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Interior, LifeStyle, Art & Travel

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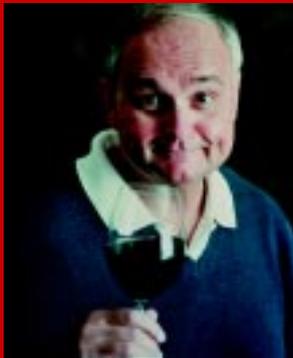
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FRED IS A GLOBAL WINE CONSULTANT BASED IN NEW YORK. HE ASSISTS SOME OF THE TOP HOTEL AND RESTAURANT CHAINS IN THE U.S. AND ASIA PACIFIC DEVELOPING THEIR WINE BY THE GLASS PROGRAMS, LEADING EDUCATIONAL TRIPS TO WINE PRODUCING COUNTRIES AND HOSTING VIP INDUSTRY DINNERS AT NEW YORK AND ACROSS ASIA.

ONCE UPON A WINE TREND

Pundits tell us that North Americans are drinking more wine than ever before. And reportedly these same people are spending more when they buy wine for drinking on and off the premises. Those who track such statistics predict with increasing certainty that the U.S. will become the world's top wine consuming nation by 2008.

It seems that the forecasters are unaware of the increasing cries of "Yummy!" from China's growing number of wine drinkers, who are learning to appreciate the finer points of red wine very fast. They say that if the adult population of China ever decided to drink just one glass of wine per head, per day, the vineyards of the world couldn't possibly meet the demand.

For the moment, however, there's little ground for alarm as your favorite wine should be readily available for quite some time to come. By no means every adult in China is a wine drinker, although many are becoming increasingly aware of the joys of good wine.

But any trend in China is serious when it comes to consumption, simply because we are talking in terms of billions rather than millions. So what constitutes a good bottle of wine these days and what is new and exciting with respect to the world of wine on this side of the world, you might ask?

Well, the definition of a good bottle of wine has not changed: it's still what you like, not what someone else likes. But the origin of more and more of the wines that Americans are consuming is changing as well as the mix of grapes and the prices that people are willing to pay for their wine.

Not long ago the world's leading wine producing countries considered the typical American wine consumer as a neophyte, not to be taken seriously. Of course there have always been a few serious American palates, educated collectors and wine authorities since George Washington's time, but they are the exception, not the rule, statistically speaking. The majority of imported wines were traditionally aimed at entry level and elderly consumers who wanted the equivalent of adult

Cool Aid (Reunite, Lancers Rose, Mateus Rose and Blue Nun being some of the most prominent examples).

But things have changed for the better in the industry as well as for our own palate satisfaction and it would appear that this trend will continue, if not accelerate. We are drinking more wine with food -- a concept made popular by the Europeans and brought to our shores with the waves of immigrants who founded the American wine industry from New York to California. Restaurants are serving a better selection of wines by the glass from very basic to very complex, carefully paired with the food offerings; wait staffs are being trained as never before and wine preservation is at long last being taken seriously by more and more restaurants.

This does not mean that by 2008 you will be able to have a glass of well made Cabernet Sauvignon with your Quarter Pounder at McDonald's (unless of course you travel to France where McDonald's has been serving wine for years). But it does mean that restaurants will assume that customers will order at



least one glass of wine as well as bottled water (tap water will be out) with lunch or dinner. Tables will be preset with both wine and water glasses. If the customer orders a bottle rather than a glass, the table will be reset with even larger, more expensive crystal in honour of the additional investment in the quality of their entertainment (of course the larger glasses will make quicker work of the first bottle and as many as will follow).

Consumers will be familiar with far more varieties and types of wines from around the world. The momentum towards Southern Hemisphere, New World wines will continue with no end in sight. So Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, South Africa, Canada and the United States (mostly California, Washington State, Oregon and New York) will comprise the majority of wine sales in the U.S.

Europe or the Old World will have regrouped and reinvented themselves except for the First Growths and Champagne of France which remain in high demand globally. Italy, France, Spain, Germany and Portugal will

form an alliance similar to the EU and market their wines on a united front. The wines of Eastern Europe will have found new fame, but will continue to be the step children of their more globally recognized cousins to the west. Waitstaffs will be far more sophisticated in terms of making the best suggestions for pairing the food and wine menus. There will be a national standard with certification for professional waitstaff wine education that will clearly identify minimum wine knowledge, sales and service skills. Waitstaff will meet annually to champion continued wine education for all and award recognition for star performers coast to coast. Wine will be offered in virtually every chain beyond fast food and those with a serious wine program will offer their selections by the taste (2 ounces), the half glass (3 ounces), the glass (6 ounces), the half-bottle (12 ounces) and the bottle (24 ounces); better wines will also be offered by the magnum (36 ounces) and poured at the table in the best restaurants.

In short, at long last wine will have genuinely become part of American culture, rather

than foreign to it, despite the best efforts of the neo-prohibitionist conspiracy.

And what about White Zinfandel you ask? Will we have seen the last of it? No! White Zinfandel is here to stay and it is going to be considered just as American as home made apple pie topped with vanilla ice cream.

Celebrity wine makers will have their own Hollywood agents and be treated like movie stars and professional athletes, appearing on TV game shows, signing autographs in airports and doing commercials for luxury products. There will be Wine Maker Trading Cards (which will exceed sales of baseball trading cards by 2012); there will be male and female Wine Maker Astronauts, Cosmonauts and Chinanauts (since China will have its own rockets and space craft launches by then) to ensure that the crews enjoy the correct vintage wine with their freeze dried, gourmet food. By 2032, a famous American wine maker will be elected President.

Fact or fiction you ask? Let history be the judge. Just remember where you heard it first.