

IN VINO *Veritas*

A bottle of wine carries many names, from the country of origin to the grape varietal and from the name of the grand old chateau to the glitzy marketing man's invention. For most wine fans, it's a lot of information to digest when buying just one product, and it's fascinating to see which possible brand matters most.

A study of wine enthusiasts and sector specialists (caterers, distributors and bar owners) promoted by VinItaly yielded some very interesting information. Four in ten said they have a very clear idea of the meaning of a brand in the wine sphere, the report revealed. Of these, some 22 per cent identified with wine producers while 18 per cent said brand in the case of wine, means a combination of producer type and name.

Interestingly, another 18 per cent said the brand was the type of wine - Chianti, Moscato or Prosecco for example - while 15 per cent felt the brand refers to the type of grape used to make a given wine. Only 10% were influenced by the denomination (DOC, DOCG, IGT etc).

The Italian research, called The Value of Brand in the world of Wine, is mirrored by similar confusion around the world. Old world wine producers rely on heritage, it seems, while new world wine producers can afford to be more forward thinking in their approach.

In France, or course, the branding story is one of long-

At VinItaly this year in Verona one of the hot topics of debate was the value of the brand in the wine market and what, indeed, the consumer sees as the brand. Kevin Kelly reports from April's Italian wine show.



Above: Marquis Vittorio Frescobaldi, Grandi Cru d'Italia Chairman and Paolo Panerai, Grandi Cru d'Italia Executive Vice Chairman. Right: Kevin Kelly, editor of ESM magazine addressing Il Comitato Grandi Cru d'Italia



standing tradition and quality. The champagne brands speak for themselves: Moët et Chandon, Veuve Cliquot, Pol Roger, Bollinger, and the very top-end Dom Perignon and Krug. Likewise the French cognac makers, Hennessy, Remy Martin and Martel, have had huge success in branding their products through promotion, sponsorship and constant cultivation of the on and off trade.

Similarly, the owners of the great French Chateaux such as Latour, Margaux, Haut-Brion and the various Rothschilds have established wines which are instantly memorable, but equally hugely expensive and

largely out of the reach to all but lottery winners. But nevertheless these famed Bordeaux Chateaux wines, designated by the classification of 1855, have become super luxury brands, commanding stratospheric prices.

The problems of identification, however, have

been overcome by many - especially among the New World Wines - with names conjured up by marketing men. They are not reliant on traditional virtues of the vineyard and terroir but by more modern brand names. Think Australia's Jacob's Creek, and Blossom Hill, New Zealand's Cloudy Bay and Marlborough, California's Gallo or Mondavi, and Chile's St Rita and Carmen.

But wine makers around the world are always looking for the Holy Grail of brand recognition for their region or for their winery. National and regional bodies spend a fortune promoting their members in a bid to ensure their wines become more recognised - and trusted - than the opposition.

Pity the poor Germans and Austrians. They produce excellent wines but, lumbered with wines with unpronounceable names, they often find it tough to get the message across. Wine

buffs like German wine more than the average European consumer, but then they've had lots of practice pronouncing words like Gewürztraminer... How much more wine would the Germans sell, we wonder, if they started marketing their Riesling as Super Riesling

The latest to join the



Present at the gala dinner were (front, l-r) top Italian television personality Bruno Vespa, Cristina Nonino, owner of Nonino Distillatori, possibly the most exclusive grappa company in the world, and Paolo Panerai, Grandi Cru d'Italia Executive Vice Chairman.

corporate marketing push for the branding of wines is the Comitato Grandi Cru d'Italia, a consortium of Italy's finest wine makers, a lot of them with aristocratic names such as Antanori, Frescobaldi, Ricasoli, and Folanora. Many are descendents from the great Renaissance families of Italy who have been making wine for generations, but they have failed to exploit the tremendous quality of their wines. These Italian aristocratic families are now only too well aware that the family crest or logo on a bottle of wine carries with it an amazing historical imprimatur.

A comparison between the stories of the great French chateaux and the Italian families is interesting. For years the Italians have lagged behind

the French, the ultimate marketers of wines, who have been so successful in building their brands and achieving high prices. The quality of their products has been matched by the attention to detail put into cultivating relationships with wine writers and key distributors. Any suggestion their wines are overpriced is met with a Gallic shrug.

The Italians, however, have a template of what to do. Under the strong leadership of the Milanese publisher Paolo Panerai, the owner of the Super Tuscan Domini Casalere de Caslino, the Italians are on the move. They have seen how their French colleagues have won the day and have ambitious plans. A renaissance of the top-end Italian wines is on the way. ■

VINITALY – THE SHOW

VinItaly was a record-breaking affair, but ESM believes Italy's pre-eminent wine show in Verona was not a vintage year. VinItaly's claim to be the world capital of oenology was bolstered this year when a total of 47,000 operators from more than 110 countries turned up to the annual show in, boosting the total attendance to 152,000.

The crowds were a welcome sight. "My greatest satisfaction is to have seen renewed trust on the faces of exhibitors," said Ettore Riello, President of VeronaFiere. "They certainly appreciated the hard work by the VinItaly team to increase attendance by operators."

Giovanni Mantovani, Director General of VeronaFiere, was also bullish. "To achieve this result," he said, "VinItaly conducted massive direct marketing action on the main markets and attracted to Verona qualified delegations from North, Central



and Eastern Europe and Russia, as well as USA, Canada and Australia, Mediterranean countries, Asia, the Far East, Central and Southern America."

For wine makers after a difficult two years, there was much to celebrate. "There was good attendance from foreign markets," confirmed Lorenzo Biscontin of Santa Margherita. "The signal from this VinItaly is that markets are performing well, with attendance here in Verona by all the main Asian and North American international partners, while we also had new contacts in Hungary, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.