

Wine, Women & Marketing: *Leslie Sbrocco puts it in writing*

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It's no secret that women make up the majority of U.S. wine drinkers, yet many wine marketing types seem to be at a loss as to how to reach them. Some try to create "feminine" packaging, or add fruit flavors to their wines in the hopes of making them more appealing to women. While such tactics may work on some women, most of us wouldn't touch those wines with a 10-foot corkscrew.

According to a study conducted by Merrill Research & Associates for the Wine Market Council, women accounted for 55% of core and marginal wine drinkers in 1994. (Core wine drinkers are defined as those who drink wine weekly or more often, while marginal drinkers consume wine at least once every two or three months). By 2000 the percentage climbed to 62% of core wine drinkers and 64% of marginal wine drinkers. The organization is currently finishing up another study, which they predict will show an even higher percentage of women wine drinkers.

"I know a lot of people say that (women purchase more wine than men) because women buy all the low-end wine in grocery stores," said Leslie Sbrocco, author of



Wine for Women: A Guide to Buying, Pairing and Sharing, set for release by HarperCollins books in October. "Motto Kryla Fisher (MKF) did some studies, and according to Christian Miller, their director of research, they found that women make up 60% of high-end wine buyers. The collector profile, according to MKF, is still predominantly male, but the high-end wine

buyers—those who regularly spend more than \$15 on a bottle of wine—are mostly women. Women do buy a lot of grocery store wine, but they are also high-end wine buyers. Women buy it all, and drink it all."

Sbrocco said she first had the idea to write a wine book for women four years ago, while working for *Wine Today*. "I'd be out speaking with people all the time and doing seminars for consumers," she explained, "and I always found that the women came up to me afterwards and asked me lots of questions. Men would do the same

thing, but the questions were very different. With men it was much more of the technical aspects, like 'What was the oak regime on this wine?' and women would say, 'This sounds like a great party wine. Can you suggest a food pairing?' They really were much more lifestyle questions. Of course that's a generalization, but it consistently happened."

Once the idea took root, Sbrocco began to gather statistics. "I saw the data from the Wine Market

Council, and that spurred me on," she said. "And so I started compiling more studies—Vinexpo had done two studies, one in the UK and one in Japan—Meridian Vineyards did a big study with the IACP, Canyon Road did a big study, and I saw all of the information coming together. I thought, wait a minute, there is a way to approach this differently."

Sbrocco interviewed hundreds of consumers and industry experts—both male and female—and found that the responses supported her theory that women and men relate differently to wine. "The answers that I got back consistently backed up that data, which was that women care less about ratings and more about taste, and that it was very difficult to separate wine and food from the female perspective. The data from Canyon Road showed that more women were 'Involved with wine'—meaning they were more likely to order wine when going out for a cocktail or choosing a drink in a restaurant. It was their drink of choice in terms of entertaining and enjoying."

Based on these findings, Sbrocco approached her book from a lifestyle perspective. "It's about taste and enjoyment and wine within the context of life," she said. "That's why the book has a lot of food in it, and it has real life situations. 'I have to plan a wedding, what do I do about the wine?'"

Chapters are organized around a lighthearted fashion theme (Chardonnay is categorized as "basic black," while Rieslings are "spring dresses"), with buying, pairing and entertaining tips for each chapter. The buying guide highlights consistent producers and describes the style and taste of each wine minus vintages. The "pairing" and "sharing" sections include everyday recipes to pair with the wines, as well as information about entertaining, such as

how to how to organize a wine-tasting group.

"All the boring wine information, from temperatures and how to chill down wine, is within the context of the sharing sections. It's all within the context of living with it," Sbrocco said. "I wanted to get the information across in a way that doesn't make you feel like you're reading a wine book."

The Marketing Message

For wineries looking to reach female consumers in the U.S., Sbrocco said she recommends approaching wine from a lifestyle angle, as she does in her book. "Numerous wineries are doing that very thing right now—Delicato, for example, with their 'how to start a supper club' promotion in *Cooking Light* magazine, and Sutter Home with their breast cancer initiative. If you look at the advertising that they're doing, it's not about posting the scores from the *Wine Spectator*, it really is about wine and food. It's looking at wine through other aspects of women's lives that are important to them. Don't just talk about things like '12 months in new French oak.' Who really cares?"

It's also important to send women the right message in retail and restaurant situations, where they are often treated as second-class citizens or ignored altogether. "Treat women as important wine customers," Sbrocco said. "Focus your shelftalkers not on ratings and scores ... Treat women with respect in a restaurant."

Jennifer Pagano of Wine Market Council, who along with Sbrocco participated in a panel discussion about marketing wine to women at this year's World Wine Market, agreed. "I think the key is really learning how to communicate with women about wine," she said. "Since women are the primary buyers and the primary social prompters, reaching them where

they make their purchase decisions seems to be a good strategy. Grocery stores and other retail outlets are places where basic information about the wine's flavor profile would be very valuable to someone deciding whether or not to buy wine, or what wine to have with a simple dinner. At a restaurant, suggested pairings are always helpful."

Sbrocco also gave the following tips for selling to women, both on- and off-premise:

Off-Premise

- **Avoid pigeon-holing.** Most women are willing to try something new. Don't assume they're all Chardonnay or blush wine drinkers.
- **Host tasting events.** Women enjoy drinking wine in a fun-yet-educational format.
- **Hire more women salespeople.** Women rely not only on the advice of their female friends, but on the advice of salespeople. Female salespeople help make wine buying less intimidating for other women.

On-Premise

- **Don't ignore women in restaurants.** Pour a taste for the diner who orders the wine, whether the person is male or female. (*Here's an idea: How about giving a copy of the wine list to a member of each gender!—Ed.*)
- **Focus on flavor and style.** The more information you can give, the better. Offer wines by-the-glass and put together tasting flights so women can sample different wines without a major commitment.
- **Educate your staff.** Make sure they don't talk down to women and know how to make them feel comfortable. ■