

# Terroir vs Technology



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**W**orldwide, the wine industry is facing a critical transition phase. “The crux of the transition,” says international wine expert Roger Dial, “is the tension between terroir and technology.”

‘Terroir’ relates to all the things that give wine its personality. This includes the character of the land where grapes are grown, the climate and traditional methods of wine-making. This stuff ferments in the minds of wine aficionados and gives rise to the romance associated with good wine. Dial, the publisher of *AppellationAmerica.com* adds, “It also elevates the production of wine to some mysterious art form, akin to tribal dance. To wit: it ain’t industrial.”

On the other side of the vineyard fence lays the field of technology. It’s ramping up like never before. Dial refers to this as a “globalizing corporate system” which views wine as a mass-market commodity. It also discounts the romance or regional characteristics of wine that many people value.

So, there’s a potential battle looming between the two Ts. “If technology trumps terroir, the game is over. Wine then becomes Coca-Cola and that will rip the guts out of both the economy of wine and the thousands of people who produce it for the passion,” Dial says. Not to mention millions of folks who drink it for the same reason.

Put in more basic terms: If certain technologies become standard *everywhere*, then it takes the *somewhere* out of wine. And it is the *somewhere* that makes wine interesting and valuable in the first place. The key to survival? If technology can enhance wine’s sense of place/region, all will be well.

So how does innovation and technology affect wineries in Atlantic Canada? With 10 wineries and three more in the making, Nova Scotia is the largest wine producer in the region. That’s small grapes compared to the over 4,500 wineries in North America. Yet, like that fabled turtle, wineries in NS have slowly but surely inched their way into the winner’s circle.

Jost Vineyards, for example, produces an impressive line of Nova Scotia wines (and a list of awards that would fill a keg). What owner Hans

Christian Jost and his family have accomplished in the past 30 years is impressive. Part of the company’s success is keeping up with the times and doing business in better, smarter ways. Jost embraces new technology when it makes financial sense, and when it doesn’t impact in a negative way on his wines.

For example, the company bought equipment that “hedges” the rows. Before, it took the equivalent of a day per acre to manpower this maneuver. Now, with a hedger attached to a tractor, it’s an acre per hour. The same applies to moving leaves so the ground can get more benefit from the sun. Rather than taking days, it’s done in hours.

“It makes all the difference in the viability of our vineyards,” the winemaker says, “and our co-workers who have small acreages share equipment so it makes it all worthwhile.”

On the production side, one of the biggest innovations inside the winery is a new centrifuge. Normally, it takes several months to settle out the yeast in wine. Now, it takes mere minutes. The winery can move its schedule forward; products get to market sooner. And there’s an added bonus. The technology used in the new equipment doesn’t allow oxygen (wine’s greatest enemy) to be introduced into the process.

Does this affect the wine’s terroir? Not a whiff. “We’ve won more awards than ever before. The judges love it and consumers love it,” says the seasoned entrepreneur.

Of course, innovation sometimes comes at a price. Jost Vineyards bottled their own sparkling wine last year. They made a point to get the best bottles and the best corks. Alas, the corks fit so tightly that it’s a challenge to remove them. So the big hunt in on to find another “best cork” that won’t be so hard on the triceps.

The biggest challenge? “Regional growers [need] to keep up with new technology. “We’re a relatively new industry here in Atlantic Canada, but after 30 years there’s a knowledge base that is starting to kick in.” And in the eyes of this astute winemaker, there’s plenty of room to grow. “There’s a 130 km stretch of land on the north mountain in the Annapolis Valley that’s a prime grape growing region. That acreage is more than the Niagara region,” Jost says, “and the land prices are tiny in comparison. There’s an incredible opportunity here in Atlantic Canada.”

Worthy of a toast, eh?

ABM

Sandra Phinney has penned hundreds of business articles. She also writes a culinary column for *The Atlantic Co-operator* and is a regular food columnist for *Living Healthfully* in Atlantic Canada. “Addendum” covers topics like food trends for meetings and conventions, wine etiquette, and where to find laptop-friendly eateries. If you have any ideas, comments or suggestions about this article or future articles, send them to Sandra at: [s.phinney@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:s.phinney@ns.sympatico.ca)