

Our Exclusive Interview with Robert Parker

THE FOUNDER OF *THE WINE ADVOCATE* TELLS US **WHAT'S NEXT** FOR HIM AND FOR THE HIGHLY REGARDED PUBLICATION

by Scott Greenberg



Robert Parker.

Robert M. Parker, Jr. is widely considered the most influential wine critic in the world. With just one perfect score from the founder of *The Wine Advocate*, demand for a wine can skyrocket and prices can soar. And unless you've been living under a rock, you probably know that Parker has sold the 35-year-old publication to an investor group in Singapore.

So what does the future hold for consumers, collectors and wine professionals who have faithfully followed every review and debated every score? I recently caught up with Parker and asked what everyone was thinking: What's next?

THE TASTING PANEL: *News of the sale of The Wine Advocate sent shockwaves through both the professional wine community and the wine consumer world. What was the impetus to sell the publication?*

Robert Parker: This was the fourth offer and the most pleasing one to me for preserving the legacy of *The Wine Advocate*, in spite of the fact that it came from some young financial guys in Singapore. I started to consider selling *The Wine Advocate* after I turned 60, and I finally sold a majority interest in it when I was 65. I have been doing this since 1978, and will continue for at least the next three to five years, covering Bordeaux, Northern California and some miscellaneous value picks from top importers. The ability of a younger group of investors to take *The Wine Advocate* to the next level, penetrating the Asian market, was just too appealing to turn down.

TP: *My father once told me, "The graveyard is full of indispensable men." It was his way of explaining that no one is irreplaceable . . . with the possible exception of you. How do you plan to transition your readers over from what has essentially been a one-man-band to a publication with multiple players?*

RP: This is one of the largest challenges, since I have been doing this for so long and readers are familiar with my palate.

We certainly have a fabulous team in place now, even though we've gone through a transitional period with the retirement of Jay Miller, the departure of Antonio Galloni, and now bringing in three new full-time writers. All are eminently qualified and I like their positions on integrity, independence and how they conduct tastings. Obviously, readers will have to get used to them, and that's not always easy, but I do think there will be a continuation at *The Wine Advocate* of searching out the best wines and the best values in many different styles and presenting those choices to readers.

TP: *There's been a lot of debate over your ability to influence winemakers who want to specifically appeal to your palate for fruit-centric wines with firm tannins, aka "fruit bombs." Do you think this trend will continue for the new reviewers at TWA?*

RP: I have never subscribed to the idea that winemakers would compromise their own craft to make a wine specifically appealing to my palate. My tastes are very diverse, and while my critics tend to put my tastes in black-and-white terms, they are far from that. This so-called "Parkerization" is a myth, although I recognize that criticism is out there. Any winemaker or winery that wants respect is going to do what they think is best, not what some critic thinks is best.

TP: *I've noticed that you personally enjoy a wide variety of wines that run the gamut from rustic and charming to refined and elegant. Do you have a favorite style of wine or region that you like to enjoy when you're just hanging out?*

RP: I like wines, as I do people, with real personalities and who are authentic. I tend to avoid phony, insipid and dull people the same as I do wines that are made in a similar style. It is certainly not true that I prefer bigger wines to more delicate ones. Certainly my fame came from Bordeaux, which, by and large, is a relatively classy, noble wine with lots of elegance and finesse. ■■