

Selling speciality wines on the Internet



Jean-Daniel Loparco (above, left) opened a web-based wine business, alfavin.ch, in 2010 to sell Italian and Spanish wines to the Swiss market. He believes in increasing more than just volume in the burgeoning business – he aspires to increase his clients' wine knowledge, too.

"Wine is a sensory pleasure, but it's also an aesthetic and intellectual one," says Loparco who, with business partner, Yanick Humberset, runs the web-based wine store alfavin.ch. "So the greater the depth of knowledge wine lovers possess, the greater their ability to tap into the full experience of drinking a glass of fine wine."

How does he approach the knowledge-building aspects of the business? "They are mostly inherent to the way our site is set up," he says, "although we also do tasting events and dinners – so far, in Suisse Romande where we ourselves are based."

Imparting expert knowledge

The 39-year-old Loparco, who earned an MBA from Lausanne's IMD business school, comes from an international business background. He speaks fluent English and leads tastings in the language. His own wine knowledge is like a second skin; his mother is Spanish, and his Italian father is a well-known Vaudois wine importer and restaurateur.

"Everything on the alfavin.ch site aims at empowering shoppers to make pleasing choices right now, regardless of their level of wine knowledge. Anyone who still doesn't feel confident enough to make a savvy decision can fall back on our special selections, or 'alfapacks' – introductory assortments."

Eighty per cent of the growing selection

of 112 wines is Italian; the rest is Spanish. And it is a Spanish wine that Loparco uses to illustrate another core value of the alfavin.ch concept: trust. "Building client trust is essential," he states. "We also have relationships of trust with our suppliers, many of whom were part of my father Giorgio's network. You create genuine, long-lasting bonds."

To demonstrate his point, Loparco cites René Barbier (above, right), a winemaker of French origin, who has become a legend in the Priorat region of Catalonia. "His work has made the area one of the top wine-growing regions in Spain, right up there with Ribera del Duero. His individualistic approach is very environmentally conscious; a mix of artisanal and high-tech."

"René's fame hasn't changed how we work together. Wines from his Clos Mogador winery, which we carry, have achieved international cult status. Yet when my son was born, René bottled a special magnum for him. We've cellared it, and will open it on a special occasion when he's grown up."

Which will be in about 20 years – not a problem for Clos Mogador wines. A powerful red like Clos Mogador 2007, a blend of Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Carignan grapes, can keep for 20 to 30 years. With its hints of cinnamon and vanilla, cocoa, violets, and berry aromas, it's the sort of jammy wine beloved of U.S. wine guru Robert Parker, on whose scale it enjoys a whopping 96/100 rating.



Bearing a Priorat appellation, Clos Mogador is made from grapes grown in vineyards with an abundance of biodiversity: flowers, and fruit, almond and olive trees. The 2007 vintage is rated a rare 96/100 by wine guru Robert Parker.



"At 89 francs it's one of our pricier vintages, but it's a superb choice for holiday feasting, ideally suited to lamb, red meat and game. It's an evolving wine, so we recommend decanting it a couple of hours before serving."

See for yourself: www.alfavin.ch

By Gail Mangold-Vine for alfavin.ch

Special Offer

Until December 31, 2010, Clos Mogador 2007 is available for 75 francs a bottle to those ordering 12 or more bottles.