



hindustantimes

Should women get their own wines?

(27th April, 2012 – AFP) With bottles emblazoned with slinky black cocktail dresses and sexy sling-back heels, their target market is clear. But wines made specifically for female sippers are a disservice to the industry and to women, says one expert who called the current trend a gimmick that treats females differently – unnecessarily.



Red red wine: A woman tastes red wine during the annual Vinaria 2009 international wine fair in the town of Plovdiv in Bulgaria.

In an effort to tap into an ever-growing market, winemakers have been launching a slew of bottles with names like Girls' Night Out, Little Black Dress, and Strut. Last Christmas, clothing retailer Banana Republic partnered with California winery Clos du Bois to launch a line of holiday labels outfitted with sweeping party frocks.

But prominent Hong Kong-based wine critic and educator **Jeannie Cho Lee** - also the first person of Asian descent to be awarded the Master of Wine title in 2008 - points out that wine is like food: it's part of the meal.

“What if I were to prepare a separate meal for you just because you’re a woman?” she pointed out in a phone interview from Vancouver. “Why can’t you win over female drinkers from just the purity of the ingredients?”

Wines should be sold based on their merit, Lee said, and not by trying to play into gender stereotypes.

But it’s no wonder that winemakers are trying to seduce female drinkers. As Lee points out, with more and more women around the world choosing to delay marriage and motherhood in favor of a career, bigger disposable incomes also give them more purchasing power.

Women have different taste buds

Meanwhile, promoting the role of women both in the trade and as important consumers are also themes of the Women and Wines of the World conference that kicks off Thursday in Monaco, in which female wine critics will be choosing their favorite wines.

Critics range from journalists, chefs, hotel and hospitality graduates, corporate executives and general oenophiles around the world.

And while Lee asserts that gender shouldn’t play a role in winemaking, she acknowledges that “in theory” women are supposed to taste wine differently because they have more sensitive taste buds.

For example, Yale University researchers found that 35 percent of women in their study were ‘super-tasters’ compared to just 15 percent of men after counting the number of taste buds on their tongue.

The theory goes that women, therefore, are more sensitive to tannins and aromas than males.

And while that may be true, Lee says that in her experience hosting wine education seminars around the world, men tend to be stronger at describing the flavors they’re tasting.

“Even if I can taste all these flavors, if I can’t articulate and communicate what I’m drinking or identify them again, then it doesn’t matter if I’m highly sensitive or not,” Lee said.

Other gender differences Lee has observed in the way male and female consumers drink wine includes how they approach it: men, she says, tend to be preoccupied with status -- price, rank and prestige -- while women are more interested in understanding the flavors and characters of what they’re drinking.

Women and Wines of the World International Competition runs April 26 to 27 in Monaco.