

Spreading the word about IGP

The Top 100 IGP France competition, in association with Harpers, ran a promotion to help consumers and retailers better understand the category, as Carol Emmas reports

The greatest gift the launch of the Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP) classification has given to the consumer is assurance of quality. Following a European reform that came into effect on August 1, 2009, each IGP denomination is linked to a management and defence organisation in its region, which is obligated to work with an external inspection or certification organisation, which controls the wines before attributing IGP certification. The result of these stricter quality controls is far greater traceability from the grape to the bottle.

In order to ensure that the cream of this new classification rises to the top, The Top 100 IGP France competition (formerly the Top 100 Vin de Pays) was launched in 2003 and has quickly become one of the most important in the trade. But has this new classification trickled down to trade and consumers, and if it has does it actually mean anything?

In association with Harpers, The Top 100 IGP France gave independ-

ent wine merchants the chance to take part in a promotion to raise consumer awareness and understanding of the category. It offered six retailers free stock of trophy-winning wines from this year's selection, judged by a line-up of well-known wine writers, broadcasters and buyers. The merchants were then able to use the wines for in-store sampling.

Taking part were Harpers Top Merchants award winners Manchester's Hangingditch, the Oxford Wine Company, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Corks Out, Corks & Cases in Yorkshire and Devon-based Christopher Piper Wines.

We discovered what the IGP classification means to these leading independent retailers and how the trophy-winning wines were received by customers.

Building awareness

Whereas the industry may be aware, the customer is the last in the wine chain to hear about changes in wine and knowledge of the IGP classifica-

tion has not yet fully trickled down.

That was the overall view of the participating merchants. Lee Isaacs, branch manager at the Oxford Wine Company, says his wine team were "very" aware of the IGP and he made an effort to be fully up to date with it. But he would welcome more publicity of the classification.

"Everything I knew, I learnt through my own research," he said. But with regards to accessibility, Isaacs thinks IGP simplifies things in many ways and makes it easier to pass on to the customer.

"The customers were quick to grasp its workings. They generally liked the fact that the wines were organised and ranked. After the series of tastings our customers now seem very comfortable with the classification and understand its implications," he said.

Ruth Yates, owner of Corks Out, says the trade is well aware of the changes, but thinks the consumer is less so, and is also less concerned by what the classification status actu-

ally means. In Yates's opinion: "The consumer prefers the story behind the wine and the wine itself."

Damien Hosty, who helped run the tastings at Manchester's Hangingditch, agreed. He says none of the customers who attended his tasting were aware the classification had changed and some weren't even aware of the previous Vin de Pays category. "Customers find it difficult to understand the French demarcation system, many can just about cope with the fundamentals of Bordeaux and Burgundy," he said.

Hosty added: "I'm not sure customers are that bothered by classifications; most don't have the time or inclination to read up about it even though they might have enjoyed the wines. They trust us, the retailer, to advise on a good bottle and are more interested about what's inside."

John O'Keeffe of Christopher Piper Wines thought the classification has been well promoted throughout the trade and, while his personal understanding was good,

