



Recent advances in bullshit reduction

Legal and illegal perspectives

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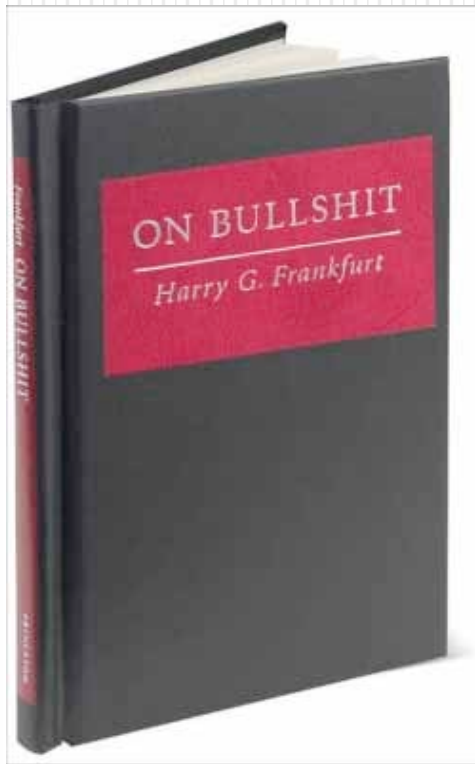
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A brief history of bullshit



“One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. Everyone knows this. Each of us contributes his share. But we tend to take the situation for granted. Most people are rather confident of their ability to recognize bullshit...so the phenomenon has not...attracted much sustained inquiry. In consequence, we have no clear understanding of what bullshit is, why there is so much of it, or what functions it serves.”

–Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (2005)

Education = bullshit radar

“The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things--the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit, and to prefer the good and the genuine to the bad and the counterfeit.”

–Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

“If you work hard and intelligently you should be able to detect when a man is talking rot, and that, in my view, is the main, if not the sole, purpose of education.”

–J. A. Smith, *Remarks to His Oxford Class* (1914)

FTC rules play a key role in protecting consumers from bullshit

- FTC Endorsement Guides § 255.5: “When there exists a connection between the endorser and the seller of the advertised product that might materially affect the weight or credibility of the endorsement (i.e., the connection is not reasonably expected by the audience), such connection must be fully disclosed.”
- It’s admirable that the FTC recognizes and confronts the cognitive impact of information

Bloggers have to play by the rules, but “traditional media” doesn’t. Why not?

- FTC Notice II(H)(1): “One factor in determining whether the connection between an advertiser and its endorsers should be disclosed is the type of vehicle being used to disseminate that endorsement—specifically, whether or not the nature of that medium is such that consumers are likely to recognize the statement as an advertisement (that is, as sponsored speech).”
- FTC Notice II(H)(2): “The threshold issue is whether the speaker’s statement qualifies as an “endorsement” under the Guides. If not, no disclosure need be made.”
- FTC Notice II(H)(3)(b): “The Commission acknowledges that bloggers may be subject to different disclosure requirements than reviewers in traditional media. In general, under usual circumstances, the Commission does not consider reviews published in traditional media (i.e., where a newspaper, magazine, or television or radio station with independent editorial responsibility assigns an employee to review various products or services as part of his or her official duties, and then publishes those reviews) to be sponsored advertising messages. Accordingly, such reviews are not “endorsements” within the meaning of the Guides. Under these circumstances, the Commission believes, knowing whether the media entity that published the review paid for the item in question would not affect the weight consumers give to the reviewer’s statements. In contrast, if a blogger’s statement on his personal blog or elsewhere (e.g., the site of an online retailer of electronic products) qualifies as an “endorsement” – i.e., as a sponsored message – due to the blogger’s relationship with the advertiser or the value of the merchandise he has received and has been asked to review by that advertiser, knowing these facts might affect the weight consumers give to his review.

What are the main differences between bloggers and print journalists?

	<i>Blogger</i>	<i>Print journalist</i>
<i>Working conditions</i>		
Full time?	Sometimes	Sometimes
Compensated?	Sometimes	Sometimes
<i>Content</i>		
Advertorial?	Sometimes	Sometimes
Edited by someone else?	Sometimes	Sometimes
Independent and honest?	Sometimes	Sometimes
<i>Distribution</i>		
Primary medium	Web	Web
Readership?	Zero to several million	Zero to several million

A case study in traditional media bullshit: wine magazines

“In some instances, there is an unhappy marriage between a subject that especially lends itself to bullshit and bullshit artists who are impelled to comment on it. I fear that wine is one of those instances where this unholy union is in effect.”

–Richard Quandt, “On Wine Bullshit,”
Journal of Wine Economics, 2007

A selection of adjectives from *Parker's Wine Bargains (2009)*

acacia

quince

wet wool

lime zest

mulberries

sage

fresh green beans

rose hip

saddle leather

smoky black tea

Mint

Sap

dried black currants

tar

black olives

white pepper

cress

salted grapefruit

winter pear

milk chocolate

roasted red peppers

smoky Latakia tobacco

beef jerky

baked apple

tangerine zest

salt-tinged nuts and
grains

tomato foliage

restrained gooseberry

An empirical bullshit test: the *Wine Spectator* “Awards of Excellence”



What does it take to get a *Wine Spectator* award of excellence?

- Supposedly awarded to the world's best wine restaurants
- Magazine collects \$250 fee from each of 4,000+ applicants
- Vast majority of 4,000+ applicants receive awards
- Gross revenues of \$1M from application fees, plus considerably more in advertisement fees
- This raises questions about the purpose and information content of these expert ratings

NEW 2008 WINE SPECTATOR 2008 RESTAURANT AWARDS PROGRAM LISTING FORM 10769

Please review carefully the information we have on file for you (in the left hand column) and correct any errors and FILL IN ANY BLANK AREAS in the right hand column. Please remember that this data is used for both editorial overview and publication in Wine Spectator and on our website. PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN THIS FORM ASAP along with the materials needed as shown in the highlighted box below. Please DO NOT copy this listing form for use with any other entries!

Wine Spectator Restaurant Awards Program
 PH: (212) 684-4224 ext. 781 FAX: (212) 481-0724 EMAIL: restaurantawards@mshanken.com

Please Note: We DO NOT HAVE your LISTING FORM for 2008. We HAVE your WINE LIST for 2008.
 We HAVE your MENU for 2008. We HAVE your ENTRY FEE for 2008.

**** DATA CURRENTLY ON FILE ****

1. Restaurant: Osteria L'Intrepido
2. Hotel / resort:
3. Contact / Title: Stiglitz G.S., Owner
4. Mailing Address: Viale Filippetti 33
5. Milan, 20122
6. ITALY
- 7.
8. Street Address: Viale Filippetti 33
9. Milan, 20122
10. ITALY
- 11.
12. Sommelier:

13. Wine Director:
14. General Manager:
15. Owner(s): Stiglitz G.S.

16. Contact Email (to receive confirmation of receipt of materials and other information from Wine Spectator):
 lintrepido@gmail.com
17. Reservations (39) 0-24-074-6174
18. Business (39) 0-24-074-6174
19. FAX (39) 0-24-074-6174
20. Website:
 http://www.

21. Total number of selections on wine list: 0
22. Total number of bottles in wine inventory: 0
23. Corkage fee per bottle if allowed (in US\$): Not Allowed
24. Are you a private club (yes / no) No
25. Dinner entree price range in US\$ \$0 - \$0
 (if prix fixe only, then prix fixe range)
26. Prix fixe menu offered? (yes / no) No
27. Prix fixe menu only? (yes / no) No
28. Cuisine type:
29. Chef:
30. Credit cards (check all that apply):
31. Meals offered (check all that apply): Lunch Dinner
32. Days closed: None

**** LIST CHANGES OR CORRECTIONS HERE ****

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. Augusto CRAZIA

13. Augusto CRAZIA
14. Luca GAMBERINI
15. GS STIGLITZ
 Please send correspondences to GS Stiglitz
 But not publish name of owner in magazine
16. _____

17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. http://www. osterialintrepido.wordpress.com

21. 256
22. 2,100
23. \$ _____ per bottle
24. YES NO
25. \$ 30 to \$ 42 (secondi piatti eur. 20-28)
 for a la carte entrees (or prix fixe if prix fixe only)
26. YES NO
27. YES NO
28. Milanese
29. Paolo GAGGINO
30. AMEX MC VISA DV None
31. Lunch Dinner
32. Closed Monday and Sunday night

By: GS Stiglitz Print Name/Title: Owner General Manager Date: 14 Febb 2008

Osteria L'Intrepido di Milano - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://osterialintrepido.wordpress.com/

My Account My Dashboard New Post Blog Info

Osteria L'Intrepido di Milano

Buone feste! L'osteria rimane aperto a natale 2007 e capodanno 2008

12 Dicembre 2007 at 12:21 am (Uncategorized) · Modifica

L'Intrepido rimane aperto a natale per un pranzo speciale di 7 pasti alle 15h00 a (125,00 € a persona), e una festa per capodanno 2008 alle 21h30 (150,00 € a persona cena + Champagne).

[Permalink](#) Comments Off

Esce menù d'inverno 2007/2008

25 Ottobre 2007 at 11:15 pm (Uncategorized) · Modifica

È uscito il menù d'inverno 2007/2008, [clicca qui](#) per visualizzarlo.

[Permalink](#) Comments Off

10 Marzo 2007 at 4:23 pm (Uncategorized) · Modifica

Benvenuti sul nuovo sito WWW dell'Osteria L'Intrepido! Qui si trova i nostri menù e contatti...

[Permalink](#) Nessun Commento

Pages

- Prenotazioni: Tel./Fax
+39 02 4074 6174
e-mail intrepido@gmail.com
- Via Filippetti 33, 20122 Milano
- Come trovarci (pianina)
- Menù Inverno 2007/2008

Archivi

- Dicembre 2007
- Ottobre 2007
- Marzo 2007

Categorie

- Uncategorized

Cerca

Blogroll

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start AAW... Do M... Wirel... aaw... Micro... C:\D... L'intr... L'Intr... Oste... Google 2:30 PM

I rossi italiani “riserva” della nostra cantina

AMARONE CLASSICO 1998 (Veneto) 65 points. “Not clean. Stale black licorice and slightly frothy on the palate. –JS”	Tedeschi	80,00 €
AMARONE CLASSICO “LA FABRISERIA” 1998 (Veneto) 60 points. “Unacceptable. Sweet and cloying. Smells like bug spray. –JS”	Tedeschi	185,00 €
AMARONE CLASSICO “GIOÉ” 1993 69 points. “Just too much paint thinner and nail varnish character in this. –JS”	S. Sofia	110,00 €
BARBARESCO ASIJ 1985 (Piemonte) 64 points. “Earthy, swampy, gamy, harsh and tannic. Tasted three times.”	Ceretto	135,00 €
BAROLO 1990 (Piemonte) 64 points. “Earthy, musty, lacking in charm or much fruit character.”	Az. Agr. GD Vajra	140,00 €
BAROLO RISERVA 1982 (Piemonte) 72 points. “Mature and earthy, with aggressive [<i>sic</i>] tannins that are sharp and harsh.”	Bruno Giacosa	250,00 €
BAROLO “ZONCHERA” 1994 (Piemonte) 74 points. “Quite disjointed, a bit green and herbal in flavor, with a coarse, chewy texture and an astringent finish. Hard to tell if it will ever come around. –PM”	Ceretto	120,00 €
BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO RISERVA 1996 (Toscana) 74 points. “Smells of ripe fruit, with turpentine. Medium-bodied, with hard, acidic character. Disappointing. –JS”	Gianfranco Soldera	235,00 €
BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO “LA CASA” 1982 (Toscana) 67 points. “Smells barnyardy and tastes decayed. Not what you’d hope for with Brunello.”	Tenuta Caparzo	200,00 €
BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO 1993 (Toscana) 80 points. “Pleasant and easy to drink, but with a bit too much new wood. A bit lacking in concentration, but with pretty, round tannins and a soft finish. Drink now. –JS”	Tenuta Caparzo	180,00 €
BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO RISERVA 1995 (Toscana) 81 points. “Pleasant berry and cherry character, but the palate is light-bodied with a slightly diluted finish. Light for the vintage. Rather disappointing for this producer. Drink now. –JS”	Tenuta Caparzo	135,00 €
CABERNET SAUVIGNON “I FOSSARETTI” 1995 (Piemonte) 58 points. “Something wrong here. Of four samples provided, two were dark in color, but tasted metallic and odd. The other two were corky. –PM”	Poderi Bertelli	120,00 €
SASSICAIA 1976 (Toscana) 65 points. “Even Sassicaia could not apparently escape the wet weather of this memorably bad vintage in Tuscany. It lacks harmony, having oxidized and developed a bitter orange character. Lean finish. –PM”	Tenuta San Guido	250,00 €
SASSICAIA 1980 (Toscana) 77 points. “Light, watery and diluted vanilla and milk chocolate character. While smooth in texture and clean on the finish, this is a modest Sassicaia. –PM”	Tenuta San Guido	280,00 €

The most important part of the application...





HONORING

Osteria L'Intrepido

*This restaurant is honored by Wine Spectator
for having one of the most outstanding restaurant wine lists in the world.*

Editorial & Corporate Office

*Wine Spectator
387 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mr. R. Shanken".

*Marvin R. Shanken
Editor and Publisher
Wine Spectator*

West Coast Office

*Wine Spectator
Opera Plaza, 601 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California 94102*

Wine Spectator's spin control

<<



GRUB STREET

>>


'Wine Spectator' Forum a Hotbed of Non-Controversy [Updated]

As we related earlier, *Wine Spectator* yesterday attempted to explain away giving its "Award of Excellence" to an imaginary restaurant with notably bad wines on the list. And in response, readers posting to the magazine's online forums have been *nothing* but positive. You'll find post after post of suspiciously supportive statements affirming the uprightness of the award and the wickedness of scammer and author Robin Goldstein. It's almost as if *Wine Spectator* controlled what was said there! Notably non-outraged statements from this echo chamber include:

- "Very nice to hear the other side of the story, sounds like Robin is a liar."
- "Thank you for this post. You have given quite a few additional details that Mr. Goldstein failed to mention. It appears on the surface that he is a dishonest person."
- "An applause of appreciation for your endeavors... to handle this situation appropriately. And respect/kudos to laying out the facts in a very clear and concise manner. Well done."
- "Wow, another person with to [sic] much time on their hands. To go to all that trouble, and for what?"

Perhaps, like Voltaire's God, Robin Goldstein is a comedian playing to an audience that is afraid to laugh.

Wikipedia meddling


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- Contents
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Wine Spectator

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Wine Spectator is a [magazine](#) that focuses on [wine](#). Founded as a newsprint tabloid by Bob Morrissey in 1976, it was purchased three years later by publisher Marvin R. Shanken. That year, its panel of experts blind tasted and reviewed over 12,400 wines. Each of the 16 issues per year contains a large section devoted to wine reviews and wine ratings.

The magazine's consumer orientation is reflected in stories such as family conflicts among producers, the identification of producers whose wines suffered from systematic [cork taint](#), and alerting collectors to the proliferation of counterfeit wines. Among the critics in the magazine's tasting panel are [James Suckling](#), James Molesworth and [James Laube](#).

The magazine organized and sponsored the *Wine Spectator* Wine Tasting of 1986 on the tenth anniversary of the "Judgment of Paris".

Criticism

[[edit](#)]

Having started a restaurant awards program in 1981, the accolade has since come under some criticism.^{[1][2]} At the August 2008 conference of the American Association of Wine Economists in [Portland, Oregon](#), a [hoax exposé](#) submission of the fictitious restaurant Osteria L'Intrepido was revealed by the author and [Fearless Critic](#) founder [Robin Goldstein](#): he had won an Award of Excellence for a restaurant that didn't exist and whose "reserve wine list" was full of the lowest-rated Italian wines in history. He stated the exposé to be part of research for an academic paper^[3], whose aim was to discover what it takes for a restaurant's wine list to receive an award from the magazine.^{[4][2][5][6][7]} With nearly 4,500 restaurant applications, the magazine earns over \$1 million each year from submission fees.^{[8][9]} Editor Thomas Matthews published an official response on the magazine's forum site.^{[10][4][5][2][11]}

References

[[edit](#)]

- ↑ Hesser, Amanda, *The New York Times* (July 9, 2003). "A Wine Award That Seems Easy To Come By" [↗](#).
- ↑ ^ a ^ b ^ c Bonné, Jon, *San Francisco Chronicle: The Sipping News* (August 21, 2008). "Awards: 'Hoax' on the Wine Spectator" [↗](#).
- ↑ ^ blindtaste.com [What does it take to get a Wine Spectator Award of Excellence?](#) [↗](#)
- ↑ ^ a ^ b Mitham, Peter, *Wines & Vines* (August 19, 2008). "Economists Question Real Value of Wine" [↗](#).
- ↑ ^ a ^ b Hirsch, Jerry, *Los Angeles Times* (August 22, 2008). "Wine Spectator drinks a hearty glass of blush" [↗](#).
- ↑ ^ Yarrow, Alder, *Vinography.com* (August 19, 2008). "Wine Spectator Restaurant Awards Exposed as a Total Farce" [↗](#).
- ↑ ^ Coleman, Tyler, *Dr. Vino* (August 19, 2008). "Fictitious restaurant wins Wine Spectator Award of Excellence" [↗](#).

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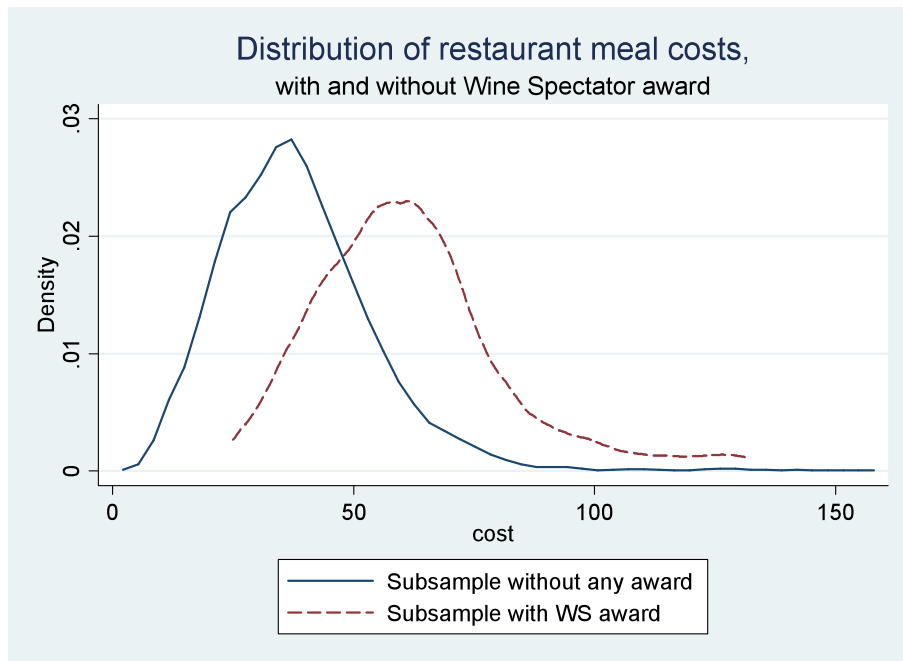
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- [\(cur\)](#) [\(prev\)](#) [04:16, 19 May 2009](#) [156.199.177.126](#) ([talk](#)) (5,867 bytes) *(This user seems to be representing Wine Spectator—this link is clearly relevant)* [\(undo\)](#)
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- [\(cur\)](#) [\(prev\)](#) [12:51, 27 September 2008](#) [Discospinster](#) ([talk](#) | [contribs](#)) m (5,570 bytes) *(Reverted edits by 156.34.89.233 to last version by Murgh (HG))* [\(undo\)](#)
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Regression analysis (Ashenfelter, Goldstein, and Riddell, 2010)

- Presence of WS Award raises meal costs by \$ 8.52 (21% of \$40.90), holding constant quality of food, décor and service: basic award raises cost by \$4.29 (11%), “Best Of” by \$16.32 (40%), and “Grand Award” by \$19.73 (48%).



Variable	cost	cost
food	0.8597 (0.2181)***	0.8036 (0.2177)***
decor	1.4822 (0.1484)***	1.4718 (0.1479)***
service	2.6337 (0.2525)***	2.5936 (0.2518)***
Any award	8.5158 (1.7126)***	-
Award of Excellence	-	4.2920 (2.0363)**
Best award of excellence	-	16.3244 (2.9382)***
Grand award	-	19.7278 (7.1131)***
Constant	-50.5794 (3.7324)***	-48.5250 (3.7576)***
Obs	1712	1712
R-squared	0.41	0.42
F-test: the coefficients on the 3 dummies are equal	-	7.34 Prob>F = 0.0007

Conclusions from the experiment



nce does not measure or

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e or signal?

Should a Wine Spectator award be considered an “endorsement”?

- Cost of basic endorsement is \$250; cost of additional ads in awards issue ranges from \$3,090 to \$8,810
- Endorsement is available to anyone
- FTC Endorsement Guides § 255.0(b): “An endorsement means any advertising message (including verbal statements, demonstrations, or depictions of the name, signature, likeness or other identifying personal characteristics of an individual or the name or seal of an organization) that consumers are likely to believe reflects the opinions, beliefs, findings, or experiences of a party other than the sponsoring advertiser, even if the views expressed by that party are identical to those of the sponsoring advertiser. The party whose opinions, beliefs, findings, or experience the message appears to reflect will be called the endorser and may be an individual, group, or institution.”
- Maybe the disclosure rules would apply (on a case-by-case basis) to *Wine Spectator*. But there should be no safe harbor for print media in the Guide.

If Endorsement Guide rules were applied to *Wine Spectator*, the Award of Excellence would be considered deceptive advertising

- Endorsement Guides § 255.3(b): “Although the expert may, in endorsing a product, take into account factors not within his or her expertise (e.g., matters of taste or price), the endorsement must be supported by an actual exercise of that expertise in evaluating product features or characteristics with respect to which he or she is expert and which are relevant to an ordinary consumer’s use of or experience with the product and are available to the ordinary consumer. This evaluation must have included an examination or testing of the product at least as extensive as someone with the same degree of expertise would normally need to conduct in order to support the conclusions presented in the endorsement.”
- Endorsement Guides § 255.3(b): “To the extent that the advertisement implies that the endorsement was based upon a comparison, such comparison must have been included in the expert’s evaluation; and as a result of such comparison, the expert must have concluded that, with respect to those features on which he or she is expert and which are relevant and available to an ordinary consumer, the endorsed product is at least equal overall to the competitors’ products. Moreover, where the net impression created by the endorsement is that the advertised product is superior to other products with respect to any such feature or features, then the expert must in fact have found such superiority.”

Where should we go from here?

- Voluntary disclosure is the best kind
- bloggerdisclosure.org



- Establishing social norms can function as a powerful means of regulation
Ideal is to create a culture of compliance

Robin Goldstein

- My blog: blindtaste.com
- My books: *The Wine Trials*, *The Beer Trials*, *Fearless Critic* restaurant guides
- Fearless Critic site: fearlesscritic.com
- Email: robin@fearlesscritic.com
- Twitter: [robinsgoldstein](https://twitter.com/robinsgoldstein)