

WINE WRITERS' CIRCLE OF CANADA

- CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS

A wine writer has only personal credibility and reputation to fall back on

Professional journalists, whether they write about politics, finance, industry, marketing or wine, earn public respect when they adhere to a code of standards and ethics.

This code requires honesty, truthfulness, accuracy, due diligence with facts, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, protection of confidential sources, as well as independence from the influence of parties with a vested interest, openness, public accountability and full disclosure.

These principles apply to the information-gathering process, to the publication of stories resulting from that research and to wine recommendations and advice dispensed to the hospitality industry and to the public at large.

As a professional organization, the WWCC seeks to hold its members to a high ethical standard because the behaviour of one member reflects on our profession as a whole. Joining the WWCC means that the journalist has voluntarily chosen to be bound by this ethical code as a matter of professional excellence.

Ethical dilemmas are not always clear or apparent; however, there are two critical guidelines to follow:

WWCC members must have no direct interest in a winery, distillery, brewery, wine agency or any business which promotes and/or sells wine.

WWCC members who have an indirect interest in any of these organizations must practice full public disclosure. (An indirect interest means that the WWCC has a family member with an interest in a winery, distillery, brewery, wine agency or any business which promotes and/or sells wine.)

Examples of conflict of interest include:

- you (or an immediate family member) own shares in a wine company that is the subject of an article;
- a winery pays you, the writer, for signed copy;
- you mention a particular restaurant in an article, without informing the reader that the restaurant is a client.

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Examples where there is no conflict of interest:

--you run a wine competition which profits from the promotion of a specific region's wines. However, your promotional work focuses solely on promoting the competition, not the winning wines or their producers;

--a winery hires you to conduct a tasting of its products and you provide objective opinions, disclosing the fact you've been hired to do so by the relevant organization.

If there is any question of a conflict or potential conflict of interest, WWCC members are advised to seek guidance from the Executives Committee. As the behavior of individual WWCC members reflects on the entire group, anyone who is aware that a colleague is in conflict of interest, or who is concerned there may be a conflict, has a responsibility to report this information to the Executive.

In the normal course of business, the WWCC deems that there is no conflict of interest when members receive wine samples, attend special trade tastings with or without meals, visit wineries and accept invitations for travel to distant locales. These are common and accepted practices utilized by other professional associations and wine journalists of global stature. Samples are an integral part of the business of reporting on and reviewing wine; visits provide valuable opportunities for writers to meet winemakers or to witness growing and production conditions, while special invitations offer chances to taste flagship wines or older vintages in the context of the dinner table. However, it is incumbent on every WWCC member to maintain journalistic integrity notwithstanding these opportunities. The WWCC encourages members to make full disclosure in their writings of any samples, meals and travel – full disclosure is the best way to promote the appearance of unbiased reporting.

Assignment editors who insist a wine writer maintain a higher standard, should be invited to pay for all research materials, samples and trips.