

# tasting notes

wine views & reviews



**Bad cork, or something else?** Too often, good wine disappoints. It's all the rage these days to blame a tainted cork. But what role does storage play in the ultimate quality of a wine?

Answer: A huge one.

The intensity and texture of fruit flavors in wine are extremely sensitive to warm storage conditions, even if such conditions last only a short time. In fact, exposure to heat can render excellent wine undrinkable, although—and here's the kicker—the mistreatment may not affect the wine's taste until a year or more *after* it occurs. When it does kick in, though, the effect is profound, causing wine to lose all delicacy.

One summer day a few years ago, a friend and I removed six bottles from a full case of Grand Cru Burgundy that had been stored in a 55° cellar, and placed them in a hot garage. A single day, we thought, would be enough to simulate the conditions found in a temporarily overheated warehouse, or in an un-refrigerated truck, or on a shelf near a retailer's heating vent, or even in a large seagoing container with a failed cooling system. Then we returned the six overheated bottles to the 55° cellar, with marked labels, of course, so as not to confuse them with the remaining bottles.

Then, every six months or so, we tasted two bottles side by side, one mistreated and the other not. In the first tasting, there was little difference. But as time passed, the

mistreated wine lost its fruit and acquired a hard edge. By the fourth time we tasted the wines, on the second anniversary of the dastardly deed, the mistreated bottle was downright undrinkable—I had to spit out my mouthful. Meanwhile, the other bottle had a velvet texture and full fruit flavors: it was the great wine that it was supposed to be, with a fine, long life ahead of it.

The moral of this story? The regulatory agencies that supposedly control the wine industry for the benefit of the public should require that wine shippers, wholesalers, and retailers certify that their wines have never suffered from excessive heat or other mistreatment. Much as wine-labeling laws certify a wine's place of origin, so should sellers and distributors certify proper storage. If a wine was subjected to unfortunate conditions, a disclosure tag can easily be placed onto a bottle of wine—which means that the wine should be drunk up, or sold at a discount, or not at all.

Wine consumers should not be forced to inspect bottles for signs of mistreatment (by looking for seepage under the cap from expanded heated wine) or forced to wait until that moment of truth years later at a dinner party. Wine should be treated more like milk and less like vodka—by everyone who touches it and sells it. Even if we mortals don't deserve it, certainly many wines do.

—Condé Thompson Cox

**With tasting panels** in both Oregon and British Columbia, **Northwest Palate** reviews Pacific Northwest wines in the following manner: Wines reviewed for each issue are submitted directly from wineries or sourced through local distributors. Our panels blind-taste each sample in flights of 3–6 wines, grouped by vintage and varietal. Approximately an hour is devoted to each flight. Wines are evaluated and discussed by the judges before winery names and prices are disclosed.

Wines are judged on aroma, flavor, balance, and finish. Flawed wines or wines devoid of varietal character are not recommended. Corked wines are re-tasted from a new bottle. Our reviews of recommended wines are published, often with food-matching suggestions.

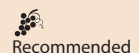
Wine tasting and reviewing is by nature subjective, but in each issue, we offer judgments by the same tasters, thereby affording our readership consistency of opinion. The Portland panel consists of Cameron Nagel, editor and publisher of **Northwest Palate**, and Larry Halkinrude, wine buyer for Elephant's Delicatessen in Portland. Our British Columbia panel consists of Vancouverites Harry Hertscheg, manager of the Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival and Anita Boomer, an advertising manager at the University of British Columbia.

## tastingkey

Wines exhibiting complexity, varietal focus, and excellent structure (balanced fruit and acid in white wines; balanced fruit, acid, and tannins in reds) are rated **Exceptional**. Wines that are well-balanced and exhibit varietal focus and persistent flavors are **Highly Recommended**. Well-made wines displaying good varietal character and balance are **Recommended**.

 Exceptional

 Highly Recommended

 Recommended