



The Unauthorized Guide to *Wine Spectator*

SAMPLE COPY

Fourth Edition

Copyright © 2003 by Wine Angels
www.wineangels.com
orders@wineangels.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of Wine Angels.

This publication is provided "as is", for your information only, without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, including but not limited to, implied warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose and non-infringement. You assume all risks concerning the suitability and accuracy of the information within this publication. This publication may contain technical inaccuracies or typographical errors. Wine Angels assumes no responsibility for and disclaims all liability for any such inaccuracies, errors or omissions in this publication.

This guide has not been prepared, approved, licensed, endorsed, or in any way authorized by any entity involved in creating and publishing Wine Spectator. Wine Angels is not affiliated with Wine Spectator.

Table Of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	4
LIST OF TABLES	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
SCOPE.....	6
METHODOLOGY	6
MAJOR FINDINGS.....	6
RECOMMENDATIONS	6
WINE SPECTATOR BACKGROUND	7
THE REVIEWERS	7
THE WINE SPECTATOR METHODOLOGY	7
NUMBER OF WINES REVIEWED ANNUALLY.....	7
NUMBER OF REVIEWS BY VINTAGE IN 2002.....	9
THE WINE SPECTATOR 100 POINT SCALE	10
SCORE FREQUENCY.....	10
CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION AND FREQUENCY BY SCORE RANGE	11
AVERAGE SCORE.....	12
AVERAGE SCORE BY REGION AND VARIETAL BY VINTAGE	12
AVERAGE SCORE AND RETAIL PRICE BY WINE TYPE.....	12
RETAIL PRICE AND AVERAGE SCORE BY VINTAGE	13
RETAIL PRICES OF WINES REVIEWED BY YEAR	13
INCREASE IN REVIEWS OF IMPORTED WINES	14
CASE AVAILABILITY TO AVERAGE SCORE CORRELATION	16
RETAIL PRICE TO AVERAGE SCORE CORRELATION.....	17
THE SPECTATOR SELECTIONS	18
BEST BUYS/BEST VALUES	19
SPECTATOR SELECTIONS/SMART BUYS.....	20
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.....	21
CELLAR SELECTIONS/COLLECTIBLES	22
SUMMARY OF SPECTATOR SELECTIONS ANALYSIS.....	23
SPECTATOR SELECTION COMPETITION	23
WRITTEN REVIEWS	25
CALIFORNIA – JAMES LAUBE – CHARDONNAY	26
THE ANNUAL TOP 100 LIST	28
WHY SOME WINES MAKE THE LIST AND OTHERS DON'T	28
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	30

(continued on next page)

Table of Contents

(continued from previous page)

APPENDIX 1	31
ANNUAL REVIEW DETAILS BY COUNTRY/US STATE 1993 THROUGH 2002	31
ANNUAL SPECTATOR SELECTIONS BY CALIFORNIA REGION 1999 THROUGH 2002	33
APPENDIX 2	34
ANNUAL TOP 100 DETAILS BY COUNTRY	34
APPENDIX 3	36
LIST OF AVERAGE SCORES, AVERAGE RETAIL, NUMBER OF REVIEWS AND NUMBER OF SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS BY COUNTRY/US STATE IN 2002	36
APPENDIX 4	37
REVIEW DETAILS BY COUNTRY/US STATE IN 2002 (ALL VINTAGES)	37
APPENDIX 5	40
AVERAGE SCORE BY VARIETAL AND BY VINTAGE WITHIN REGION	40

List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Wine Spectator</i> number of wines reviewed annually 1993 through 2002	7
Figure 2. Red wines reviewed in 2002	9
Figure 3. White wines reviewed in 2002	9
Figure 4. Score frequency 1993	10
Figure 5. Score frequency 2002	10
Figure 6. Reviews by score range 1993	11
Figure 7. Reviews by score range 2002	11
Figure 8. Annual average score 1993 through 2002	12
Figure 9. Average score and retail price by vintage	13
Figure 10. Average retail price by year	13
Figure 11. Reviews by country 1993 vs. 2002	14
Figure 12. Reviews by country 1993	15
Figure 13. Reviews by country 2002	15
Figure 14. Average score by case availability range.....	16
Figure 15. Retail price to average score correlation 2002 (\$5 to \$100).....	17
Figure 16. Retail price to average score correlation 2002 (\$5 to \$25)	17
Figure 17. "Best Values" average score and retail price by year	19
Figure 18. "Best Values" retail price by score 2002	19
Figure 19. "Smart Buys" average score and average retail by year	20
Figure 20. "Smart Buys" retail price ranges by score 2002	20
Figure 21. "Highly Recommended" average score and average retail by year	21
Figure 22. "Highly Recommended" retail price by score 2002	21
Figure 23. "Collectibles" average score and average retail by year	22
Figure 24. "Collectibles" retail price by score 2002	22
Figure 25. Most frequently occurring flavor and aroma attributes with avg. score – James Laube – Chardonnay	27

List Of Tables

Table 1. <i>Wine Spectator</i> editors and their reviews in 2002	7
Table 2. Average score by wine type.....	12
Table 3. Reviews by country 1993 vs. 2002	14
Table 4. Score, price and case availability ranges by "Spectator Selection" in 2002.....	23
Table 5. Annual number of "Best Values" by country/US state 1999 to 2002.....	23
Table 6. Annual number of "Smart Buys" by country/US state 1999 to 2002.....	24
Table 7. Annual number of "Highly Recommended" by country/US state 1999 to 2002	24
Table 8. Annual number of "Collectibles" by country/US state 1999 to 2002	24
Table 9. James Laube Chardonnay Flavor/Aroma Attributes.....	26
Table 10. 2002 Average retail price Top 100 vs. Non-Top 100	28
Table 11. 2002 Average case availability Top 100 vs. Non-Top 100	28
Table 12. 2002 Top 100 criteria by score.....	29
Table 13. Annual number of Spectator Selections by country/US state 1993 through 2002	31
Table 14. Spectator Selections as percentage of total annual reviews 1993 through 2002	31
Table 15. Annual number of reviews by country/US state 1993 through 2002	32
Table 16. Best Values by California region 1999 to 2002	33
Table 17. Smart Buys by California region 1999 to 2002	33
Table 18. Highly Recommended by California region 1999 to 2002.....	33
Table 19. Collectibles by California region 1999 to 2002	33
Table 20. Top 100 details by country/US State 2002	34
Table 21. Number of Top 100 Listings by Country/US State 1999 to 2002	34
Table 22. Annual Number of Top 100 Listings by Region 1999 to 2002.....	35
Table 23. 2002 Averages and counts by country/US state.....	36
Table 24. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country - Argentina	37
Table 25. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country - Austria	37
Table 26. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country/US State - California	37
Table 27. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country – Chile.....	38
Table 28. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country - France.....	38
Table 29. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country - Italy.....	39
Table 30. 2002 Averages and counts by region by country – South Africa	39
Table 31. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California Bay Area/Central Coast ..	40
Table 32. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California- Carneros.....	40
Table 33. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California- Mendocino/Lake.....	41
Table 34. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California- Napa.....	41
Table 35. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California- Other California	42
Table 36. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California- Sierra Foothills	42
Table 37. Average score by varietal and by vintage - California- Sonoma	43
Table 38. Average score by varietal and by vintage – California- South Coast	44
Table 39. Average score by varietal and by vintage – Oregon.....	45
Table 40. Average score by varietal and by vintage – Washington.....	45
Table 41. Average score by varietal and by vintage – Australia.....	46
Table 42. Average score by varietal and by vintage – New Zealand	46

Executive Summary

The purpose of this guide is to help wineries gain an understanding of *Wine Spectator's* scoring methodology. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with point-based rating systems, a strong review can be an incredible asset in this increasingly competitive industry. This guide will also highlight correlations between score and any other independent variables.

Scope

Although 19 years worth of reviews, or over 116,000 reviews, are available on *Wine Spectator's* website, in some cases it proved more pertinent and accurate to limit the analysis to the last 10 years. For the most part, the analysis in this guide focuses on comparisons between the years 1993 and 2002 and any trends developing during the ten-year period. The analysis is restricted to what *Wine Spectator* reports and makes available on its website.

Methodology

Score, retail price, case availability, "Spectator Selections"¹ and Top 100 placements were analyzed for this guide. Most of the analysis was done by year of review and not by vintage, unless otherwise specified.

Major Findings

Correlations exist where expected. On average, score is related to pricing and case availability. This guide also finds that the number of high scoring wines has exploded over the past decade. The number of wines scoring between 85 and 100 points has more than tripled from 2,150 in 1993 to almost 8,000 in 2002. Meanwhile, competition for "Spectator Selections" and Top 100's is increasing. More wines are being reviewed, but as a percentage less "Spectator Selections" are being awarded.

Recommendations

Although there are no proven strategies for improving score, wineries can take certain steps to ensure that their wines fit the criteria for "Spectator Selections" and the Top 100 list. These steps include:

- Providing accurate retail price and case availability information to *Wine Spectator*.
- Being aware of retail price and case availability requirements for certain "Spectator Selections" and Top 100 placements.

This guide is written without any preconceptions or agendas. It is based on facts and figures analyzed using sound statistical methods. Although it is understood that *Wine Spectator* conducts all of its tastings blind, patterns cannot be ignored where they exist. All the relevant data has simply been analyzed and recommendations to wineries have been made where appropriate.

In a separate report, the hypothesis that advertising contributes to the so-called "X-factor" used by *Wine Spectator* to highlight certain wines over others is analyzed. The report, *Advertisers and Wine Spectator Magazine: 1999 through 2002*, includes a full listing of winery advertisers in *Wine Spectator* magazine and advertising dollars spent annually between 1999 and 2002. The report can be purchased at www.wineangels.com. For a sample of the advertising report, please go to the reports section of our website.

¹ Throughout this guide we will refer to specific terms used by *Wine Spectator*. When used, any such terminology will be captured within quotation marks.

The Wine Spectator Methodology

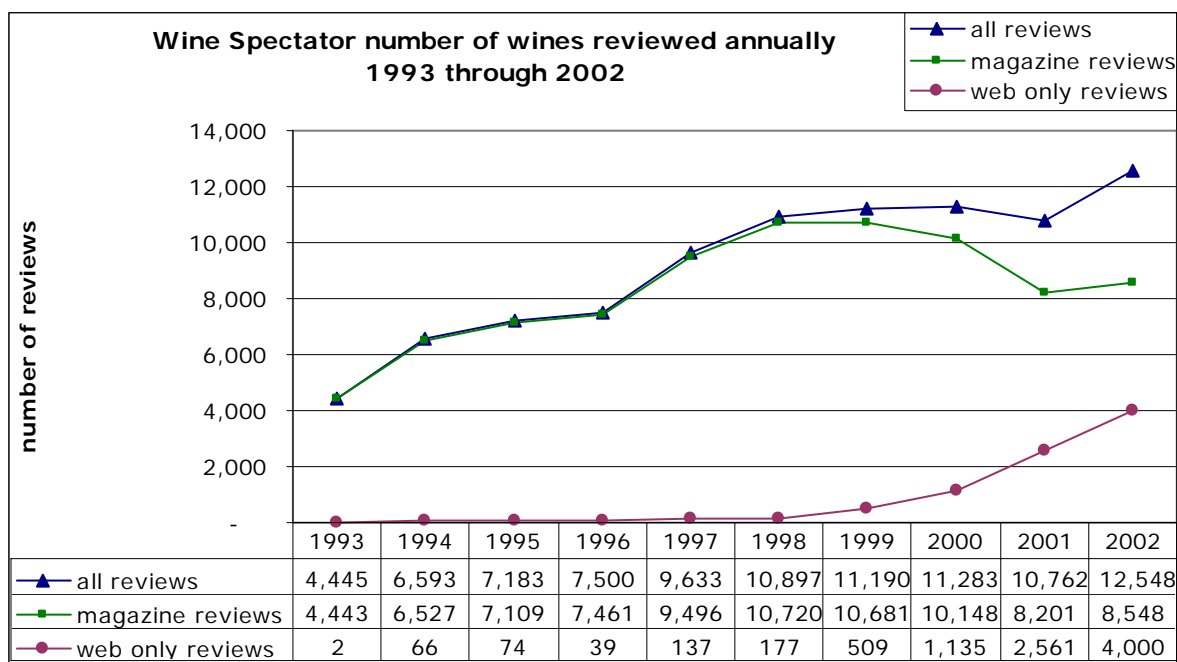
The three components of a *Wine Spectator* review are score, the possible awarding of a "Spectator Selection", and written review. This guide analyzes all three components and sheds light on the methodology used by *Wine Spectator*. The editors review wines both sent to them from wineries and wines they purchase based on national availability. The wines are tasted blind by either a panel or an editor. The scores and comments are then entered into a database before the wine is revealed to the reviewer. Once the name of the wine is revealed, additional comments may be added, but according to *Wine Spectator*, no changes are made to the original score.

Number of Wines Reviewed Annually

The number of wines reviewed by *Wine Spectator* peaked in 2002 at 12,548. The overall number of wines being reviewed annually is increasing, as are the number of reviews only being published online. Since the launch of *Wine Spectator's* website in 1996, more than 10,000 wines have been reviewed and only published online. As illustrated in figure 1, the growth in "web only" reviews has been very rapid in the last four years. Additionally, *Wine Spectator* has gone back and retroactively added "web only" reviews to years as early as 1983.

Although the so-called "web only" reviews are not printed in the magazine, wineries should be aware of their existence as they do occasionally include strong reviews. In 2002, a "web only" wine even made it on to the Top 100 list; Isabel Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough, 2001, ranked 52nd on the list. The analysis shows that "web only" reviews on average are reserved for wines from more obscure wine growing regions with slightly lower than average retail prices and scores.

Figure 1. *Wine Spectator* number of wines reviewed annually 1993 through 2002



The Wine Spectator 100 Point Scale

Score Frequency

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the number of reviews at each score level in 1993 and in 2002. In 1993, scores are almost evenly divided between 82 and 86 points, whereas in 2002 there is a clear spike around 87 points. This is the first indication of an increase in average score in the last 10 years and an increase in the number of wines scoring between 85 and 89 points.

Figure 4. Score frequency 1993

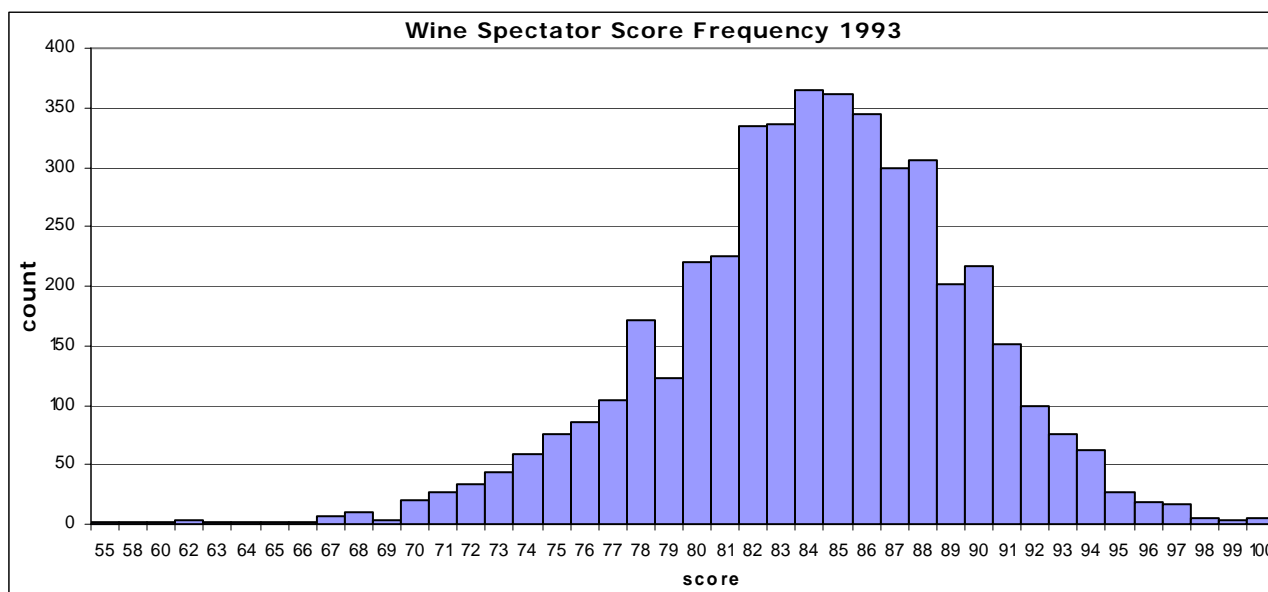
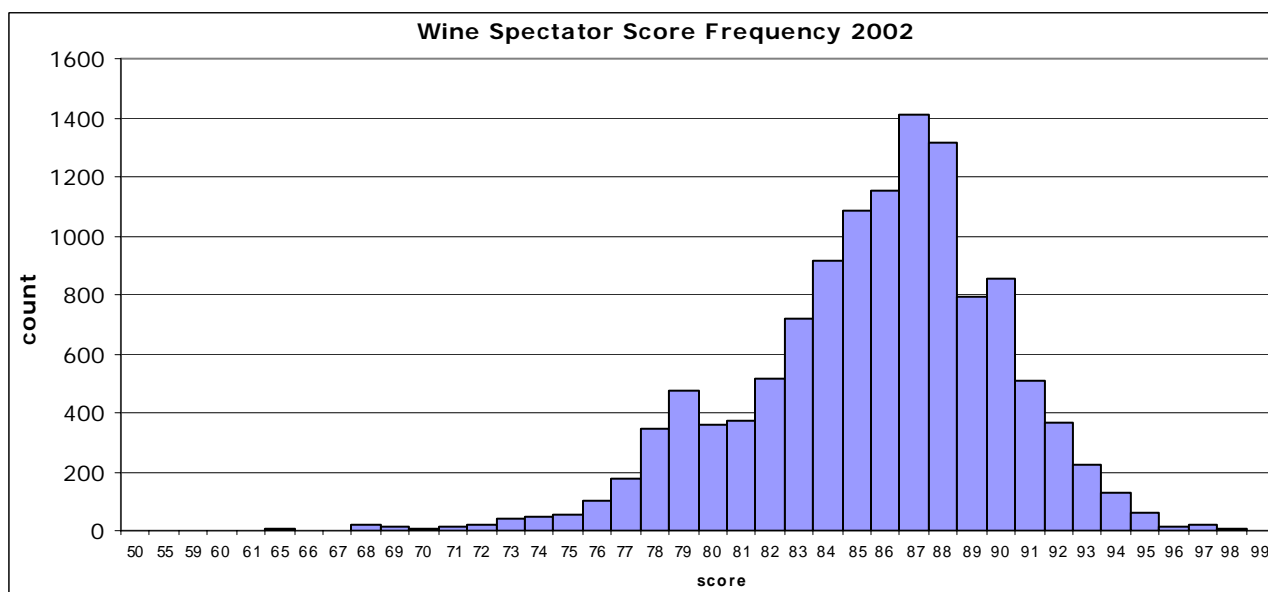


Figure 5. Score frequency 2002



Increase in Reviews of Imported Wines (continued)

Figure 12. Reviews by country 1993

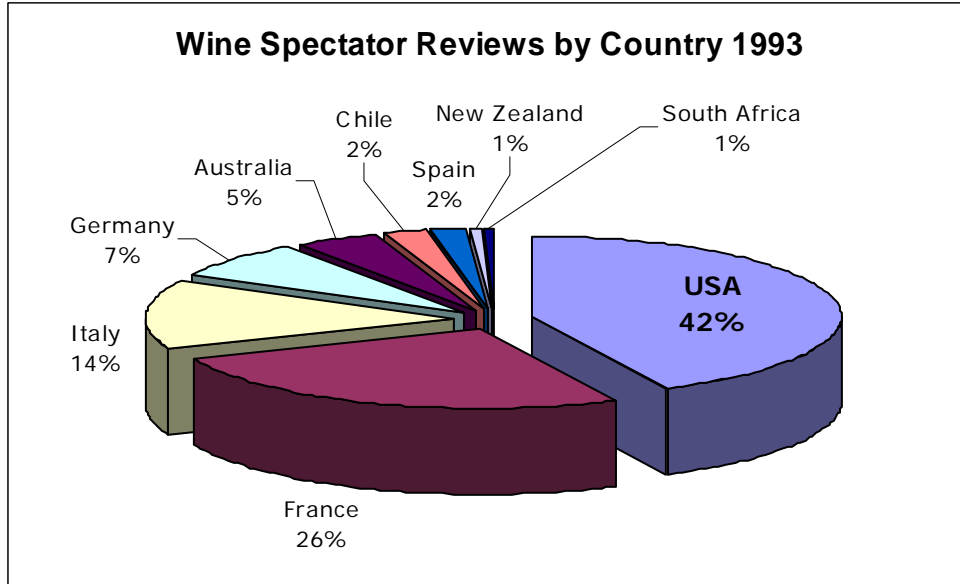
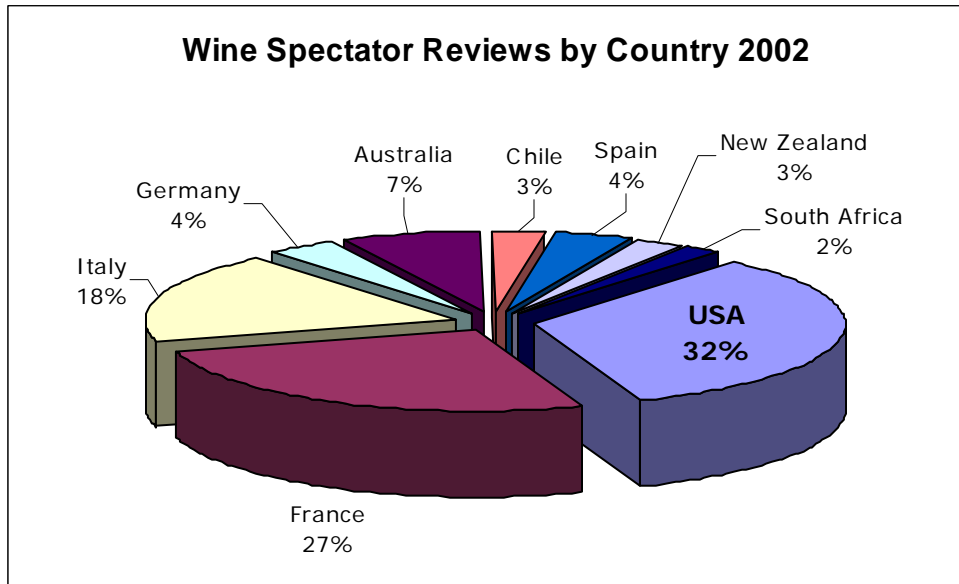


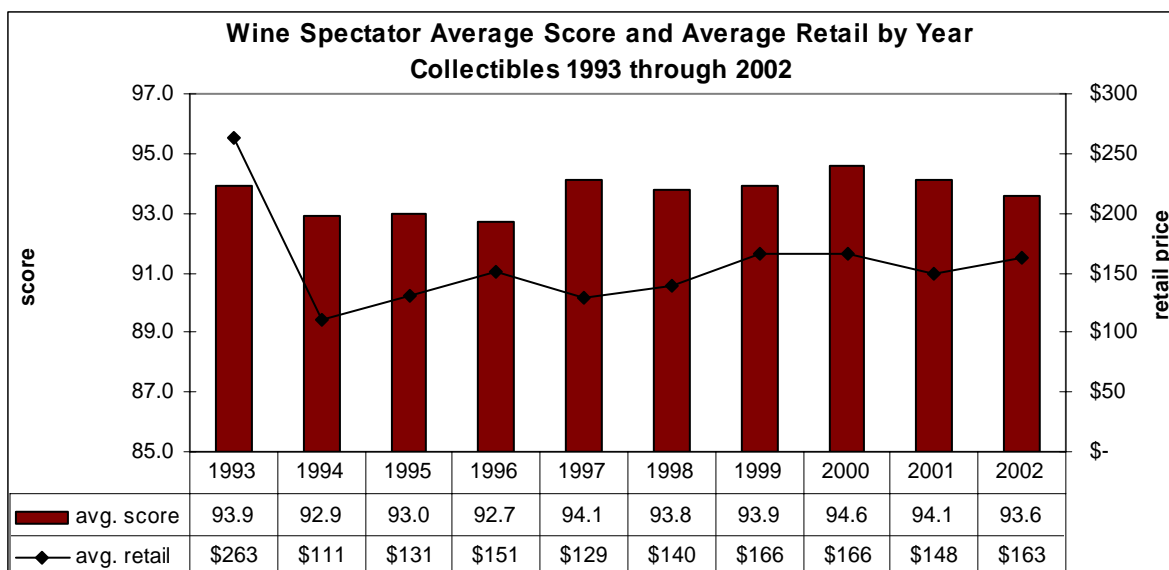
Figure 13. Reviews by country 2002



Cellar Selections/Collectibles

Over the last 10 years the average score and retail price of a “Collectible” wine was 93.8 points and \$155.70 respectively. The average retail price and average score of “Collectibles” have remained fairly steady in the last 10 years. Although this category is not used by very many wineries to market their wines, it is an important designation for higher priced red wines. In 2002, 89 percent of all “collectibles” were red wines.

Figure 23. “Collectibles” average score and average retail by year



As one might expect, the retail prices of wines falling within this range are much higher than the overall average. These wines are selected for their ability to age and increase in value. In 2002, 65 wines were categorized as “Collectibles” and had an average score of 93.6 points and an average retail price of \$163. Figure 24 shows a weak correlation between retail price and average score within the category.

Figure 24. “Collectibles” retail price by score 2002

