

Len Evans and his Theory of Capacity Jim Sikes for 091109

Len Evans was one of Australia's finest wine proponents. He touted its attributes while exhorting the local wineries to produce better wines and export them. He was there when Australia came of age in the wine world.

Evans wrote the first real encyclopedia on Australian wine. He became a winery owner and exporter. Up until his death in 2006, he was a tireless promoter of Australian wine.

An interesting fact about Len Evans is that he was part of a duo that produced a book titled "The Galloping Gourmets." Evans and Graham Kerr made a month-long stint to experience a long list of restaurants. The name stuck with Kerr who later hosted a TV show called "The Galloping Gourmet."

During his career Len Evans penned what he called his Theory of Capacity. That's what I want to tell you about. Lots of what he says is true. It deserves a close look.

The first tenant of Evans theory is: "There is an awful lot of wine in the world, but there is also a lot of awful wine."

That is true but not as much so as when Evans first wrote this. There are some nice wines in the \$12 range and a few lower. There are some \$20 clunkers too. You have to look around and ask.

Number two is: "No sensible person drinks to excess. Therefore any one person can drink only a certain predictable amount."

I agree with that. Two or three five-ounce glasses of wine at a full meal are quite fine. A larger meal with many courses may involve more wines but usually smaller portions.

When we have dinners at Jimmy's that pair food and wine, the wine portions are about three ounces. So five of those are less than three regular six-ounce glasses.

Statement number three is true for most people, too: "There are countless flavors, nuances, shades of wine; endless varieties, regions, styles. You have neither the time nor the capacity to drink them all."

Now I've been fortunate enough to taste hundreds of different wines. I still taste 40 or so every month - sometimes more. I've been to tastings where there were 20 assorted wines. And then some, where there were 20 different Chardonnays. I particularly like those where there are 20 different Champagnes.

Tenant four is the heart of his theory of capacity: "To make the most of the time left to you, you must start by calculating your future capacity. One bottle of wine a day is 365 bottles a year. If your life expectancy is another fifteen years, there are only 5,000-odd bottles ahead of you."

He's right. I've always told people that if you don't buy three cases of wine a month, you'll get behind. At a bottle a day and a couple of extras on weekends, three cases are gone. You'll soon run out.

The fifth statement is very important: "People who say, 'You can't drink the good stuff all the time' are talking rubbish. You must drink good stuff all the time. Every time you drink a bottle of inferior wine it's like smashing a superior bottle against the wall. The pleasure is lost forever. You can't get the bottle back."

There's lots of good stuff out there. Then there's even better stuff. And then there's what my friend Bill Boulton calls "nectar." It's easy to tell when he's found one: his bright blue eyes start to shine and his smile is as broad as Andy Griffith's.

Most nectar comes at a dear ticket. Some does not. Finding those is fun. Most of the others you pass along the way aren't bad either.

"There are people who build up huge cellars, most of which they have no hope of drinking. They are foolish in overestimating their capacity, but they err on the right side and their friends love them" is tenant number six.

Most of those folks don't intend to drink it all anyway. They have parties or dinners. Some collect and sell. Others just look at it like artwork - mighty fine artwork.

Alfred Hitchcock was into wines. He said that 2000 bottles was just right for a wine cellar. It is enough for some variety but not so much that you can't drink it. He was not a wine collector. He was an appreciator and consumer.

If you follow Evans' assumption, 2000 bottles is about four years worth of wine or maybe a little more. That sounds like a nice cushion so that you won't run out too quickly.

Number seven is: "There are also people who don't want to drink good wine and are happy with the cheapies. I forgive them. There are others who are content with beer and spirits. I can't worry about everybody."

Hey, Evans was a "good wine" guy. Folks like that assure that there will be plenty of "Ripple" and "MD 20-20" left on the shelves.

In his eighth statement Evans said, "Wine is not meant to be enjoyed merely for its own sake, it is the key to love and laughter with friends, to the enjoyment of food and beauty and humor and art and music. It rewards us far beyond its cost."

To food and wine lovers he got that one spot on. Wine is best with food and friends. A fine wine is as strong a creation as any art or music. No question that it is beauty in a bottle. A bottle of wine is a great souvenir of a trip. Its enjoyment down the line will far outweigh tee shirts, tote bags and salt and pepper shakers. Just make sure you keep taking pictures.

The ninth says: "What part is wine of your life? Ten percent? Then ten percent of your income should be spent on wine."

Let's look at that one. 365 bottles a year at \$15 is about \$5,500. That's not a bad price for a year's worth of pleasure, pleasure every day. Along with that pleasure come the enhanced enjoyment of food and the appreciation of the winemaker's art. There are times your mouth will sing with joy and your soul won't be far behind.

So give Len Evans' Theory of Capacity some thought. If sharing a bottle of wine every day is not for you, make it a couple of days a week. Because when you share that bottle, you'll share food and part of your life with others – your family. You'll take the time to sit together and be "one."

My theory is I have an endless capacity for times like that.