

Choosing the right bottle

7 Nov 2006 by Jancis Robinson

Here, faced with the array of bottles in a wine store, do you pick the right one off the shelf? Here are five random but specific suggestions:



Decide on a price bracket and stick to it, but it can be worth spending at the top of that bracket.



Take a look at special offers. In today's competitive marketplace, heavily scrutinized by a bevy of wine critics, these bargains are almost certainly there to lure you into the shop, or make you aware of a new wine rather than to offend anybody. But, unfortunately, few of the most interesting wines feature in these promotions.



If possible, pick a bottle that has been on its side, and has not obviously been kept anywhere the temperature may have varied considerably. Acid bottles which have been standing upright in strong light (although supermarkets turn their stock over so fast this is not usually a problem and better specialist stores have a policy of constantly changing the one representative bottle from a horizontal to that is stood upright). Be wary of bottles which have 'wept' around the cork or have a relatively low fill level as both of these are signs of temperature variation.



Try to grasp the names at least and classify the characteristics of the major grape varieties: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Syrah/Shiraz among reds. If, once you become relatively familiar with the most common wine names, you spot a bottle that seems to have a completely unrecognizable pedigree, give it a try. It is probably there only because someone passionately believes in its inherent quality; wine buyers generally are on the side of caution. The well-known international wine brands such as Meusnier, Blossom Hill, Jacob's Creek, Gallo, Turning Leaf and Mission Caden can offer a reliable minimum quality level in a strange place with a very limited selection but are usually relatively expensive (if that advertising has to be paid for).



Be wary of wines designed for early consumption that are more than two years old.



Remember that very expensive wines (especially reds) carrying vintage dates less than three or four years old are almost certainly years from being fun to drink.



Try to take a note of any wine you particularly like so that you can find similar styles of wine.

