

Reference

Walser, M. (2012). *Das dreizehnte Kapitel (The Thirteenth Chapter)*. Berlin, Germany: Argon Verlag.

MORTEN SCHOLER: *Coffee and Wine – Two Worlds Compared*. Troubador Publishing, Leicester, UK, 2018, 336 pp., ISBN 9781789014747 (hardcover), GBP 30.00 (\$38.33).

I strongly suspect that for those of us who are coffee and wine enthusiasts, this book will become our must go to encyclopedia. Written by Morten Scholer, with an eye to detail that probably only someone with an engineering background can bring to the subject, it explores two seemingly unrelated worlds. I say “seemingly” for there is no doubt that many in the coffee trade look up to the wine industry, wishing that they could find the magic wand that will transform the quality end of the coffee market into something approximating what wine has achieved. And it is in that spirit that Morten has explored the similarities and differences between the two, and, indeed in doing so, has clearly demonstrated that the wine industry can also learn a thing or two from the coffee industry.

With around 2.5 billion cups of coffee and 0.5 billion glasses of wine consumed each day, these industries are important components of not just world trade, but of everyday consumption and it is somewhat surprising that the literature comparing the two industries is so thin. This book is, therefore, long overdue. Morten has carefully maintained an objectivity that is uncommon among aficionados, although he does allow his love of both products to shine through. This is not, however, a book that can be read from cover to cover in one session, but rather a reference book that not only contains the basics, but also contains precious nuggets that inevitably will make you cry out loud “Wow, I never knew that!”

The book is designed to appeal to players in both industries, explaining both sectors in a simple, yet effective, style, allowing the reader from either the wine or coffee trade to understand the mechanics of how the other industry works and the challenges each face. On the other hand, it must be said, that the juxtaposition and constant zig-zag shift between coffee and wine has the potential to be, at times, a little confusing. But the clever use of colour codes together with many illustrations and maps, as well as a very detailed list of contents overcomes this, making the book more reader friendly than might have otherwise been the case.

As you would expect Morten starts off looking at the long and illustrious history of both products, although wine can certainly be traced further back than coffee. He then moves on to statistics (maybe not everyone’s cup of tea), but his unique and definitely quirky approach encourages the reader to continue delving into the different tables covering production, conversion ratios, and area devoted to both crops.

As an annex to the first chapter Morten lists 100 differences between coffee and wine as products and as sectors. Some are obvious, others not so and quite a few are very thought provoking. Such as the fact that coffee has twice as many aroma characteristics as wine or that there are many (20+) technical options for quality enhancement (“manipulation”) of wine, but very few in coffee. Robusta steam-cleaning and pulped-natural-honey-processing of Arabica are among the few or that the proportion of mechanical harvesting significantly differs. Harvesters are still not widely used in coffee-producing countries and even in Brazil, where harvesters are used, they still only cover around 20% of the crop. On the other hand, for wine the mechanically harvested portion has grown rapidly since the turn of the century and is surprisingly high. It is around 80% or above of the harvest in many countries, including France, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

The basics are covered in depth, exploring the botany, agronomy, harvesting, and processing involved in both crops, comparing and contrasting the different approaches and techniques used in both industries. Of particular interest is the chapter on “Quality and Quality Control.” The similarities in approach to judging quality is remarkable, even though there obviously remain differences, some of which are manifest, although others are more subtle. Nevertheless, it is clear that the wine industry has been a trailblazer in this regard and that other industries, especially coffee, have not only learned from wine industry pioneers, but have also gone on to enhance and adapt many of the techniques and terminologies employed to create well establish criteria against which products such as coffee can be judged. This has greatly benefitted all those involved and, ultimately, the consumers of these products.

The value/supply chain is analysed meticulously with coffee having to pass through considerably more hands than wine, although it is interesting to note that industry concentration is much higher in coffee than in wine. In coffee the eight largest trade houses account for almost 50% of the world trade in coffee with some individual companies accounting for almost 15%. In wine, however, the largest wine companies only cover less than 3% of world production.

The book contains some useful advice for coffee growers and aspiring coffee exporters, and in so doing neatly illustrates how differently the supply chain works in the two industries. Indeed, it emphasizes the fact that while wine is essentially a first world industry, with a few notable and important exceptions, coffee growing is predominantly a developing country-based activity.

Throughout the book Morten uses case studies to illustrate certain points, but also to highlight interesting, if sometimes idiosyncratic, coincidences and linkages between the industries. One such example is the case study relating to Berry Bros. & Rudd, a major wine merchant based in London, which can trace its roots to trading in coffee in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The health benefits of both coffee and wine are somewhat disappointingly only covered briefly, although to be fair, Morten does point the reader in the direction of a number of authoritative publications and websites on the subject. Of possibly greater entertainment and interest is the coverage given to the various campaigns throughout history against both products. Naturally wine being an alcoholic beverage is subject to greater scrutiny and legislation covering health warnings against excessive consumption today than coffee is, but coffee is mostly served hot, which in itself can be dangerous in clumsy hands.

The one area where, although Morten does not say directly so himself, the wine trade should take note of what is happening in coffee, is sustainability. The reader quickly becomes aware that the standards of sustainability applied to coffee are in several ways more complex than the standards for wine. This may well be because coffee sustainability standards are global whereas those applied to wine tend to be national, but as Morten so rightly points out this is not to say that the standards for wine are simple and easy. They are not, but while Morten maintains thorough neutrality on the subject, it is apparent that national standards are not easily comparable to each other and that this may well be an issue that has the potential to cause real, but avoidable, problems for the wine industry in the future.

The last chapter in the book provides data and the history of both wine and coffee by country. It is encyclopedic in its concise, yet rich, coverage of each country. It contains a wealth of useful information and as such will probably be well thumbed by students, researchers, and serious nerds like myself.

If I have one criticism it is the fact that the book does not look at the amounts of subsidy or aid going into each industry. Farming in both developed and developing countries increasingly appears to be reliant on direct outside support in one way or another, rather than on the market alone. A direct comparison between the two industries would have been helpful and informative.

Nevertheless, I really like this book, it is informative, well researched, quirky, easy to navigate, and a good read.

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doi:10.1017/jwe.2018.49