

Newsletter #19

I've been around for long enough to know a bad review when I read one.

Dorothy Parker – never one to waste her wit on blandishments – once famously dismissed Ms Katharine Hepburn as “*running the gamut of emotions, from A to B*”. Ouch!

Wine writers too can be tough, although sometimes it's hard to pick the praise from the pan. Consider this assessment of an Australian Pinot Noir:

“*Savoury, meaty nose with a slight feral/forest floor character...*”

Or this description of a Bordeaux style Cabernet blend:

“*Intense southern ‘dead ant’ intensity on the nose with hints of raspberry jubes...*”

And those are the **good** reviews!

Dead ants on the nose? Are they serious?

Actually, the reference to dead ants sent me running to the trusty (yes I am joking) world wide web, where I discovered to my amazement that the capacity to smell dead ants is determined genetically – like attached earlobes, or the ability to roll your tongue. Who knew? (I assume also that quantity plays a part: I mean, just how whiffy can one dead ant be?) It's all a bit of a surprise, but at least the next time I get an insatiable craving for formic acid, I'll know which bottle to uncork.

Here's another one: “*Complex kerosene and mineral characters...*”

Hang on, I know that note. It's one of ours! It refers to our 2002 Tasmanian Riesling - a wine I know and love!

Pause to reconsider...

Funnily enough, I *am* familiar with the taste of kerosene. A tangential career interlude many years ago led me to embrace the art of fire-eating. (Don't ask: it was the eighties). Kerosene was what we used to gargle in order to create a great big fiery “blow”. **But** (and this is the funny thing) I don't ever recall thinking, as I took my swig of kero: “...mmm... tastes just like finely aged Tasmanian Riesling...”

Well, actually, I wouldn't have. My sally into Circus predated my induction to the world of wine by at least a decade. I barely knew a Riesling from a raincoat, and I certainly didn't speak the language.

These days I'm multi-lingual. My primary language is *Fiftyish* - a hybrid language, rooted in mainstream English, overlaid with adjectives and descriptors which were common in the 1960s and 70s. (Speakers of Fiftyish, make young people wince irrespective of the subject matter.) I also speak a couple of dialects, including Theatre (as in: “**Darling**”); Publishing (as in: “*Deadlines, darling*”) and of course, Wine (as in: *Dead Ants, darling...* apparently).

As you will have gleaned, I'm no expert, but the thing I know for sure about language is that it is only EVER useful if someone else understands it, and can - hopefully - speak it too. Wine writers - like so many of us who take for granted the circles in which we move – sometimes forget that readers may not be fluent in the lingo. It isn't obfuscation or self indulgence (well... mostly): it's just language.

Of course not all these whacky terms are terms of endearment. There are some fairly expressive phrases that indicate that a wine is faulty. "Wet dog" is a good example. It's a foul smelling fault caused by the presence of the yeast *Brettanomyces* (just Brett will do). But don't get your *wet dog* confused with your *cats wee* – of which many people are inexplicably fond. In wine at least.

There's a plethora of colourful wine descriptors out there. Here, for your edification (and amusement) are a few more to add to your wine thesaurus:

Pinot Noir: Pickles; Sappy; Gamey; Barnyard; Bacon Fat; Forest Floor; Truffle; Tar

Cabernet Sauvignon: Dusty; Tomato Leaf; Seaweed; Black Olive; Fruitcake; Prune; Tobacco

Shiraz: White Pepper/ Black Pepper; Blackberry; Plum; Menthol; Eucalyptus; Salami; Leather; Soy

Nebbiolo: Green Tea; Violet; Camphor; Cherry; Chestnut; Mocha; Burnt Toffee

Sauvignon Blanc: Lantana; Cats' Wee; Nettle; Artichoke; Celery; Flint; Gunpowder (!)

Chardonnay: Cucumber; Fig; Melon; Mango; Chestnut; Tobacco

Riesling: Herbal; Mineral; Flint; Bath Salts; Cold Cream (yes, cold cream); Guava; Quince; Lanolin; Kerosene

Pity the poor sod whose job it is to taste the cats' wee, wet dogs, dead ants, bath salts cold creams and forest floors to provide wine writers with the benchmarks.

Ah... there's a task for the work experience kid!

Happy Easter. Enjoy, be safe.

Gillian Hyde

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