



## THE GRAY REPORT

BEST INDUSTRY BLOG 2012: WBC

# Australian wine is greater than the US wine press admits

W. Blake Gray | Palate Press | Aug 13, 2013

First, let me give you a number: Australia is the second-largest exporter of wine to the US, behind only Italy. We buy more Australian wine than wine from France and Spain combined. So why don't you read much about Australian wine?

Part of that is the domination of Yellow Tail, which accounts for 38% of Australia's exports here. That's a lot, but we're still unduly ignoring the rest of the country. Take away Yellow Tail from Australia and it would still be our 4th largest source of foreign wine, still ahead of France and Spain.

I can't explain why the wine media is so out of sync with the US drinking public. My guess is that media is trend-driven, and Australia's not trendy. What it takes to start a trend, I don't know.

But I will share a little meta-post about my own efforts.

A few years after Yellow Tail took the US by storm, and not coincidentally Australian fine wine sales dropped, I tried to sell several magazines and newspapers a story about the good wines from Australia. Not just any publications either: publications I was writing for regularly. Publications that ran stories about wine.

And not just one angle on Australia. I tried to sell stories on cool-climate Shiraz, the wines of Yarra Valley, Hunter Valley Semillon, Clare Valley Riesling, Western Australia Cabernet and I forget what else. I tried the general theme story, that Australian wine is as great as any country's and had become underappreciated. I tried the business angle, that Yellow Tail was eating into Australia's image.

Couldn't sell it. I sold other articles to the same publications. I usually send a menu of story ideas, and for a long time I had an Aussie article or two on that menu. But like the liver and onions, nobody ever ordered it. I've sold more articles on wine from Uruguay than I have on wine Australia. Uruguay's new and different (and the Tannat is good); Australia's that old country that just happened to sell 50 million more gallons of wine here last year.

I have never fallen out of love with Australian wine. Yeah, there's a lot of characterless supermarket red from Down Under, but you can also say that about California, and that doesn't preclude anyone here from recognizing the greatness of California's top wines, or lately the quiriness of our artisans. How often we see articles from some East Coastie that read, "I look down my nose at most California wine, but this one .."

Why don't we see Australia the same way?



Regular consumers have never been as down on Australia as the wine press. For one thing, there are the sales figures. I'm running an informal poll on my blog right now, for "What Country Makes Your Favorite Wine?" You're allowed to pick 3. As I write this, Australia's running 6th, which is pretty good when you look at the competition. My readers, generally a wine-loving crowd, seem to have Australia in their regular rotation, unlike the wine press.

Now I write monthly columns for two online publications, Palate Press and Wine Review Online. Unlike with most publications, I don't have to pitch them, although like all publications they have the right to edit or just plain reject a piece if I were to write that Grenache was Osama bin Laden's favorite grape or something like that. But under normal circumstances, I can write about the topics I choose.

I've been telling Australian wine importers and winemakers for years, "I love your wines. I'd love to write about them." And then pitching the stories, and getting nada. Finally this month I said, bugger this, I'm going to write about some great Australian wines.

So I wrote for Palate Press about Chester Osborn's attempt to regain enophile respect for Australian Shiraz by making 13 different single-vineyard Shirazes from grapes he used to combine to make D'Arenberg The Dead Arm. And I wrote for Wine Review Online about the great dry Rieslings of Australia, which are among the most distinctive in the world, age-worthy and bargains to boot.

Enjoy and g'day.

