

✂A wine manifesto✂

Jamie Goode

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Why?

It's an attempt to gather together some thoughts about wine, in a series of short points that capture my approach to wine, and my vision for where it should aim.

You may disagree. That's OK. But I hope it causes you to question.

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@jamiigoode

www.wineanorak.com

1✂ The heart of authenticity

Authentic wine is rooted in a place and a time

2✂ The skill of winegrowing

Sensitive, intelligent winegrowing¹ produces wines that capture the location and the vintage.

3✂ The art of interpretation

There can be a number of different interpretations of a particular terroir. It's wrong to think that there can just be one wine made from each site. Consider the site as a musical score. You can have bad, good or even great renditions. Among the good ones there may be differences.

4✂ Soils matter

The ceiling for wine quality is determined by the soil. Great wines can only be made from privileged terroirs, no matter how skilled the winegrower and how perfect the climate.

¹ *A note on language. Language is important. It shapes our perception. Careful use of language reminds us of important issues. For this reason, we should stop using the term 'winemaker'. My preference is for 'winegrower'. It better reflects the role of human agency in the production of wines, which at its heart is a microbiological transformation.*

5✂ Some wines are just wine

Of many wines there is nothing to be said. They are just wine. It's foolish to say anything more about them, but still some people try.

6✂ A mystical transformation

Wine is made by microbes, but so often we forget about the importance of yeasts and bacteria in this mystical transformation. That's an error on our part.

7✂ The wine is a whole

Reductive approaches to understanding wine – breaking it up into its various components – have a place and some utility. But this utility is limited. If we want to understand wine properly we need to take a holistic approach.

8✂ Express the vintage

Vintage variation isn't a problem to be ironed out. By all means combat the challenges of each vintage with gusto. But consider the vintage in dealing with the wine in the cellar. Vintage variation adds interest when handled well.

9✂ Monsters aren't serious

There's a place for monster, ripe, bad ass wines. It's just that they aren't serious. But so often the people who make them want them to be taken seriously, which instantly makes them joke wines.

10✂ The evil of overripeness

Overripeness in red wines is a grave sin that has to be covered up with acidification and oak. The sadness: often it is avoidable.

11✂ Wine: be yourself

There's nothing wrong with commercial wines. The world needs good, cheap wine. But cheap wine doesn't have to try to mimic more serious wine by winemaking trickery. Honest wines are better than 'better' wines.

12✂ The sadness of spoofulation

There aren't all that many special places to grow wine grapes. It's a tragedy when a privileged terroir is used to make sweet, oaky, international-styled red wines.

13✂ The taste is not in the wine

The taste of wine is not a property of the wine, but is a property of our interaction with the wine. We bring a lot to the wine tasting experience.

14✂ Wine as an aesthetic system

Wine appreciation doesn't exist in isolation, but is part of a wider aesthetic system. We decide together what is great about wine, through our interactions, our discussions, and our learning.

15✂ Too many commercial palates

The wine trade is chock full of talented tasters, but too many have commercial palates. They are skilled at differentiating among commercial wines, and even very good wines, but can't differentiate top quality commercial wines from truly serious wines. They often take offence when you suggest there's a difference.

16✂ Don't expect others to pick up your tab

The wine business – and especially vineyards – must be sustainable. You can't expect the next generation to pick up your tab.

17✂ True to origins

If you stick the name of a place on a wine label, the wine should taste of that place.

18✂ No new clothes

If you hate overripeness and obvious new oak (as you should), take care lest you end up praising a wine for the mere absence of these faults. It happens.

19✂ Wine resists the proud

Be humble in the face of wine. It's an endlessly complex subject that changes each year. It's beyond any single human's ability to understand to any serious degree. We see in part. That's OK.

20✳ Bright side story

There's lots of bad wine, but I'm not going to worry too much about it. I'll just spend time chasing the good ones. There are plenty to keep me going.

21✳ There is always another wine

Supply and demand imbalances mean that every now and again, old favourite wines become no longer affordable. Still, there are lots of new ones to discover. Friends move on; you make new friends.

22✳ Buildings, people, fabrics

We have an impoverished vocabulary for tastes and smells, so describing wine ends up a challenge. Figurative language is the best way of capturing the personality of wine in words. Shopping lists of ingredients are so inadequate.

23✳ Beer is better than wine

Many commercial wines are so deeply dull, dishonest and tricked about with that I'd rather drink beer. Many in the wine trade are so disillusioned because they know that they are peddling crap, that they lose their love for wine. Beware!

24✳ Escape the small oak rut

Too many winegrowers are obsessed by small oak. Small oak – barrels and barriques – doesn't suit all that many wines. But it seems the default vessel of *élevage*. It's a mistake.

25✳ Mouthfeel matters

It's in the mouth that we really get to understand a wine. Texture, mouthfeel, elegance, finesse – they're all underrated.