

Call me a skeptic, but...

Among the many positive changes the wine industry has taken in the last few years has been to shed its snobbish image and educate the consumer. Whether through regulatory initiatives, or self-governance, the wine industry learned that by keeping it simple, they sell more wine.

This global advancement is certainly not limited to American winemaking. France is reviewing its complicated classification system; Germany is simplifying its bottle labels and sales are increasing significantly. Even Italy, wrapped in centuries of hyper-governmental oversight, is changing its overly-regulatory ways. It's apparent everywhere that the industry is now genuinely committed to transparency for wine consumers. Or so I thought when I attended a recent trade show in Miami a few weeks ago.

Wine trade shows can be so much more than just walking around tasting a lot of wines. They offer an opportunity to learn about new trends in the industry. I wasn't more than a few steps into the football-field, sized-center, where more than 400 producers from twenty plus countries were offering samples of their latest wines, when I noticed a huge banner claiming to feature a wine that was a "neutraceutical" revolution! Really?

Given the monumental movement by grape-growers and vintners to "green, organic and biodynamic" farming, it seemed odd that anyone might suggest "enhancing" wines with chemicals, even those advertised as *all-natural* ingredients. To their credit (I think?), they did claim to not add preservatives or stabilizers in this enhancement process. To further tout their *healthier* wines, they say they have added broad-spectrum digestive enzymes specifically targeting "some senior citizens who gradually lose their ability to digest wine." I couldn't help but wonder if their wine might be covered under Medicare.

Maybe this process is in the best interest of, and the health and well-being of a wine-drinking public. They probably also hope to make some money. Okay, I'll try to give them the benefit of doubt. After all, the process is based on "resveratrol", a naturally occurring compound in the skins of red grapes that has been well documented in clinical studies to be beneficial in controlling and reducing heart disease.

I guess what I most take issue with is that this company suggests that by increasing resveratrol levels in a five ounce glass of wine by up to 300% above its *natural state*, they are providing the wine drinker with a healthier life. Well, maybe. The marketing materials were rife with what I can best describe as suggestive. When I read statements like, "*survival gene*", and a "*dietary component that could lengthen the human lifespan by up to 70% or 50 years*", I can't help but be skeptical. Will a few glasses of wine a day really allow me to reach the ripe old age of 130? Do I want to live that long? Given recent economic events, I've not sure my portfolio will see the new year, let alone a few decades beyond my centennial birthday!

Another study in the company literature referenced a relationship between resveratrol and an enzyme that purportedly "*turned plain mice into champion athletes, making them twice as fast on a treadmill*." Great, now someone is going to have to build a better mousetrap!

Call me a skeptic, but... I think I'll stick with my organically grown, biodynamically-farmed pinot, sans the neutraceutically injected compounds, thank you.

Somewhat shaken by this *better living through chemistry* foray, I moved on in search of a glass of my favorite unadulterated drink. Not three booths away, I met the distributor for an Italian winery claiming to have developed a system to produce "totally healthy wines, free of toxins, with five times the level of, you guessed it, resveratrol." I was beginning to wonder if I hadn't mistakenly stumbled into a drug company convention.

This producer, from Italy's Lake Garda region, was handing out marketing materials claiming his wines (and I quote verbatim here) "*can be drunk with no personal harm to the personal health, even in case of*

generous amounts in-taken by healthy people.” No harm even in “generous amounts”? I know more than one personal injury lawyer and a few doctors who may think otherwise, and I doubt they’ll get much support from Mothers Against Drunk Drivers!

As best I could determine, unlike the above vendor, this winery is not adding anything to their wines. In fact, they claim that it is in their “special” process of washing the grapes, the wines take on - and again I quote - *“peculiar and organoleptic properties allowing these wines to be safely in-taken also by sick people who are prescribed to integrate diet with essential elements.”* What? The vintner’s representative never does quite connect the dots between *washing the grapes* and the claim, *“we have achieved levels of trans-resveratrol as much as five times higher than those achieved in traditional processes.”* Neither the winery’s literature, or the distributor at the show could elaborate on, or define, trans-resveratrol, or how washing the grapes results in a five-fold increase of the compound.

Maybe I’m missing something here, but is all of this *wine gone mad?* The claims of these two businesses seem suspect at best, and the one seems completely contrary to the growing global green movement, with increasing numbers of vintners committed to producing wines in its most natural state possible.

My guess is that the vast majority of consumers will continue to look for and choose wines that are as pure and natural as Mother Nature intended. I encourage wine drinkers to proceed with caution when considering wines containing substances (or additives) not found in the soil in which they originate. Until we fully understand any real potential benefit of introducing chemicals or compounds to wine, let’s keep science in the laboratory and out of the winery.