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Wine experts sharply disagreed on when Argentine bottles should be drunk, a study found

Professionals in five countries split even over a 35-year-old wine, suggesting one drinking window can mislead buyers

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A study published Friday, November 20, in the journal npj Science of Food found that wine professionals in five countries often disagreed sharply when asked to judge how long a wine could continue aging and when it should be consumed.

The research involved 140 wine professionals in Bordeaux, London, São Paulo, Chengdu and Davis, California. In blind tastings, they evaluated 13 Argentine wines from a single producer, including nine reds and four whites that ranged from 3 to 35 years old. Each participant rated how much they liked the wines, estimated an aging window and described sensory traits.

The authors said the work addressed a basic question in the wine world: whether experts in different markets read the same wine in the same way, and whether a wine's perceived aging potential is closely tied to how much people like it. Their answer was mixed. The panels showed some common ground in how they described the wines, but they also showed meaningful differences in language and in their judgments about drinkability and future aging.

For the red wines, the researchers found a shared descriptive core. Of 83 descriptors used in the study, 54 appeared at every site. Even so, the way those terms were used varied enough across locations that the panels were less aligned than the researchers would have expected by chance. The paper said that difference was especially clear in Bordeaux, where tasters placed more emphasis on structure and signs of evolution.

The study also found that estimates of future aging generally became shorter as bottle age increased, at least for the red wines. The authors reported an odds ratio of 0.30 for every 10.9 additional years of age, indicating that older bottles were more likely to be placed in shorter remaining drinking windows. But those broad patterns did not produce agreement. At every age level, professionals still spread their judgments across several categories.

That dispersion was visible even with the oldest wine in the tasting. For the 35-year-old bottle, more than one-third of the panelists still judged it to be at its optimum or even later, rather than clearly past peak. The authors said that level of disagreement suggests a single aging label can hide substantial variation in professional opinion.

The link between liking and projected aging potential was present, but limited. The study reported a modest positive relationship, with a rho value of 0.37. In practical terms, that means wines judged capable of longer aging were somewhat more likely to be liked, but the connection was far from strong enough to treat the two measures as

the same thing.

The authors argued that because professional judgments varied so widely, the distribution of opinions may be more useful than a single category assigned to a wine. That point could matter beyond academic tasting panels. For wineries, importers, retailers and collectors, the findings suggest that a single expert drinking window may oversimplify how a wine is likely to be received in different markets. It could also prompt a broader review of how aging recommendations are communicated on sales materials, in trade discussions and in critic-led evaluations, especially when those judgments are used across countries.

The study focused on wines from one Argentine producer rather than a wider mix of regions and wineries, but it covered bottles with a wide age span and brought together professionals from major wine centers in Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia. The paper's author list included researchers from the Catena Institute of Wine, the University of California, Davis, and institutions in Bordeaux.

The journal article disclosed that the research was partially funded by the Catena Institute of Wine, which is affiliated with Bodega Catena Zapata, the commercial winery that produced the wines used in the study. The authors said that beyond the contributions of named authors affiliated with the institute, the funder had no role in data analysis, interpretation of the results or the decision to submit the manuscript. The paper also disclosed that one co-author is scientific director at Seguin Moreau Cooperage, which the authors said did not fund the study and had no role in the research process.