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WINE CLUB NOTES



Anna Maria Knapp

Who are you?

According to a new study, if you drink wine, you are likely to be a trendsetter, who is open to new experiences, follows your own path in life, is information-savvy and a confident consumer, desires intangibles, experiences, and emotions, has your life priorities in order, and eschews brands as badges. Unfortunately, the study did not examine whether you developed these qualities because you drink wine or whether you drink wine because you possess these qualities. Personally, I think it's the former. We all know that, at least when we drink too much, we may want to dance on tabletops without professional training, ignore a companion's well meant advice, order dessert even though we're full, take undue interest in the server, order another bottle even though dinner is finished, disregarding the label, all of which are behaviors that correspond to the study's definition of a trend setter.

The Yankelovich Monitor, a marketing company which tracks consumer attitudes, values, and lifestyle trends conducted the study with 2,442 participants, who consume wine more than twice a year. Yankelovich Monitor discovered that, more than any other source, personal recommendations are the most valued source of wine information, including friends, family, and the sommelier or server in a restaurant. Forty percent of wine consumers receive information from newspapers and magazines. And among the 25 percent of consumers who are able to visit wineries, those visits provide the most powerful purchasing influence.

A full 74 percent of people who purchase wine at restaurants, bars, and clubs are buying it by the glass because they feel that this kind of purchase is best for experimentation. Even those who spend \$15 or more on a bottle of wine at a retail shop are still most

likely to purchase by the glass in a restaurant setting, so that they can get acquainted with different wines.

Finally, the study found that California wine rates as most favorable and familiar, and is most often purchased by a wide margin. Out of 12 different U.S. and foreign wine regions, including California, three-quarters of the participants in the study described California wine as "easy to enjoy, versatile, appropriate for many occasions, a good value, and consistent." I suggest, though, that if you are receiving *The Great Wines of Italy*, you are a super trendsetter, who has probably visited or is planning to visit Italy, which is the most popular European destination for American travelers after England and France. According to U.S. Tour Operators Association, Italy is the most popular destination among guidebook buyers and the number one destination for American Express Vacations for the last three years. In other words, Americans have been visiting England and France for so long that they don't need guidebooks or tours, whereas Italy is a new adventure and requires guidance.

Interestingly, the study participants equated wine consumption with "safe adventure," although the account of the study that I read, which came from the San Francisco Wine Institute, didn't explain or define "safe adventure" in relation to wine drinking. Perhaps the multi-faceted experience of learning about new wines, the people who make them, the places where they originate, maybe the hope of traveling to those destinations constitutes "safe adventure." How that adventure might differ from general vacation travel was not discussed.

This being the beginning of yet another New Year, I wish all of you trend setting wine drinkers a happy New Year and multiple "safe adventures" in 2006. ■