

:: AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH ::

:: It's not often said that optimal conditions for tasting wine depend on the objective of the tasting, but I believe this to be quite true, and therefore important.

:: For example, Stephen Tanzer and I recently tasted through all 26 vintages of Orion since 1986. I went through my usual palate tuning before the event, and to me, the conditions were neutral; just right for what this occasion was - namely, a critical tasting between professionals to compare a long line of vintages of the same wine.

:: Are these the ideal conditions for enjoyment of any of those individual bottles? Of course not.

:: One may well ask what I'm talking about.

:: I'm talking about the fact, inexplicable thus far by any theories I've heard - most certainly including my own - that precisely the same bottle of wine will taste very different from one day to the next, a fact that has nothing to do with personal mood, body chemistry, bottle variation, etc. But fact it is, and it's extremely inconvenient.

:: What sommelier wants to face the thought that a wine that should be recommended one day certainly shouldn't be the next, and so on through an entire wine list? Who wants to plan a special tasting with no clue how the wines will show that particular day?

:: Still, any private person choosing wine for present consumption can easily increase the odds of pleasure by a few simple procedures. For example, in my case, I have several wine-maker's canaries, or if you prefer, tuning forks, that I use to appraise the nature of the day; in other words, wines that I taste frequently and casually, which are similar enough in general type to something rare and old I'm thinking of opening, that I can judge whether to do so by tasting them first.

:: If, in the case of an Orion, say, my canary is dead on the floor / short, closed, poor aromatics, no voluptuous mouthfeel, unbalanced tannins, etc. / then surely the cork should remain intact. If, on the other hand, the wine jumps from the glass, tweeting an astonishing choir of grace notes and subtle aromatics, long voluptuous palate, & a remarkable length & complexity of finish; well, guess what? The time has come, and the blood of the grape becomes my own.

:: So, say, if Stephen and I had been tasting on one such day when all was at its best, any of these wines would have "scored" substantially higher, because on the day we did taste them, they weren't at their best, simply at neutral average. On the other hand, if they were at their worst, all sorts of sudden "flaws" would have reduced their "scores" very significantly; but that wasn't the case / since, as above, they were at their neutral average.

:: So there are many reasons for tasting rare wines; judgment is one, eros is another, and they shouldn't be confused here / nor probably anywhere else, but there I digress...

::