

WINE SHOWS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

TRANSCRIPT OF DISCUSSION

HUNTER VALLEY

31 AUGUST – 2 SEPTEMBER 2012

For what it's worth – for your reference or amusement – this is a full, fifty page transcript of every presentation and discussion at the Wine Shows in the 21st Century weekend held in the Hunter Valley in August/September 2012. This account is not always verbatim (my fingers sometimes couldn't keep up!) but it does capture every point made from the panel and from the floor on the day. It's unedited – please excuse spelling errors and profanities!

Tyson Stelzer.

Session 1: Are wine shows obsolete?

Iain Riggs

This weekend came about in an odd sort of way, starting with rumblings from the past scholars about the need for a reunion of the Len Evans Tutorial. Then Sam Connew casually informed me that she was now the chair of the ASVO wine show committee. It wasn't hard to realise that if we did have a reunion, we would have some of the brightest and hardest working people in the wine industry in the one place. It was therefore logical to expand it to include a talkfest on wine shows. The date was also easy – Len Evans' birthday, which is today, and tonight we will be joined by Trish, Sally, Toby and Jodie Evans. We've put up some photos from 11 years of the LET. Everyone is there, from a baby-faced Ben Edwards, Sarah-Kate who looks 13 years old and Tim James, who always looks 75."

50 of 132 Len Evans scholars are in attendance from 11 years of tutorials.

Today would have been Len Evans' 82nd birthday.

This is about speaking our mind, assessing where our system is at and where it will be taken in the future.

Twitter #wineshowfuture12

Wine shows have been around in Australia for a very long time, even before the RAS held its first show in 1812. An Australian wine was awarded a silver medal in the UK prior to this time. Have wine shows run their course and don't serve the industry or consumers? Have we engaged consumers enough? Have winemakers been sidelined? Or have wine shows done enough?

Are wine shows obsolete?

Aaron Brasher

What purpose do wine shows serve?

Who is the target audience?

What is the communication process around wine shows?

Do we need to revive to survive? Do we need to get the Packer whacker out there to revive it?

Corrina Wright

I don't enter my wines in the national shows because regionality is what it's all about to me. I'm not prepared to enter them but I am prepared to judge them. It helps me to see what's going on in the world. There's camaraderie, interchange of ideas and I believe in change from within. And there aren't enough women in wine shows. Life is short, you only get so many vintages as a winemaker and learning from others might enable you to do them better.

I'd like to see a leadership position assumed by someone.

I put together a survey in my region and I was amazed, of 60 people who got back to me, 80-90% thought that wine shows were still relevant but all had suggestions for change. Is it relevant to consumers, to winemakers, to betterment of the breed? There are lots of different thoughts on this.

Greg Mellick

I've been involved with the Hobart Show since 1984. I've also been involved in a show in Hong Kong and when you see the people involved in that show and how it has influenced the wines they drink you realise just how influential wine shows can be.

We've created a committee of master judges of wine. If we want to be professional about our shows we need a proper structure around it with properly accredited judges.

I think we have too many wine shows. A lot of them aren't relevant. Regional shows should be for regional wines and should feed into the capital city shows.

Aaron Brasher

Tim James wrote a paper in 2001 regarding regional shows feeding into capital city shows and into national shows. Brian Walsh has suggested that there is something like 70 wine shows in Australia at the moment. There's a lot of clutter.

Greg Mellick

Who are wine shows for?

Primarily for producers and feeding into the industry and secondarily for the consumer. As an agricultural society in Hobart we focus on serving the producers.

One of our biggest problems is that many producers want to enter because James and the Wine Companion contribute significantly. Many wine shows target wine journalists to judge so that they can write about the show and bridge the link with consumers.

Paul Henry

I was somewhat reticent to declare my position as an antagonist or a protagonist for wine shows. Conclusion often tends to triumph over enquiry and I hope that we are able to robustly debate these issues.

What is the purpose of wine shows? We first need a consensual view as to what it is intended to do.

I watched Australian wine shows from afar in the UK since 1993 and they had a profound impact on Australian wine and the view of the British consumers. At a strategic level so much has changed in the intervening 20 years that I would question whether the purpose still fits their role. Do wine shows encourage improvement of the breed? I see a lot of winemakers doing that among themselves now.

Who is the audience? We as an industry constantly talk to each other and no one else. An accurate but lazy observation. If there is a singular challenge in common to the Australian industry it's new consumer creation, so there has to be a consumer component that is more obvious and more understandable than it is at the moment.

Equity of participation and funding are crucial. We need to discuss how much money the Australian wine community invests in wine shows and how much agricultural societies do or don't make out of wine shows, and if that is equitable, because if it is not these shows are not sustainable.

We should be here less to debate the relevance of wine shows and more our capacity to effect change.

The process of incremental change has already been exercised and has come up short.

This will not happen unless the incremental change and tinkering has come up against barriers which cannot be surmounted without institutional change.

There are a lot of people advocating change, a lot of people suggesting that the wine show system is in need of reform.

What is the purpose of wine shows? Who is the audience? And what is the equity?

Nick Stock

Ownership and who should have ownership are the crux of the issue.

We have too many wine shows and we'll have many more, at a grassroots level and in the trendy styles and big international shows like Decanter, branching out into Asia.

The question is not whether they are obsolete but how we can effect change.

We love and value regional shows most. And they are becoming the heroes of our wine show system. The revenue is channelled back into the region, effective, cost effective. Judges and producers learn a lot.

If every regional show in the country doesn't have a wine of provenance award in the next year they're not paying attention.

The Hunter and Barossa are benchmarks of what regional shows should be.

A year ago I played my hand and wrote a blog on capital city wine shows, run by agricultural societies. They're not run by a community, by winemakers, they're disconnected, disparate.

There are two things that the capital city wine shows are meant to do. First, to improve the breed. The other is to act as a promotional vehicle. And I suspect they are not doing either of those things particularly well in most cases. Or as well as the could do with the money available.

The shows have not moved as quickly as the world of wine. Winemakers hire consultants, seek opinions, travel the world, use regional shows and don't need capital city shows to show them this.

On a marketing front, it's very difficult to gauge. Increasingly, when consumers walk into wine stores they're confronted by a sea of labels and it becomes bamboozling. If large wine shows are to have a presence and become useful, we need a rationalisation.

And we need longevity. A lot more could be done to extend the impact in the market. A lot more efforts need to be made.

If wine shows don't improve the breed in the grand way they did, and as a marketing tool if they're obsolete, the return on investment question needs to be asked of capital city wine shows. And who is going to take the lead is a question of why we are here.

The National wine show has real merit but I don't think the RNCAS should not be allowed to run it, if only because of the unfreshly shucked oysters served in an attempt to poison the judges every year.

And why did the Alpacas piss on the floor of the shed the week before the judges came in? There needs to be an attention to the details.

We should put the big wine shows out to tender to see what brilliant people could contribute to the industry. Outsource them if you like. What could a wider pool of people bring to wine shows? And hopefully Wine Australia would throw a tender in.

We could make it more attractive to everyone, judges, winemakers and consumers. As an industry we need to demand better outcomes from bigger wine shows, better reinvestment and ultimately a rationalisation of wine shows.

Aaron Brasher

Common questions: Who is the audience? Who is going to take ownership? Are wine shows relevant or obsolete?

Out-sourcing wine shows is a challenge.

Paul Henry

Do we have a view of to what extent the wine industry currently supports them in dollar terms? To what extent do awards speak to consumers, or do awards help retailers category manage?

Greg Mellick

Royal Hobart \$125k income, \$80k expenses, and money invested back into the industry. \$20-\$25k put aside for future years.

Aaron Brasher

Our estimates are that the industry invests \$6-\$7M a year in wine shows.

Lyndey Milan - If we didn't have sponsors in Sydney we'd run at a loss. We're trying to evolve and move with consumer trends.

Michael Hill Smith - Some people do the money making better. Some of the royal agricultural shows have staff on for most of the year. Decanter has 12,000 entries at 90 pounds a year, which equates to AUD\$1.6M, but people see it as a good investment because if they do well they will interact with the end user.

James Halliday - Mundis Vini Wine Show in Germany - I have seen with absolute horror the gold medals appearing on sub-\$10 Australian wines. And other shows with a complete lack of any responsibility for the judges. There is no bench measuring for the results. Some shows specify that precisely 30% of entries will win medals. There is no discussion between the judges during the entire judging process. If these are successful shows - and they are - if we aren't doing a whole lot better, we have to ask why.

With the pyramid structure, you'd have to run all your regional shows in the first five months of the year, the capital cities in the next five months and the national show at the end of the year.

And what are the volumes of entry? In a regional show it will always be less than a capital city show.

I disagree completely with Paul Henry and Nick Stock when they doubt the value of the show system in improving the breed. Note to PR people: Scooping should be restricted to dog poop on the streets, not to medals in wine shows.

The show system is enormously beneficial, playing a tremendous role in the improvement of chardonnay in recent years. Don't write off shows on this score.

Marketers control the purse strings of the \$6-\$7M investment, and should be put in the context of the total marketing expenditure of wine companies.

Nick Stock's shirt: CAUTION - Wine Show Judging in Progress

Nick Stock

I have no doubt that wine shows assist in improving the breed, but capital city wine shows could do this a lot more effectively. There is a lot of repetition and could this redundancy be removed?

Wines that blow through capital city shows tend to be reflective of fashion, compared with wines in regional shows, with a focus on wines of providence.

Regional shows improve the breed and engage with communities and consumers.

Why can't one big wine show that's cashed up with a big team of people running it do away with the middle band of wine shows. All these capital shows, with just one more gold medal.

Nick Bulleid - Regional shows and to some extent capital city shows rely on a huge amount of volunteer labour, and how does a tender process make use of this.

State shows. Do regional shows feed into capital city or state shows.

Nick Stock - Decanter and others do it so why couldn't we? Both still attract significant volunteer labour, even though they are commercial enterprises. It's not an impossible model.

Stuart Gregor - How can capital city shows be considered relevant when the best wines aren't entered? Capital city shows are not even remotely judging the best in the class.

Angie Bradbury - The changes to classes and styles in Melbourne and Sydney shows that there is progress, and the number of entries is growing.

Greg Mellick - In New Zealand the people running the shows go and buy a small number of the best wineries that are not entered. Eligible for medals but not trophies.

Halliday - A blind tasting that put show winners against non exhibitors did not reach a conclusive outcome.

Jim Chatto - The pseudo regional wine shows, Cowra, Riverina and Rutherglen.

Nick Stock - Kill them. They're the biggest pimple on the backside of the wine show system.

James Halliday - Cowra is appalling but the simple solution is that they become the NSW state show. Why not?

Huon Hooke - A tiered system of shows- this has always been an assumption in the background but has it outlived its usefulness? How does regionalism fit in with a pyramid structure? Does it just compound the felony that the biggest and darkest wine gets to the top, in spite of regionalism.

Wine and Spirits Magazine has gone away from judging all wines from all places together, judging only like regions together.

Corrina Wright- I find it quite irrelevant at the end of a show to judge a young riesling alongside an old semillon and a Barossa shiraz, to choose the best.

Nick Stock - A great illustration of how the big shows are asleep at the wheel is that they're focused on how to convert to the 100 point score system when they can't even arrange 300 shiraz into regional groupings.

Ben Edwards - The only opportunity for the top wines to be identified is if regional feeds into larger shows. Tiny quantities of high quality wines can never make it to the top.

Mike - Adelaide Wine Show Committee - not a money making process, run by exhibitors, lost money until the wine show dinner was discontinued. Entries have gone up this year, even though we're not looking for more entries.

Brian Walsh - there are lots of merits in the hierarchy model, but practicality fails us, unless we can come up with a better system. Perhaps regional shows don't need to feed into other shows?

And what of those who miss out on one day at one time at a regional show, can they have a second chance in a state show. And what of smaller regions without a regional show?

If there's no step between regional and national shows, you have no training ground for judges.

Sue Bell - If we are to continue to align ourselves with food, don't we have a point in common that we haven't taken full advantage of yet.

Are wine shows obsolete?

Nick - Partly

Corrina- No

Greg- No

Paul - Increasingly

Session 2: Judging Pinot Noir

Tom Carson

This session came about because Iain Riggs gave Tom's wine no award in the Sydney show.

The problems with judging pinot. They don't like being judged. Looking for things that judges keep second guessing with pinot.

Found eight 2010 pinot noir trophy winners from the seven capital city shows. Only 24 gold medals awarded, so not being awarded as much as should be. Wines winning trophies in some shows are given bronze, silver, gold or nothing in others.

The only wine judged consistently was Bay of Fires, always silver or gold though never a trophy.

2011 wine shows- 119 wines per day, Adelaide 160, Perth 153, Sydney 149, Hobart 144, Melbourne 135 and Brisbane 124.

Adelaide in 2011 was gruelling to judge. When this happens the crowd pleasing wines in the middle ground win the awards, as judges are afraid to award the bigger darker styles or the more edgy styles.

120 wines is the limit and I think it should be under 100 to really do it properly.

Parochialism. WA gave 1 gold medal to a pinot and it was from WA. Melbourne 5, Hobart 10, Adelaide 6, NWS 6 and Sydney 2. It is an issue that local wines are favoured- 100% in Perth for 2010 pinots, 80% Melbourne, 70% Hobart, 16% Adelaide, 66% VIC in NSW, 50% in Sydney/Brisbane.

And if pinot is not taken seriously it has no chance. I didn't enter Perth because I know it won't be judged properly.

Colour is important but not everything. Just because a wine has stalks doesn't mean it's a really good wine. You have to look at a wine as a complete package. Eucalypt/mint/gumtree is confused with whole bunches.

We're afraid of extract and tannin in pinot. But we shouldn't be.

Aftertaste is important in wine shows and difficult to judge if you can't take your time.

Blind pinot tasting

1. St Huberts Pinot Noir 2010

Group vote mostly silver

2. Morey St Denis Domaine Stephane Magnien 2009

Group consensus bronze or nothing. Some saw brett and underripeness.

3. Yabby Lake Block 6 Pinot 2010
Group consensus silver.

4. PHI 2010
Group consensus gold

5. Coldstream Hills Reserve 2010
Group consensus silver/gold

6. Rousseau Clos St Jacques 2009
Group consensus bronze.

7. Bay of Fires 2010
Group consensus gold

At the NWS Chatto gave Coldstream Hills Reserve the only gold on the panel but as it opened up it received unanimous gold and went on to trophy.

Should the stewards pour the pinot flight early. Hobart now judges in big burgundy Riedels, which makes a huge difference.

Tom

Adelaide has a real problem with sorting out top golds across split classes. Decisions are made without collaborating with those who've judged the classes.

Debate over pinot medals in Perth. Only one gold in 2010 pinots in 2011. Eastern states don't enter because results inconsistent. Tom.

Day 1 Summary

Regionality prized

Judging like with like important

Too many wines judged per day

Dedicated style judges, fly in fly out for particular classes

Pinot judging - pour earlier, 20 wines per day or less

Consumers and wine shows

Why can't wine shows cap entries (if not about dollars and profit) - judges spread too thin

Improvement of breed or promotional opportunity?

This is a \$7M industry - who benefits and who should pay?

Not enough industry people in capital city wine shows?

Tender for national wine show?

Wine show calendar - how would that fit with the pyramid system?

Session 3: Stars, Bars and Gold Stripes

The 100 point scale and the relevance of Gold, Silver and Bronze

Nick Ryan

Gary Walsh, whose insights into the wine show system must be fascinating since he's never been anywhere near them.

James Halliday

I am fairly wedded as everyone knows to the 100 point system and I am mystified by the convolutions that wine shows have gone through in attempting to convert a 20 point scale to a 100 point scale.

The scores that I use are the same conversion as the World of Fine Wine.

I cannot understand why judges should continue to judge out of 20 when someone else alongside them could do a simple mathematical conversion.

You cannot simply multiply by 5.

87-89 points bronze

90-93 silver

94 and above gold

And it stops there. If you want to give a lion very high points you can leap upward through the stratosphere. But you almost never use 19.5 and 20 so you don't need to try to specify the trophy. That comes out of a different process.

The discussion assumes whole numbers but with three judges you can often end up with fractions.

Nick Ryan

Don't get hung up on numbers but find the golds and bring out the silvers and bronzes. Does it matter what numbers we're using?

Why move to a 100 point system?

James Halliday

For better or worse, Parker was the juggernaut who started it going, it's widely used in overseas wine shows. There are plenty of commentators and magazines who use it. Every commentator in Australia uses it.

Dave Bicknell

Melbourne is going through a convoluted calculation to come up with the points, and I don't think that's the right thing to do. We've always used 20 points and that's what we're comfortable with. Converting to 100 points is like learning another language but judges will get used to that pretty quickly.

Is it the medal that's important or the score? I'm not sure what it is. The score is being provided to bring the consumer in. But historically the important thing is getting the quality bands right and we're not trying to categorically rank every wine in order. That's not our goal. There are more questions than answers.

Brian Walsh

The gold, silver, bronze, nothing is a perfect differential of our wine show system as distinct to other forms of wine show endorsement. I'd like to see us go further and not even publish scores in our catalogues.

Just as we don't expect James to use a medal ranking in his Companion, I think shows should move away from points and ascribe only medals. Use points to arrive at your decision but keep these points internal.

The 100 point system for shows hasn't been really well canvassed. I think this is the first time that it has been canvassed.

Do the scores help the exhibitor or the system?

We have a system, it's served us quite well. Should we allow independent wine commentators to use the gold, silver and bronze system or is that the intellectual property of the wine show system.

Gary Walsh

Points are to make it easier for the consumer. For the wine show it's about marketing and relevance. There could be a consistent scale of comparison.

Canvassing some retailers, they would like to be able to

I did a survey. Is a score of 94 out of 100 more compelling than a wine show gold medal? Of 450 respondents:

43% yes

45% ambivalent

20% no

Dave Brookes

I think changing to a 100 point scale is like shifting the deck chairs around the titanic. Use it in marketing collateral. Brian Walsh has a ready reckoner that the Fine Wine Magazine uses and this could be used for conversion.

The way we communicate with the consumer has got to change.

The Adelaide Hot 100 communicates its results in a booklet purposely for consumers.

The public has become disassociated with wine shows.

Gary Walsh

A lot of people have no idea what a medal means. They think a gold medal means first place.

I asked a group of interested wine consumers and a lot said that 94 points was more compelling than a medal because they don't understand medals.

Brian Walsh

Many of our target consumers are also interested in food. And the Good Food Guides use just three hats or three glasses and don't see the need to ascribe points. It does a disservice to our consumers to suggest that they don't understand medals.

I dislike the idea of standardising things to try to make it easier for consumers.

Dave Bicknell

Are the results for the industry or for consumers or for both?

Nick Ryan

Is anyone who isn't in the wine trade downloading the results of wine shows?

Dave Bicknell

The high scores are no better than anything else but just the wine we like better on the day. But inherently it's no better than the group of gold medals around it but it just has something that the judges like on the day. Wine shows are not about creating a categorical ranking. We're not trying to say they're the best wines but they hit a particular category on the day.

We should not only be publishing the big points but also the low points. If the wine's shit it's shit and we should be passing that message back to wine producers.

The idea of bettering the breed is bullshit. The Jimmy Watson was abused because everyone learnt to make caricature wines that were undrinkable. But that's been sorted out now.

James Halliday

Serena Sutcliffe gave 0, 4, 8 and 12 in New Zealand and we could not convince her to go higher and so we disregarded her scores.

Lester Jesberg by email

The wine by numbers approach is poisoning the wine show system. Australian scribes desperate to be published are blindly following the American system.

James Halliday

I continue to be bemused as to why the 100 point system is poisonous while the 20 point system is not. It's simply a means to an end.

I cannot get excited about what is purely a mechanical part of the process.

Iain Riggs

When did the wine show system go away from first, second and third as in other agricultural shows to awarding many golds, silvers and bronzes in any class?

Nick Bulleid

In 1959 or 1960 some Lindemans wines were awarded first, second or third.

Brian Walsh

A wine show is subjective, not objective like a 100m race. So we should award bands.

Nick Ryan

But the diving and gymnastics use subjective scores.

Nick Bulleid

No Olympic competition has ever not awarded a gold because no competitor is up to standard.

Sue Bell

Do we need trophies?

James Halliday

When we get to trophy judging we throw all of our collaborative skills out the window and you put in a betting slip. And Evans would find a way to have a second vote and break the tie to shift the outcome in his favour. I think it's very unsatisfactory the way trophies are awarded. It's one of the elephants in the room.

Dave Bicknell

In Melbourne we bring all the panels back to re-engage with all of the top wines. And last year there were only two impasses at which the chairman got involved. And one was a tight Clare style and a more progressive German style. So we discussed it. There should be collaboration right to the end.

Nick Ryan

Can trophies be deployed as a stylistic choice to drive trends?

Brian Walsh

Maybe we need to spend a couple more days trophy judging. Maybe the first three days are qualifying to get into the final. Then the trophy judging is the final and we could award first, second and third. And this gets around the problem of the second best wine disappearing into oblivion.

Nick Ryan

But can we afford to put more time into wine shows? And do we need to pay judges if we put more time in?

Michael Hill Smith

In all of my years of judging I cannot remember not being rushed.

If you are a progressive show and want to be relevant, people can relate to the 100 point scale. We have adopted the 100 point scale recently for Singapore Airlines tastings and it worked particularly well.

Nick Stock

The Air New Zealand show has introduced elite golds.

It doesn't matter what you use to put these wines forward but how well you communicate this to the public. The Melbourne show is working hard in that direction. How much resource, human and monetary, is put into communicating and celebrating results.

Dave Bicknell

Who cares what the fucking Kiwis think?

Iain Riggs

Do James' score bands allocate too many levels to gold?

James Halliday

Breakdown of bronze and silver don't serve the consumer particularly well. Having flexibility from 94 upwards, most scores will land between 94 and 96. 97 is like three 19s, and that will not happen very often.

Iain Riggs

Sydney and Brisbane use five point bands.

The points system should see the abandonment of gold, silver and bronze.

Dave Bicknell

Does a point score of a medal have most meaning? I suspect medals have more meaning for most.

James Halliday

You will have to force rank if you only have points to form a hierarchy within gold scores for each class.

Ben Edwards

Are we trying to make people fall in love with shows? They already love wines. They distinguish between wines through points, medals, whatever. Are we trying to make the show more relevant to the consumer? To bring the consumer to the show?

Dave Brookes

It's about trying to make the information about the show relevant to the consumer. It's about trying to gain their trust again.

If you use 100 points, 20 points or 3 smiling faces it doesn't matter, it's a means to an end.

Jim Chatto

What happens when a 94 point wine beats a 97 point wine in a trophy tasteoff? We fudge the numbers to suit.

Greg Mellick

Does adding up 100 point scores take longer?

Iain Riggs and James Halliday

No difference.

Brian Walsh

What do the exhibitors want back from judges. We don't generally have enough feedback about how we arrive at a score. Perhaps an Ipad application could provide some more insight into the way we communicate this. Comments for every wine in the class. Every judge has made a comment to arrive at their conclusion. Why don't we share this with exhibitors?

Chris Pfeiffer

Every exhibitor gets the score and a one line comment on each wine. Every panel has their own secretary to type in the comments. It makes the process considerably longer.

Gold, silver and bronze is the point of difference that a show system can offer.

Brian Walsh

If you're going to publish points in the catalogue from 84 to 97 then the medals lose their relevance and I'd prefer allocating the medal bands.

James Halliday

The argument that medals are the ultimate show outcome, but we should communicate both medals and points.

Brian Walsh

An elephant in the room is the awarding of points by a retail panel. There is a rigour in the wine show system that, for instance, retailers don't necessarily use.

Nick Ryan

Do we want to communicate detail of the rigour of wine shows to consumers.

Brian Walsh

There is a lot of research on the effectiveness of medals and the result is that medals help to sell wines.

Angie Bradbury

Whatever we do we just need to be consistent about it.

Jeff Byrne

Should the conversion to a score out of 100 simply be made at the end after awarding a score out of 60?

Tom Carson

People don't take notice of the points now, so why will they take notice out of 100? The trophy winners are the focus. It works as it is. Winner takes all and only a few wines gain commercial success if they sweep the pool. The points are not worthy of so much discussion.

Huon Hooke

Pacific Rim Wine Show doesn't award points at all, just call medals and reach consensus.

Ben Edwards

The wine show system is not broken, it's our communication that needs addressing.

Session 4: Consumers and the wine show

How does a consumer regard a wine show and how do show results influence their choices?

From the first session it is clear that a lot of people have consumers on their mind.

Iain Riggs

The wine show system in Australia is a large enterprise like a company and as exhibitors we are like shareholders. Do we get a good return on our investment? We invest a lot of money and the capital city wine shows have an obligation to deliver better results to the wine industry. But the industry has never asked for that. Do we look at the results and simply walk away?

In the Sydney Royal show we try to engage the consumer. The bloody results catalogue is in serious need of a revamp. Can we have a separate set of results for the consumer. The first comment back from finance was that we can't afford to print it so do it online.

The digital age is one of the big untapped resources at the disposal of the wine industry.

The consumer has trouble engaging with the wine show catalogue. A phone app or online resource would make this more accessible. Some way to make all the effort that the wine industry and show committees invest into wines.

Peter Nixon

Dan Murphy's does very well out of wine shows. Medals are a very strong driver of sales.

The NZ show system has one portal for results of all shows.

An app would make a huge difference.

Trish Barry

There is not just one consumer, there are many consumer segments and we think about a premium wine consumer but the bulk of the market couldn't care less about most of what we're talking about. One solution is not going to fit every market need.

It's our responsibility as an industry to bring new consumers in and we can use the wine show system to do this. We're looking for an endorsement, a way to help the consumer navigate the retail shelves. And do we explain what a medal means? The communication is often lacking.

Larry Lockshin from Uni of SA has done extensive research. On average, consumers spend 4 mins to make their decision. After brand and price, the gold medal or any medal is the third most important piece of information. 7.5% of people say a gold medal makes a impact on their choice. But 5 stars has twice the impact. My own research, 50% say a medal doesn't impact choice, 37.5% maybe. And most don't understand what a medal means.

Tasting a wine previously and someone else recommending it is the most important cues for buyers. Peer recommendations are endorsed by 90% of people over advertising.

How can we invest in communications and use peer to peer recommendations more effectively.

Mobile internet usage will surpass desktop usage by 2014.

Why aren't we thinking about apps that communicate all the gold medals in the country?

How are people accessing their information? Snoop and cellartracker and online portals. Cellartracker has 40k users but 90% of visitors are not users.

The Hunter Valley show had a reach of 40k people through Twitter engagement. How can we double the reach and make it meaningful?

How do we think about the language to make it more accessible to consumers?

Tyson Stelzer

There exists a disparity between the imperative for wine shows to provide a return on a \$7M investment, and the strong scepticism with which wine shows are regarded by the engaged consumer.

The most important thing that wine shows can do to win back the respect of the consumer is to endorse the best wines on the shelves.

Survey of 1000 bottles in a retail store:

Sub-\$15: 4% displayed wine show medals, of which 60% were silver and bronze, 40% gold and trophy.

Over \$15: 2% displayed wine show medals, of which 30% were silver and bronze, 70% gold and trophy.

Nicholas Crampton: "The less engaged average consumer doesn't particularly understand what shows are about and they don't particularly care. There's a standing joke that they think a bronze medal means third.

How can the wine show system better engage the consumer?

Imagine a wine show designed purposely for its relevance to the consumer. I imagine it would:

- Judge classes by retail price rather than production volume.
- Do away with confusing class codes.
- Judge less than 120 wines each day to ensure consistent results.

Is this realistic? Matthew Jukes and I have run the judging of The Great Australian Red for cabernet shiraz blends this way for six years, and it works.

The average consumer is looking for simple cues.

The judging panels of wine shows outside Australia tend to have a stronger representation of media, buyers, sommeliers, retailers and general wine trade with a closer connection with consumers. This is surely a key priority in ensuring that our shows better engage with consumers. It seems to me that Tom Carson's proposal of remunerating these judges for their time is crucial if we are to keep them on board.

Stuart Gregor

Wine show medals are increasingly less relevant than they used to be. We've gone past improving the breed.

It's lazy marketing. There are many more clever and important ways that the message can be communicated.

The best wines in the shows get the gold medals but the best wines aren't always in the shows.

We're 20 years ahead of other food producers and I'm starting to see medals on yoghurt and olive oil and I no longer think it's relevant. There are so many more clever ways that we can promote our wines.

And when we feel that a wine needs 20 medal stickers to distinguish it from other wines what's the point.

The girl at Rockpool sends her staff out to peel the stickers off the bottle because they don't want them to be seen in the restaurant. I might have made that up.

Jimmy Watson is not as remotely important as it was twenty years ago. If I were a wine producer I would be much more serious about getting a score from Huon Hooke than getting a medal in a wine show.

Iain Riggs

Is improving the breed still important? I've been judging for thirty odd years and there was a dramatic need for improvement in wine quality and we've got to that point. So it's less important than it used to be.

But shows are still necessary in keeping the industry basically on track in where we take wine styles and wine shows. And do wines that are very orange or very cloudy have a place in shows?

We are at a tipping point as an industry. Do we sit or do we go forward? And do we take the consumer with us. Bury the phrase "improving the breed."

Stuart Gregor

Is the wine show system the best way to improve the breed any more?

Peter Nixon

The DMs panel looks at wines in the same way as the show system. And we have independent judges joining us.

We use all the important sales tools and they're confusing.

The problem with the current awards system is that they don't understand medals. James talks style and value and talks their language.

"Commercial" doesn't mean anything to a consumer. "Under \$20" does.

Medals work up to \$100, still relevant in that space. Silvers and bronzes are effective up to \$8 but can be negative above.

A JH score of 90 can be a real sales driver but a silver medal is not.

Stuart Gregor

Does a Dan Murphy's wine panel score mean as much as an independent assessment?

Peter Nixon

Commercial classes judged separately at Dan Murphy's.

Trish Barry

There hasn't been one person in the digital space who has made a connection with the consumer. The quaff boys have made the language easy and wine more accessible. But look at food and the Masterchef phenomenon and there's a great opportunity. Make it more fun and inviting and relevant.

Iain Riggs

Trialling the use of Ipads in judging benefits the producers and the consumers because your tasting note can be put online.

Stuart Gregor

Are less producers likely to enter because they've been exposed.

Iain Riggs

I hope they do receive less entries and I hope irrelevant wine shows fade away. In addition to those already listed, Cairns, Kalgoorlie.

Aaron Brasher

There's a big assumption here that a consumer has a desire to know. Medals do a reverse job, they're not seeking to communicate a detailed story.

James Halliday

Wine Intelligence found some years ago that among the very average consumer, "Clean skin" was the most recognised wine label.

Gary Walsh

With increasing sales online, they have a much wider resource of information in front of them.

Paul Henry

Tesco sells approx 20% of its wine online. 50% of sales across all its products.

Trish Barry

10-15% of wine sales in Aus are online.

Stuart Gregor

Wine medals are irrelevant to on premise.

Kim Bickley

We don't peel the medals off the bottles. I base purchases only on what wines I've tasted.

Iain Riggs

There is no direct connection between wine shows and on premise.

Stuart Gregor

If the wine show system has one legacy of value to the industry, it is the Len Evans Tutorial. This is the singular greatest contribution it has ever made to the industry.

Rob Geddes

If wine shows can direct their energy communicating with retailers and get the trade back on side, this situation can be turned around quickly. And they need to announce this the results to retailers in advance so that when the results are announced they have stock.

Consumers are confused by the plethora of wine shows.

Peter Nixon

The biggest challenge for us is the timing of stock release and the shows. We do it through our guide for the NWS.

Angie Bradbury

In releasing information to retailers, info was sent with an embargo because the retailer contacted the winery and the winery went ballistic because they had a bad relationship with the retailer.

Part of the issue is that wines are not commercially released for a significant period of time following the show.

Dave Bicknell

Wine shows focus on young, callow things, not the fully formed wines, which is what the consumers want, so there is a disconnect.

James Halliday

In some classes, Sydney specifies that the wine must be ready for consumption, but what does that mean? We had to conclude that it means that they can get the cork out of the bottle.

Peter Nixon

People just want to take a wine home and enjoy it. Medals are an easy mechanic for people to identify wines that are not faulty.

Stuart Gregor

Do you get caught in a cycle of needing to put more medals on than last year.

Brian Walsh

We should focus on promoting excellent in our wine shows, even if we are no longer talking about improving the breed.

Corrina Wright

It's not up to the shows to engage consumers but up to the brands.

Iain Riggs

I agree that it's brand marketing but the industry as a whole invests so much money and time that for the industry to walk away with that, I don't understand.

Sue Bell

The collegiate nature and professional development of the industry through wine shows is very beneficial to our industry and improving the quality of our wines.

Stuart Gregor

There is a blinding hypocrisy that people will judge and not enter their wines in the shows.

Nick Bulleid

Larry Lockshin distinguishes between the involved and the not involved consumer. Many will never show any more interest. How do we convert the uninvolved and vaguely interested consumer into more involved and interested.

Brian Walsh

Maybe Wine Australia should have a role in a central way of providing a portal to talk about the Australian wine show system. Aaron Brasher and Brian Walsh are looking at ways to do this coming out of this conference.

Iain Riggs

We are inward looking and what about our export market? What about getting to them?

Michael Hill Smith

In the Chinese market, points are so important. It's the one thing they understand. Decanter for their Asian edition have adopted the 100 point system.

International wine shows and other competitions. An important way of building brand and reputation internationally.

Session 5: Alternative styles and the natural wine debate

Stuart Knox

Natural wines to me are wines that have had nothing added and nothing taken away. However, I don't have a problem with sulphur. It preserves the wines and it's practical. I own a restaurant and I don't have a cellar at 9 or 10 degrees and I don't want vinegar in the bottle.

The umbrella of natural wine seems to have spread a little too far. A yellow wine has developed oxidatively under a flor. And orange wine has been made with extended skin contact. And orange and yellow wines can be made naturally or unnaturally. Natural wines can be made in any colour, cloudy or bright.

Huon Hooke

I recently wrote an article in the SMH about this and I can't remember having more feedback on any article in my 32 years as a wine writer. Some positive and some negative. But there is so much interest in natural wine. There are bars in Sydney focusing on this style of wine. And in London and Paris.

The World of Fine Wine devotes a column to this issue. There were two natural wine fairs in Italy around Vinitaly. We can't ignore it.

I don't like the term natural wine. Minimal intervention is a better term. Natural implies that other wines are unnatural. But to me all wine is natural but some are more natural than others.

Natural wine doesn't have to be bad wine or faulty. Natural wine can tick all the boxes that wine shows should want ticked. However, I don't think a great white wine has ever been made without sulphur.

In Italy natural wine dictates no sulphur addition and I have a problem with that right from the outset.

If a wine has faults it's not going to express terroir, it's going to express faults.

"If you want to express your terroir you first need to make a fault free wine." - Nat White, Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir Conference

James Erskine

Cook turned waiter turned winemaker in the Adelaide Hills.

What constitutes a good wine? As a restaurateur, no two people have the same preference for taste. There's no such thing as a wine that will suit everyone's taste.

I was uncomfortable in shows when the first thing everyone would look for in a wine was faults.

Blind tasting

1. Le Temps de Cerries

Group consensus - only two people liked it.

Stuart - we sell this in the restaurant and they love it. They can't get enough brett and enough VA - they love it.

2. Jauma Grenache 2011

Group liked it

3. Tom Shobbrook Sauvignon Blanc

Group: Only a few in the room liked it.

4. Kangarilla Road The Veil Savagnin 2011

Group: Some in the room liked it.

5. Jacques Puffeney Vin Jaune 2004

Group: Only a few in the room liked it.

6. Ducks in a Row Pandora's Amphora 2011

No medal

7. Josco Gravener Friuli 2005

No medal

Sue Bell

When we walked into the room and could smell the aldehyde we might have thought we'd gone back fifty years in the Australian wine industry.

In wine shows we must always be looking for drinkability and whether you'd want to drink more of it.

James

Natural wine has nothing to do with brett. But if I did have that problem I'd sterile filter it.

Sue Bell

By James' definition of natural winemaking, many winemakers use similar processes but don't label their wines as natural. Show of hands - majority in the room. I think we've just discovered a new angle for marketing Australian wine.

The heads of the Australian wine shows are probably sitting here thinking that the show system has helped to weed out faulty wines, and are wines like this a backward step?

Stuart Know

I can't simply pour these wines and leave the glass on the table. I need to share the narrative.

Nick Ryan

If we need to justify these wines and explain them and drink them only with food and offer a snake oil narrative, how can we say these are good wines?

If we're layering a prejudice or preconception on top of these wines are we adding a false impression?

Nick Bulleid

One-third of the population cannot detect mousiness.

Huon Hooke

When I started judging, phenolics in white wine were frowned upon. But some wines with no phenolics don't hold up well with food and wines with phenolics can hold up better. There is a move toward more phenolics in white wines. Though phenolics can be overdone.

Dave Bicknell

It's about balance. And most of these wines have a character that sticks out. In a wine show, do you have a separate class for these styles? No way. That would be the worst sheltered workshop of all time. As winemakers we've worked hard to understand these wines and it's a shame that wines like the 2011 grenache are very good, but can they be made this way consistently.

Huon Hooke

Bindi is as close to natural as anyone in the country, just add some sulphur at bottling, and sprays when he has to, and he doesn't skite about it.

In a wine show system the good wines will be rewarded and the bad wines will be thrown out.

Sue Bell

When we sat down, someone asked if this is the AWRI workshop.

Bryan Currie

The two wines we've liked are the Australian wines. Is it that these wines should be drunk close to where they're made?

Jim Chatto

Challenged James on pH and sulphur levels that he suggested were safe against brett. He said you need three times the sulphur level to kill off brett.

Stuart Knox

I picked these wines, every one of which I serve in the restaurant. I chose wines to shake up the room a bit so we wouldn't go to sleep after lunch.

Huon Hooke

We're very influenced by what we see and if a wine is cloudy or brown, we're often prejudiced by this.

Ben Edwards

The natural wine discussion is something that needs to be worked out so we have a frame of reference, so no big company comes in and uses it as a marketing tool. There are some natural wines that are pushed to the extreme and look very good, though we haven't seen them here today.

Stuart Knox

There are really only two wines here that fall under natural. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are alternate techniques of winemaking.

Gravener himself hates the natural wine movement.

Iain Riggs

We all enjoy drinking Coopers Pale Ale but then shriek in horror as soon as we see a wine in a show with a slight haze.

PJ Charteris

I've poured a lot of DRC and I would not want to shake up a bottle before I decanted it. It looks much better when its bright and clean and pristine.

Stuart Knox

I've tasted a lot of these wines cloudy and then seen them later after it has settled out and they're different wines.

Huon Hooke

There is one producer in Italy which suggests rolling the bottle across the table before you uncork it. It's proud of being different and skanky.

Sydney show has a class of new and emerging styles next year.

Tom Carson

The problem with entering these wines in a show is that a show is a technical environment and shows are designed to throw out faults.

And the only wines that received praise here were made with sulphur, they're not natural wines and I don't see anything special about the way these wines are made.

Stuart Knox

The only wine here made without sulphur is wine 3, Tom Shobbrook's sauvignon.

Huon Hooke

Movements like this stimulate us and encourage discussion and I think that's terrific.

Session 7: Future direction of the Len Evans Tutorial and training the judges

The Australian wine show system is an industry and a business in itself.

11 years of tutorials to date. 132 tutors.

Does the Len Evans Tutorial need to change direction?

Do we get involved in a code of conduct to ensure there is no obvious conflict of interest among judges?

Does the Len Evans tutorial have a role in educating consumers and in educating professionals from other countries. Was it of benefit to the Australian industry? Probably it wasn't but perhaps there is benefit now in realising that we have a wider audience in training people and using them in offshore markets.

And the dreaded question of funding comes up.

Michael Hill Smith

Judged his first show in 1980, judged 200-220 wines per day.

Peter Lehmann arrived with a BAC of about 0.08 and announced that he'd had two hours sleep the night before. So we began by tasting all the fortified wines, which was a very grizzly affair.

Judges paid for their own dinners. Associates were not invited at all. Judges and associates time were taken for granted.

In Sydney, if the show committee wasn't going to look after the judges, Len would do it himself. Hence the Len Evans school for finishing professionals. And so Len paid for dinner and impressed upon restaurants and hotels to support. Associates were there to learn and to perform. Associates were expected to talk to the wine, sing, tell jokes, thank the hosts. There was lots of good-natured teasing, but Andrew Caillard didn't take it that way, having been bullied at school.

In his tenth year as an associate, Nick Bulleid received notification from Len that he had been called to the front bench. And he sent a telegram to Len, "Who died?"

Len went to Zar Brooks and said, "It's not that you don't try hard, it's just that you have no talent."

And to Michael Hill Smith, "I suppose that you've done quite well in your own way. Imagine what you could have been."

And this all morphed into the Len Evans Tutorial. We need to find a way of funding it and keeping it going.

Sally Evans

Do we continue in the Hunter? James mentioned that he hopes so, but is this the best place for it? There are benefits here in maintaining the cellar and in tapping into volunteers.

When is it? How often?

How many people?

Involve nationals?

We continue to have a healthy number of applicants, usually around the 100 mark. Are we producing too many judges?

The state spread is a good question? Do we attract people from across the country? And different backgrounds?

How do we have a succession plan for tutors?

How do we future proof the tutorial?

And how do we fund it?

Ben Edwards

The legacy that we have to protect is that of mentoring, which Evans has set for us.

The issue is not just with the cost of the great wine but with procuring them. These wines are becoming harder and harder to source.

Iain Riggs

We would like to work more closely with the AWRI.

Con Simos

The Len Evans Tutorial is the pinnacle of what Australia does well.

Con leads the Advanced Wine Assessment Course AWAC at the AWRI.

There is an incredible amount of interest out there in people coming into the industry and getting involved in wine show judging.

Our mandate is to turn the subjective into the objective.

A lot of winemakers around Australia don't have access to tasting a wide variety of wines.

Interstate and overseas courses. It really shows the international community that we have a very strong technical focus in Australia.

Would you be interested in attending a refresher/shorter AWAC course? 67.1% yes, 4.4% no, 32.8% maybe.

There is wider support for us doing more courses. 55.5% of respondents said sparkling wine courses.

Attendees: 69% male, 31% female.

79% of attendees are winemakers. 9% marketers, 4% educators, 2% journalists, remainder other industry professionals. Majority 26-35yo. At least half have never judged a show.

Do women make better tasters than men?

We taste the same wine more than once.

Reliability scores. Median 0.3-0.4 if perfectly reliable is 1.

The decision is still out on men vs women. Equal reliability in our findings to date of 240 people who have participated in our courses.

\$4500 to do the AWRI course. Wine writers and sommeliers can't afford it.

McLaren Vale Wine Show and HV Wine Shows have scholarships to AWAC.

Michael Hill Smith

Len Evans Tutorial and AWAC are not in competition.

Should there be a levy on wine show entries to fund AWAC and Len Evans Tutorial?

Have the shows ever been asked to contribute?

Iain Riggs

A \$1 or \$2 levy per wine has been proposed.

Does the Len Evans Tutorial have a place offshore?

Con Simos

Perhaps a strong opportunity in Hong Kong or Singapore.

Brian Walsh

The \$6-\$7M includes the cost of wine and travel, not only revenue.

Ben Edwards

The Len Evans tutorial is about mentoring and understanding what makes great wine great. AWAC is about learning judging skills and critical assessment.

Nick Ryan

The tutorial should stay here at Tower. The place reeks of Len himself.

WA Wine show

There should be a greater level of communication and trust between the agricultural societies and the tutorial. The amount of money needed should be communicated to the shows.

Nick Stock

Paul Henry set up the Landmark tutorial in direct response to the Len Evans tutorial.

Nick Bulleid

If there is an opportunity for a sommelier from overseas to come to Australia and see that there is as much excitement for old Australian wine as there is for 1990 First Growth or a flight of DRC.

James has requested donations from the industry to build a fund for the tutorial. Also an auction at Langton's.

James Halliday

We think a lot of bidding will come from Asia. Aubere de Villaine has donated a 1961 Romanee Conti. 9 vintages of La Tache from an anonymous donor.

Letters have been sent to 500 Australian wineries and the response has been abysmal.

We absolutely must future proof the tutorial. The top wines have become more expensive and will increasingly become more expensive.

Day 2 Summary

Stars vs medals

- Communication to stakeholders
- What is the point of medals?
- What is the point of points?

Consistency

Communication

Winner takes all – points are simply a means to an end

Consumer and the wine show

- 'Better the breed' dead?
- Use modern technology better
- Consumer friendly results
- Gold, silver, bronze or points?

The conference prompted rigorous discussion from breakfast to well into the early hours of the morning.

A breakfast meeting of the agricultural societies on the final morning – the first time in history that this has happened – the beginning of a discussion to look at common standards and structures across the wine shows – which might lead to a peak body to oversee the wine shows.

Sydney and Brisbane will stick with their 100 point score cutoffs and other shows will make their own decisions accordingly.

Everyone is keen to get some pretty clear outcomes out of this weekend. We were asked to consider what was the one thing that we wanted to see come out of this weekend.

Session 7: Wine Show Structure

PJ Charteris

Punching bag prop appeared at the front table on the final morning. PJ brought it. “This session could be fraught with some emotional danger, so if you need to use the bag, go for your life!”

Things must be desperate because the future of the wine show system is in the hands of two kiwis and a couple of clapped out Port Adelaide supporters! – email from Nick Ryan to PJ.

We’ve almost fully put to death ‘Improvement of the breed.’

First wine show 1826

In 186 years has much changed? The key basis is that we judge some wines and most importantly the marketing around that.

Comments from Phil Laffer. “In reality, we just have to get around the purity and wank factor around the judging and acknowledge that this is essentially a route to market.”

We currently have more than 100 shows running in Australia.

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard “that is the best run show I’ve been to.” But with a few exceptions, all are very well run. We have a long-term and reliable platform. The difficult thing is the reliability of judging. There is an inconsistency in judging and we need to think about how we address this. Tom’s spreadsheet of pinot noir results highlighted this.

The woolly mammoth in the room, apart from Nick Ryan, are Cowra and Rutherglen. But for many of us, we’ve had our formative judging at these shows (show of hands, maybe 30% of the room), and we need to acknowledge this.

The style based shows continue to grow, with TGAR and The Adelaide Hottest 100, and so the diversity of wine shows will remain.

Nick Bulleid

The ASVO Wine Committee History and Future

The genesis was Brian Walsh coming to the ASVO and suggesting a role of the ASVO in the wine show system, and the fact that there is no system. Looking at problems etc. The committee thought this was a good idea and the ASVO was all viticulturists apart from Nick so appointed him. Appointed a sub-committee with the slightly evocative title of a Melbourne workshop in 2001, “Who’s running this show?” We chose Melbourne because we felt they needed the most help. Timed around the Melbourne show.

Stakeholders: Show committees, exhibitors, non-exhibitors, judges, retailers.

The ASVO was tentative to start with, worries that wine shows would be upset that they were interfering with their area. But in fact the opposite was the case, with a strong representation of wine shows among the 150 delegates, grateful for the support offered by the ASVO.

Recommendations:

1. Wine judge register
2. Judge impartiality (judges step back from trophy line up if one of their wines is present)
3. Trophy judging (The Borda count method)
4. Audit protocols (Register of auditors for pre-show, collecting samples and post-show auditing. The ASVO lost a lot of money on auditing but still operates a list of auditors happy to assist shows. 12 recommendations.)
5. Wine standards – 40 recommendations
 - No medals for unfinished wines (Brisbane is the only shows still giving awards to unfinished wines)
 - Maximum of 150 wines per day and 60 wines per bracket. But now the call is now to get down to 100-120.
 - Classes sorted by variety.
 - Awards should only be claimed for wines under the name for which it was presented.
 - Use of judges comments and scores. Not appropriate to send to exhibitors. A scribe on the panel is fine.
 - Schedules. I look at every wine show schedule and I see problems with it. This has not yet been used. Adelaide came to me and I suggested that we come up with a standard that other shows could use but they didn't proceed.

Questions to be addressed

1. Topped up or recorked bottles in museum classes should not be accepted
2. Awards for wines from staggered bottle runs
3. Descriptions of awards in advertising not policed
4. The excessive number of trophies – the public needs clarity
5. Best in class awards
6. Recommended glasses
7. Use of medals and WFA standards (WFA appears to have pulled back from this)
8. Judging conditions – wine temperature, particularly for sparkling

Judges need to sign a ten page legal document in Sydney, which is going a bit far.

Does the ASVO have a role in the future?

Sue Bell

Introduction of individual vineyard trophies, wines of provenance are excellent ideas in regional wine shows.

Regional shows are fantastic benchmarking exercises at the exhibitors tastings and a great opportunity for the judges to give feedback to the region.

the speed dating idea of wine show dinners with many wines is a bit dated. This is disrespectful of great wine. I prefer to give a wine time to unfold and we should consider multiple bottles rather than so many. A regional wine show should tie in with regional food at its dinners.

I think we should adopt an inclusive approach. Elitism is one of the least attractive things we see in people. We need to be aware of that. There are some people who are intimidated by our system and we need to address that culturally.

Regional shows are places where we are less elitist. Before we go booting Cowra, Rutherglen and Riverina in the guts, we need to acknowledge these shows as a training ground for upcoming judges.

Nick Ryan

I want to thank Stuart Knox for pouring those wines yesterday to give us something to shit can rather than just the capital city shows.

Something has happened over this weekend that takes us to the heart of why the capital city shows are so important. The meeting this morning of all of the agricultural societies that are represented here. opening a dialogue that springs from the discussion this weekend. And this takes us to the heart of the role that the agricultural societies have to play . and the partnership between agricultural societies and wine industry is a key to these shows.

There is a place for each show to carve out a personality and a position all of their won.

The days of the technocrat judge are falling away and the stylist judge is ascending. If the regional shows are all about exploring regionality, the capital cities provide a platform in which we can explore styles and ways in which we make wine, and are crucial for that.

Capital cities have a way to provide benchmarks for smaller shows and set the standards for how shows should be run.

Are all as focused, as organised and as efficiently run as they could be? Probably not, but the opportunity is here for us to cooperate to make this happen.

From Friday to today I've seen a great transformation and there's an important role for the capital city shows to embrace activism and carve out a personality for themselves. The Melbourne example and its transformation is an example that everyone else could be looking too to lift their game.

Tim James

From 2001 I had a view that capital city shows had been hijacked by agricultural societies but I no longer feel that.

I feel that the focus should be on regional wine shows and that every show which doesn't should band with other regions and establish one. We need to have a certification procedure for judges.

We need to have a larger pool.

I don't share the elitism concern that Sue raised. There is no judging prerequisite for the Len Evans Tutorial.

If I've changed my view since 2001 it's the regional significance of wine shows.

JH rang me after the 2001 event and gave a whole heap of reasons why the pyramid wine show system wouldn't work and I agree. If you started from scratch you might do it that way but it clearly won't work now.

We need to work out a system of establishing and maintaining a larger pool of judges. It will take time and money. We probably need \$4M in a trust account to future proof the LET and we probably need the same amount in an account for AWEC.

This weekend, albeit with smaller numbers, has probably been a more comprehensive program than 2001 and I would hope that by the end of it we would have some solid resolutions for moving forward.

Sue Bell

Local judges on regional shows. It's important that local judges are there, even if restricted to only one on panel or only as associates, but you don't want them to influence results. source judges from places making similar styles of wines.

Brian Walsh

I suspect, and it's a shame the ASVO doesn't have the funds, maybe the wine shows can assist in the funding. We can't levy everything but maybe the shows need to look at the balance. A good idea which fell off the rails which should be expanded. If we all put in a few bucks the register could be much more effective.

Sam Connew

The ASVO had a discussion about the wine show register last week. Sam Connew heads the ASVO wine show committee, a committee of one but hoping to expand it. The ASVO is currently updating its registry, and hoping to establish a portal where any judge can log in and update their own judging history. Introduce search criteria of judges experience. hopefully more useful for wine shows. Hoping for more consultation from the industry re how it can be more useful.

PJ

A judges app!

Ryan

IJudge!

Bryan Currie

We judge in regional groups, and in some shows these groups are announced to judges, and I'm against that as it introduces bias.

Iain Riggs

Our single vineyard classes in Sydney are judged by region. Judges have the choice of knowing the regions but most choose not to know. They do want to know where the breaks are between the regions. Judging like with like. If you do want to know, the quality of our judges is that it makes no difference. If you're judging regionality within a wine show, it helps to know which region they're from.

Tim James

I'm not sending Bryan up but you have a range of Hunters and a range of Barossas and then a Griffith and you think, what the?

Riggs

An exhibitor complained that a Semillon wouldn't be given a fair chance because it wasn't from the Hunter or the Barossa but it went on to win two trophies.

Nick Stock

The days of judges looking for their own wines or to disadvantage certain regions are behind us.

Tom Carson

The question of payment of judges should be raised. Not an issue when a company pays for my time, but freelancers, sommeliers, independent journalists and bloggers need to be kept in the wine show system. This diversity of judges makes the wine show what it is today and they need to be supported.

Judging on weekends. We are giving our time up. Perth, fly on Saturday, judge on Father's Day, required to stay for a free day, then exhibitors tasting, that's an 8 day commitment. could we get a commitment to restricting days committed.

Dave Bicknell

Melbourne. We are technically paying the judges, a stipend for judges to cover out of pocket expenses. We take shit loads of expensive grog along that we all pay for as well. This is an attempt to ease the burden on everyone.

Lyndey Milan

The volunteers on the show societies don't get paid either but you should have your expenses covered.

Dave Bicknell

The capital city wine shows need to get some space between themselves in timing. That's a real problem. Half the judges in the country aren't available to judge in February in a hot

vintage. Should be at least a couple of weeks between each show. There was discussion of this in the agricultural society meeting this morning.

Lyndey Milan

The Sydney show will be looking at moving from February, but where do you move it to? We're happy to move it.

Dave Bicknell

Judging all classes by region in Melbourne this year. Judges will know the breaks but not the regions. The comment about judges having bias is total fucking horse shit. Judges at this level don't have this bias.

Tim James

Totally agree, and by removing the regional information from judges you've taken away the chance for us to be criticised on this.

The outside doesn't understand what we do at shows. They think we turn up, drink lots of booze for three days and go home!

Session 8: Perspectives of the wine show system from the Agricultural Societies

A free flow session pulled together on the fly.

The capital city and regional wine shows represented here have supported this weekend.

Ann, Royal Ag Society of Victoria, Melbourne wine Show

Just undergone a three year strategic plan, focused on excellence in agriculture, benchmarking, improving the breed, striving for excellence. Five key strategies within this, the key two being valued by industry and connecting industry to consumers. We're moving away from being so inwardly focused.

In 2001, Melbourne was clearly in a mess, and is now a very progressive show and one that we are proud of. We are now firmly placed in the food, wine and beverage space.

We have an industry advisory panel.

Professional development is a key for us, and the Len Evans Tutorial is crucial to this.

This year for the first time we sat down with all the regional shows of Vic to open up the dialogue, fix up the clashes in the calendar, etc.

We are keen to explore the options to continue to support the Len Evans Tutorial.

We produce an annual awards guide focused exclusively on the consumer market. We are also actively engaged in the social media space.

We will hold a trade tasting which will overlap in part with the exhibitor tasting this year. Also masterclasses with Philip Rich for consumers. We try to push the relevance of the show to consumers at every opportunity. And we are exploring opportunities to take it to Asia.

Lyndey Milan, Chair of Sydney Royal Wine Show

In Sydney, you can only chair for six years before you step down. Some people who know wine on the committee.

Entries capped.

Trialling tablets for judges next year.

Cellar tasting for the public after the show.

Trying to get the stewards more involved and engaging with the judges.

We realise we need to evolve.

Use of the 100 point system.

New class for new and emerging styles.

Reduced volume requirements for most classes.

Chairman of judges comes to all committee meetings and has played a fantastic role in educating our staff.

David Metcalf, NWS

Committee of four and an advisory panel of six industry reps to which we divert for advice.

The show is seen as providing a service to the wine industry and needs to stay relevant.

This is the first opportunity I've had to receive industry feedback and I'm excited about the future out of this weekend. We are keen to make changes where we need to and

Angus

Food and wine committee, Brisbane

While I am certainly not the engine room, I have a very enquiring mind and I have started to look confidentially at our wine show and it seems to me that in that room is a Pandora's box. I have lifted the lid and it seems to me there's a frog in there.

There are things we could do and the tendency is for wine shows to shut the lid and ignore it for another 50 years. But my enquiring mind doesn't allow me to do that and I've had discussions here confidentially for us to make change and allow us to kiss that frog.

We want to talk to you as an industry and partner with the industry and discuss with other shows.

What does accreditation mean. How should shows be structured? While we shouldn't try to make every show the same, there are common points that we could standardise.

Mike Palmalow, Adelaide.

Like Sydney, we've had an independent person come in and provide us with some focus for what we do.

Increased to six panels this year to decrease the number of wines a judge judges each day.

We are certainly seeing interaction and direction from the wine industry. We are very much driven by the exhibitors. We see them as our customers and want to give more feedback to them. We are also conscious that we don't want to tie up more of judges time than we need to.

Larissa Seer

WA wine show

Our show is a state show, run from Mt Barker under the auspices of the Mount Barker Agricultural Society.

If we were asked to contribute to the LET I am 100% confident that my committee would support it.

We organise judges into groups for wines for dinners and they have to bring three bottles of each wine.

Top fifty tasting in Perth.

Sam

Thankfully Angus talked about a frog not another bloody elephant

Ann – Melbourne

The advice I'd give Angus is that in Melbourne we've taken a look at ourselves. The history of counsellors staying on the committee until they're seventy. We've moved away from counsellors to rather engage in industry. This has been a key for Melbourne at the exec level. Angie Bradbury has been a key in this process.

Lyndey Milan

We have a wine consultancy committee that meets every year – communicators, sommeliers, retailers, educators, winemakers and others not directly involved with the show system. We've had fantastic information that we haven't ignored. Engage with local wine industry experts.

Angus

Five words:

- Transparent
- Professional
- Relevant
- Contemporary
- Respected

Dave Bicknell

Engage all the stakeholders. People who are actually relevant. There is a big problem with generational change in businesses like agricultural societies where you have these old wind bags sitting around for 50 years until they fall apart.

But we should work with the agricultural societies and build partnerships because they are fantastic businesses with considerable resources because they can do things we can't.

Chairmen in wine shows should not be able to exhibit under any circumstances. The chairman should be absolutely removed from any potential bias.

I don't think there's any problem with panel chairs exhibiting.

Capping of entries. In Melbourne we've gone to 7 panels and 112 wines per day. A dedicated fortified class. In all honesty, all shows should drop fortifications and let Rutherglen get on with it.

Rose classes. Two gold medals in four years. Who gives a crap? We're after the best wines and we need to get that sorted out.

Judge rotation is very important. In one show a judge has been there for 32 consecutive years. Judge rotation helps with generation change. Chairmen 3-5 years, judges 3-4 years.

Riggs

I've been hammering the point of a national fortified wine show.

With 70 shows across Australia and the capital city shows acting as state shows, you need a unique selling point, and you've got it as a fortified show. We don't need to double up.

Chris Pfeiffer

We have 200 exhibitors and they all pay money, about 2000 entries, and many of those don't exhibit in capital city shows

Riggs

I would suggest they do exhibit elsewhere and its and indictment on the industry that we keep entering wines in more shows.

Wine shows should be about style excellence more than improving the breed.

Chris Pfeiffer

Melbourne started weekend judging as a direct request of judges who wanted two days of the week to do their job.

As a chairman in Melbourne I had no choice of judges initially. A dramatic change that facilitated a lot of change in Melbourne was involving the chairman in committee decisions.

Maintaining a diversity of shows upholds a diversity of results. It's a subjective business. Just because some people think their results are better than others but I don't think that's right.

Our focus in Rutherglen is on fortifieds and we've rebranded it as the Australian Fortified Wine Show.

There's even less knowledge about fortifieds than pinot noir, they're very difficult to judge because they're so complex.

Brian Walsh

Should we revolutionise the trophy system and allow a full day for judging trophies?

Lyndey Milan

We will certainly discuss this at our next meeting

Tom Carson

The idea that we shouldn't know which exhibit it is can be a problem. I've seen the wrong wine come forward in a trophy tasting. We spend so long sorting out top gold and I think there should be direction from the chairman on the style. It should be a completely open forum, like when we are obtaining top golds in every class. It doesn't happen that judges push for their own wine or region.

If people have issues with a particular wine, all the judges should receive that information and that weight of argument. Sometimes you have a class when you can't split the top gold, and

maybe that should be brought to the trophy tasting. That can only mean better results in the end.

Nick Bulleid

I agree very much yet when I started in 1984 it was always voting and no discussion.

In the WA show, we know the varieties and look for regional characteristics and that process takes something like half an hour. And I strongly recommend that for some, maybe all trophies.

Brian Walsh

The important thing is the rigorous discussion and then the same voting system should apply.

Dave Bicknell

The mathematical model sometimes fails. And in Melbourne sometimes we go for the most first preferences so as to take out block voting where a second or third level wine can sneak forward on second and third votes.

PJ

Dave, you just need to embrace your inner Evans!

Lyndey

How important is it for shows to take results to export markets?

Paul Henry

An AWEC statistic suggests that by 2015 our exports will be worth \$1.5b but when I came into my role it was 3 billion. If you measure the top 5 brands, 67% of Australian sales come from 5 companies. For France it's about 40. I worry that we start to look like a one trick pony overseas. if the show system is about regionality and celebrating a culture of diversity, it's vital for the show system to reach out to export markets.

Email from Chuck Hayward via Riggsy – Get the show on the road (to be circulated with proceedings).

Session 9: Where to from here?

Riggsy

Our wine show system is far from obsolete. But where to from here?

Ben Edwards

It's crunch time and now we're in a position to put an action plan together.

There is a communication breakdown somewhere. We're not communicating what's going on and we need to address that.

Melbourne and Sydney are leading examples. it will be great to have tablets.

We need to raise the profile of our shows. Bring the bling! Sex it up. Make the consumer say, oh my god, how good is that? And want to come to the party.

We need to be able to use technology and social media.

It seems to me the thing we need the most is a collective voice as judges and a pr and marketing scheme that is working together on behalf of the entire show system.

We've got diversity of judges now, which I think is fantastic. It's all about communication strategy.

Nick Stock

Can I be on the national bling committee?

It's amazing seeing how much work is being done but we need to get organised. There are things we can structure as a set of minimum standards as a core of Australian wine shows.

Simple things like maximum numbers of wines per day. Then shows can be accredited or endorsed by the industry.

Regional shows, we love you.

Capital city shows have had a bit of a touch up and there is greater or lesser room for improvement. At that level, the shows need to be enterprising, relevant, show leadership. It either hasn't happened or hasn't been promoted as happening.

I would love to see a cashed up, this is great wine leader to step up and galvanise all of this together. That was probably Evans. And we need someone to step up now.

Corrina Wright

We need to get Perth on side.

From the outside perception and from inside there are still issues with elitism, as Sue mentioned. If we're not welcoming with open arms... There is still boys club stuff happening in wine shows and it puts off some people who are great judges. We don't want to lose them along the way.

Regional trophies. National show trophy judging could be rejigged. how can a pinot be judged against a fortified? Perhaps this could be included in a set of minimum standards?

We need to connect with consumers better.

Paul Henry

I did like the analogy of Kerry Packer and the traditional lab coat being in pastel colours, Sydney an pink and Melbourne in black.

Friday started with a rhetorical question but now we ask how do we ensure that the wine show system maintains its relevance.

There are micro changes like 100 points. And maybe 100 wines per day is a good number that we could work toward as a maximum.

The biggest challenge that every wine company faces is selling if not more then better alcohol to a wider number of people, a tricky political, cultural and ethical place to be.

My aspiration is that the wine show system becomes an expression of what Australia aspires to be in progressing a food and wine culture. And taking that message to the world. Acknowledging that there's a lack of consumer conversation going on, even at an individual brand level. in the past that has cost a lot of money, and we've been absent from that conversation. Consumers understand the idea of aspiration, of trophy or at very least of gold medal.

One take out that I'd like to see? A pr and communication plan presented by every show, presented on a common platform, that producers, trade, and consumers all have access to.

If we come together in two years time, that's the outcome I'd like to see us pointing to.

If embracing change and staying relevant is key, there can be no change without investment. Even with the platforms and technology that are available to do this affordably, we still need to invest in staff time to maintain this. To do so, we need a levy fee to invest in this, to make the currency of wine shows relevant to consumers, and not to fall into the place that the Olympics did, that medal is not a verb, it's a noun. You don't enter a wine show to medal.

Ben Edwards

I was shocked to learn that the ASVO wine show committee is a committee of one.

Do we need an association of judges? This could be funded by the shows. An association with a clear marketing plan, someone to oversee its processes, overseeing judges, and even addressing how judges behave. We need to stamp out the sausage fest that happens at some shows.

We need to come up with some action plans and give Sam support in this.

Sam Connew

I purposely set out to get elected into the ASVO last year with this in mind. Addressing how the ASVO interacts with wine shows.

It's crucial that we leave this weekend with a plan of action.

With regard to standards, the ASVO is supportive of rejuvenating its platform of minimum standards. There was a reference committee established in 2001 and I'd like to see such a reference group re-established to assess and review the standards last time and write a new set of standards based on discussions here.

There's no point in setting standards unless there is a mandate for shows to put them into practice. Hence an accreditation process for shows to apply for.

And this will cost money so we need to figure out how we will fund this. A levy system seems to make sense.

Nick Stock

At the international Wine Challenge judges are paid well. 13,000 wines. I'm a panel chair and I'm paid 300 pounds a day, judges 150 pounds a day. That show attracts people from all around the world with good people at the top like Tim Atkin. you're paid well and you're on your A-game and everyone wants to perform well. It's less than 100 wines a day, small classes of no more than a dozen wines at a time. I know there are lots of different opinions but I just think you've got to do it. Accreditation, minimum standard across the shows.

Riggs

We've skirted this point. Do we think entry fees are too low?

Paul Henry

Are entry fees the only way to generate income. With consumer facing products that generate income throughout the year, such as Wine Challenge and Decanter. The whole value chain is benefitting. Raising the cost of participation taxes yourself and is too heavy a burden. We need to set up a proud but inclusive system of celebrating excellence.

Angie Bradbury

I couldn't agree more. We've worked on a strategy of a diversified model, not just on sponsorship or entry fees or government grants. It's really hard and expensive to change the business model to do so. Significant amounts of money can come from other avenues.

Not for profit doesn't mean you make a margin which is funnelled back into the organisation. There's nothing wrong with making profit but it's about funnelling it back into the industry.

We've all talked about communication and engagement but we're not great at it as an industry.

WCA is going to do a webinar to follow up on the outcomes of this weekend.

Riggsy

We've come back to engaging the consumer. And if this leads to a funding model, so be it.

Ben Edwards

Angie and the Wine Communicators are who we should go to in communicating this.

Nick Stock

When the judging stops, the show begins. This is a good way to think about it, and embraced by Wine Challenge and Decanter

Ben Edwards

We need to bring down number of wines per day.

We can have our cake and eat it, and display both medals and 100 point scores.

Road shows are an important PR and communications tool.

We should include a discussion before voting on trophies. All shows could take this on board and it would have a huge effect on judges. It helps judges to stay switched on for the trophy judging.

Ben and Nick Bulleid will talk about setting up an association of judges.

The diversity of shows that we have is a good thing. Each capital city wine show should have its own unique thing – Jimmy Watson, Stoddard, Sweet Wine Challenge in Riverina, thought I'd throw that in as the chairman of that irrelevant show.

Sally Evans

Do we need an association of wine shows?

Sam Connew

Sponsors and consumers aren't represented here, and should be included on a committee with judge, show and exhibitor representative. This panel could then consider the points discussed this week.

Nick Stock

The NWS has an unofficial standard by which it endorse other shows. It would be better if this were managed by a committee at a national level instead.

Wouldn't it be great if there were an AWRI desk at capital city shows to assess any wines with faults.

Con Simos

We are running a faults show for the first time this year, a foray to see how we might go forward.

We're trying to see how we can serve the Australian wine industry better.

It could be as big or as small as you like, and there's a cost structure to go with that.

With questions of consistency, we have the capability to look at that at a much more detailed level, and would support the wine industry to go down that path.

Sue Bell

The sharing of judges and associates for training between regions should be encouraged and facilitated.

Riggsy

Gender balance is very important.