

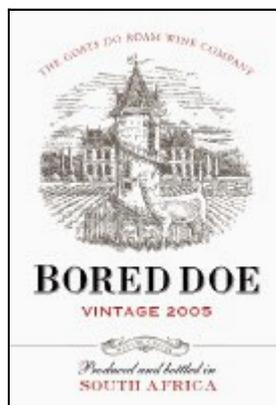
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SOUTH AFRICAN WINE

GOATS DO BLOG

By The Times (www.thetimes.co.za)

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The inventor of South African wine marketing is now a stubborn presence on the Net.

Wine blogs went critical last month with the launch of one from Fairview called fairviewtower.wordpress.com. While not the first producer's blog to hit the web, it is certainly shaping up to be the most influential since the human hadron collider behind it, Charles Back, wrote the book on SA wine marketing.

Back has been twice nominated by Wine International magazine as Wine Personality of the Year. His goats-do-something-or-other brand pokes gentle fun at French linguistic prickliness and pomposity, while his Spice Route wines pioneered non-traditional grape varietals in unfashionable appellations.

It's no exaggeration to say Back discovered the Swartland, which is shaping up to be the hottest appellation in SA — from a fashion rather than a climatic point of view. Eben Sadie was the Spice Route winemaker cum prodigal son who harvested Back's vision, trousering the highest rating to date for a South African wine at Wine Spectator magazine last year.

The first few Fairview postings are up and are already triggering tsunamis in the spittoon. On the subject of the hugely expensive biennial trade show Cape Wine 2008, Back notes: "I would not say that it was successful — it could have been better. I feel that we are still missing a trick in terms of showcasing what South African wine and wine culture is all about. The venue and setup, in its professionalism, was quite sterile. It didn't scream 'South Africa'."

Sobering words indeed for organisers WoSA (Wines of SA, the exporters' mouthpiece) from the largest SA wine exporter to the US and who ultimately pays their salaries via an export levy.

An apparent lack of involvement from government at CW 2008 is also regretted and several radical yet sensible suggestions for improving the event are made.

If only as a forum for airing issues such as these, wine blogs are a vibrant addition to the South African wine scene, where far too many producers have strong opinions they are only prepared to share "off the record".

Letters to magazine editors take months to appear (if they ever do) by which time the caravan has moved on, taking the barking dogs with it.

Lorenzo Gabba has a blog of blogs at tinyurl.com/4jp498 that links to the major South African wine blogs.

At the other end of the blogging spectrum is anonymous blog Pinot Pile at privatewine.wordpress.com, which shares the same Internet host as Fairview.

A clue for those inspector Clouseaus trying to unmask the author(s) of scurrilous stories on subjects ranging from pompous press releases to pompous bloggers with the odd drive-by shooting of pompous winemakers?

Probably just a coincidence.

On the subject of anonymous blogs, Manhattan celebrity chef Mario Batali is not a fan: "Many of the anonymous authors who vent on blogs rant their snarky vituperatives from behind the smoky curtain of the Web.

"This allows them a peculiar and nasty vocabulary that seems to be taken as truth by virtue of the fact that it has been printed somewhere. Unfortunately, this also allows untruths, lies and malicious and personally driven dreck to be quoted as fact."

Another unfortunate observation and one that makes Pinot Pile so popular is that gossip is such fun.

But then the devil always did get all the best lines.

