such thing as an ideal wine? Probably not on a global scale – but when consumers are asked to describe one, it reveals some interesting details about what characteristics matter most to them.

ProWein 2012, March 4 to 6 in Düsseldorf, does not only offer a comprehensive overview over the international wine and spirits market, it also is the international meeting place for professionals to discuss current industry issues. The wide range of exhibitors and the exciting support programme form the basis for an intense exchange of information and ideas, and a new research commissioned by ProWein also provides interesting insights. ProWein commissioned market research firm Wine Intelligence to uncover what might constitute the ‘ideal’ wine by assessing consumer preference among key attributes within their purchase hierarchy and to investigate how wine preferences varied by country. For the project, Wine Intelligence interviewed wine drinkers in the UK, the USA, Germany and China to build up a picture of what consumers consider to be an ideal wine. Their analysis of the results showed some interesting patterns emerging, but the research also uncovered several unexpected results that may change industry perceptions of certain consumer groups in the future.

Alcohol levels

In all four countries, it’s clear that consumers care about alcoholic strength, and are seeking out wines with lower alcohol levels than before.

In the UK, US and German markets, around a quarter of regular wine drinkers say their ideal wine would have an abv of 10.5% or less. In China, most consumers favour wines with 8.5% to 10.5% abv. This is clearly encouraging news for producers who are investing heavily in their lower-alcohol ranges.

In the UK, drinkers aged 18-34 are even keener on low and very low alcohol wines than their older counterparts. The research also found that more than four in 10 drinkers who favour white wines prefer an abv of 11% to 12.5%.

In the US, younger consumers say they are looking for less alcoholic alternatives, though it's the older generation that has the greatest enthusiasm for very low alcohol wines. Almost one in five regular wine drinkers aged 55 and above say their ideal wine would have an abv of 5.5% to 8%. A questionable disparity especially when considering the top selling blockbuster brands are usually around 13% ABV within the USA.

Germans are associated with lighter wine styles and it's no surprise to see this preference reflected in the research. More than a quarter of the consumers questioned by Wine Intelligence say their ideal wine would be 8.5% to 10.5% abv.

Country of Origin

Consumers in all four countries regard country of origin as an important issue when describing an ideal wine, led by China where 88% of wine drinkers list it as a priority. Seventy-one per cent of UK wine drinkers feel the same, compared to 82% in Germany and 74% in the USA.

Despite the favourable positioning as current number one selling country in the UK off trade (source: Nielsen, 2011), Australia ranks only second in choice as consumers' favourite wine in the UK with France the most popular choice. This affinity for France was even stronger among 18 to 34-year-old UK wine drinkers.

France also led the field in the Chinese research, but here it was Chile which came second, followed by China itself, Italy and Australia. Chile's position is a surprise compared with the sales data, suggesting that the recent efforts by the country to increase its visibility in China may be paying off.

Organic, sustainable and Fair Trade

The research found widespread interest in organic, sustainably produced and fair trade wines, particularly among German and Chinese consumers. Eighty-six per cent of Chinese wine drinkers regard these credentials as important in their ideal wine, as do 67% of Germans. In the USA, the figure was 42% and in the UK it was just 34%.

Wine Colour

In all four countries, red wines emerged as the most popular colour for an ideal wine, with 44% of Brits, 57% of Germans and 49% of Americans making this choice. In

China, the decision was even more overwhelming, with 79% opting for red – the nation's lucky colour.

White wine was the second choice colour in all but China, where rosé wine edged ahead of white (though both were a very long way behind red wine).

Pricing

Although the average off-trade price of a bottle of wine is 3 Euro in German supermarkets and only 2.30 Euro in a discounter (German Wine Institute Statistics 2010), regular wine drinkers say their ideal wine would be priced at 4.86 Euro. For red wines, Germans say they will happily go above 5 Euro.

Closures

Cork closures were considered the most appropriate for an ideal wine in Germany, the USA and China. But in the UK, consumers are equally happy with screwcaps – and in fact prefer them as a closure for their perfect white wine.

www.prowein.com