

The “Millennium Generation” breaks out under the big top at the 2008

# Food & Wine Classic in Aspen

by Jeremy Parzen

**The Food & Wine Classic in Aspen remains America's premier wine and food event.**

Wandering through the grand tasting pavilions of this year's Food & Wine Classic in Aspen and hobnobbing with the many celeb chefs, restaurateurs, winemakers and journalists in attendance, you couldn't help but feel the buzz in the air. In the words of one of America's leading food and wine experts, Brian Duncan, owner of Bin 36 in Chicago, the “Millennium Generation” had arrived.

The new breed of Classic attendee is young, well-traveled, and “not afraid to ask questions,” said Duncan, who led two seminars at this year's Classic, including two sessions of his show-stopping “Wines That Love Food.”

And while California wines continue to command attention (this year's “Rising Stars of Napa” session was led by the author of *Vinography*, Alder Yarrow, the first wine blogger to be asked to lead a seminar at the Classic), consumers are starting to look to Europe, Australia, South Africa and South America for value and quality—and not just the usual suspects. “After complaining for years that it was difficult to find good wines from California (especially Napa) under \$25, the tide has turned. I believe this to be a result of serious competition from Spain, Italy,





The new breed of Classic attendee is younger and more inquisitive about wine than ever before.

South America and Australia,” Brian told THE TASTING PANEL.

Of course, many of the Classic’s classics were back: Reserve seminars (for which festival-goers pay an additional \$175 to \$375 per person after the \$1,000-plus foot-in-the-door pricetag) entitled “Stag’s Leap Cellars Retrospective with the Legendary Warren Winiarski” and “Celebrating Shafer Vineyards at 30 with Doug Shafer” continued to pack ‘em in.

But this year, the old standbys went head-to-head with the likes of “The 1998 Australian ‘Vintage of the Century’ at Ten Years” and “The Spectacular Barolos from Franco Massolino,” a newcomer to the Classic and this year’s surprise sensation. For the first time ever, Franco Massolino presented vertical tastings of his family’s three single-vineyard Barolos for a standing-room-only crowd of international collectors and enthusiasts.

“The Massolino seminar is a truly remarkable tasting for the Classic,” noted reserve seminar director Andrew Lawlor, who led a tasting panel that included wine writer Bruce Schoenfeld and celebrity sommelier Richard Betts. (Italian wine expert and bon ami of the wine world Ed McCarthy also managed to find a seat at this hottest-ticket-in-the-village tasting.) “We have never seen such an impressive collection of single-vineyard Barolos, and I am thrilled that we were able to make this happen,” beamed Lawlor to the sold-out group of 82-plus Nebbiolophiles.

Known to some as the Clark Kent/Superman of Italian wine for his chiseled all-American features, Franco Massolino poured verticals of Vigna Rionda, Margheria and Parafada in a conference room at the storied Little Nell

resort. The 1989 Margheria deftly captured the hearts of the panelists (“I’m putting a dab behind both ears,” quipped the colorful Betts), but it was the vertical of Parafada that received a standing ovation from the enthusiastic crowd. Franco, whose family has been making wine in Serralunga d’Alba for more than 40 years, was clearly moved by the warm reception.

On the other side of the village, Food & Wine Classic veteran, author and ex-Babbo sommelier David

Lynch led seminars on Greek wines (“Gems of Greece”) and Italian (“Insider’s Guide to Italian Wines”) that included once exotic but now familiar grapes like the clean, crisp Moschofilero from Greek producer Boutari and a nuanced Petite Arvine from producer Les Crêtes in the Valle d’Aosta, in French-speaking Italy. “Now more than ever,” said Lynch, one of the festival’s most popular speakers, “you see consumers who know the grape varieties and come to the festival with intelligent questions.”

The Food & Wine Classic in Aspen remains America’s premier wine and food event, where consumers, trade, winemakers, importers, chefs, and sommeliers mingle, taste and exchange notes and business cards. Where else in the world can you run into Austrian-born sommelier Aldo Sohm of Le Bernardin (recently named World’s Best Sommelier by the Worldwide Sommelier Association) pouring German Riesling, Food & Wine Deputy Wine Editor Ray Isle decanting “Profound Spanish Whites” and top-NYC restaurateur Danny Meyer leading the crowd in a chorus of “Alto Adige” to the tune of Mel Brooks’ “High Anxiety”? Nowhere but that Hollywood of the Rockies, Aspen. ■■



Brian Duncan, owner of Bin 36 in Chicago, at his seminar.

PHOTO: JEREMY PARZEN

