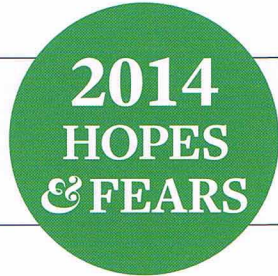


Top Merchants newsletter

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We asked a number of independent wine merchants to pick out their highs and lows from last year and tell us what they are expecting from 2014 – for good or ill

Matthew Hennings, Hennings Wines



GOOD

- ◆ A decent run of summer weather for both the on-trade and off-trade to get their teeth stuck in to.
- ◆ Press and TV coverage by Oz Clarke et al highlighting supermarket dodgy discounts.

BAD

- ◆ Ongoing misery of the duty escalator which affects the whole trade.
- ◆ Companies that try grow their business is by offering ridiculous pricing to increase turnover with no regard for profit.

HOPES

- ◆ That the government wakes up and abolishes the duty escalator.
- ◆ The consumer learns more about the true cost of wine and understands the value and return for spending a little more.

FEARS

- ◆ That the government continues with the duty escalator and possibly increases it.
- ◆ That banks continue not to support independent business.

Hal Wilson, Cambridge Wine Merchants



GOOD

- ◆ Cambridge Wine Merchants receiving recognition from the trade for its team effort in the form of eight national awards from Harpers, DRA, IWC and generic bodies.
- ◆ Opening a successful wine bar in central Cambridge and seeing it full of happy customers every evening enjoying our wines.

BAD

- ◆ Poor Katie Jones losing her wine to vandals in the Languedoc.
- ◆ Extreme weather events in Burgundy and Bordeaux, a late spring and a poor autumn damaging the 2013 vintage for many vigneron, although overall volumes were ultimately up on 2012.

HOPES

- ◆ Independents continue to work together to market our USP and learn how to continue to improve our businesses.

FEARS

- ◆ Duty escalator penalising wine drinkers and threatening indies' survival.
- ◆ Resurgent Oddbins and Wine Rack stealing headlines in the south of England.

Rupert Pritchett, Taurus Wines



GOOD

- ◆ Taurus Wines winning Small French Merchant of the Year at the Harpers French Wine Summit of course!
- ◆ Opening a concession area in a very busy farm shop near Godalming called Secretts of Milford.

BAD

- ◆ The passing away of a family member who helped found the business.
- ◆ Our best Champagne customer's therapist telling him to stop drinking!

HOPES

- ◆ To both find some great new wines on an upcoming trip in January with Wines of Argentina – and also to come back without gout!
- ◆ For one of our team's MW dissertation to pass, allowing him to complete the course.

FEARS

- ◆ Another inflation-busting duty rise.
- ◆ That customers will continue to expect a level of service that is commercially unrealistic and refuse to pay delivery charges – while at the same time wanting discount on the product “because wine club X, Y or Z can do it at 50% off” and so on.

Ruth Yates, Corks Out



GOOD

- ◆ First highlight would be getting on top of cashflow and control of stock.
- ◆ My second highlight would be our new wine-bar concept.
- ◆ Also we were 10 years old on December 11. It's been a long, hard slog but it's definitely been worth it and now we are very much looking forward to what we're doing in the next ten years.

BAD

- ◆ We have had very difficult times dealing with a bank that wants all your overdraft back when the times get good. We won them over – but when I'm ready, I'm moving for sure.
- ◆ Not having enough staff this year. However, that's changing in the new year so not such a bad thing anymore.

HOPES

- ◆ Building Corks Out into something bigger both regionally and nationally through the

website.

- ◆ Working a few less hours.

FEARS

- ◆ Keeping one step ahead of the rest, not just for Corks Out but all independents out there.
- ◆ For the trade that banks will cause some good businesses to go under and credit terms will be difficult. Also insurance for suppliers will be harder.

Ted Sandbach, Oxford Wine Company



GOOD

- ◆ Taking the plunge and opening our Oxford Wine Cafe. This was not our core business but – after a few glasses of wine – I understood the synergy and it has been a great decision. The bar is really thriving!
- ◆ It was wonderful when BBC Watchdog had the courage to expose the supermarkets and other large retailers with their phoney promotions!

BAD

- ◆ Deciding to sell our Tetbury shop and concentrate on the more exciting Cirencester operation. As business boomed in Oxford it became impractical for us to keep a retail shop so far from our core custom.
- ◆ Deciding which Pinot Noir to bring to our regular new Pinotophile tasting. The exciting discovery of Pinot lovers who frequent the wine cafe has opened up all sorts of opportunities and my wife is still convinced its work!

HOPES

- ◆ That the duty escalator is scrapped and this year wine duty will be frozen. Oh, look! Is that a pig flying past?
- ◆ That suppliers decide what section of the trade they wish to appease. I am fed up with finding our “regionally exclusive” wines in a local supermarket or restaurant. Please stop trying to sell to wholesalers and then supplying any old restaurant later.

FEARS

- ◆ Having to deal with other wholesalers “buying” business with crazy, unsustainable offers and cash incentives.
- ◆ Dealing with the scum that call themselves bankers who rip you off at every level. My new manager is barely out of short trousers but has done a course therefore he understands my business!

Read more hopes and fears for 2014 online at Harpers.co.uk