

Lovely bubbly: Price isn't everything with champagne

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(Phys.org) —Expert wine tasters cannot tell which grapes are in sparkling wines when asked to taste them blind, an Oxford University-led study has found.

And the champagnes they rated highly weren't always the most

expensive, showing that you don't necessarily have to fork out when buying champers for your Christmas party.

The scientists tested the claim that the relative proportions of red and white grapes each contribute distinct flavours to champagne. They found that although expert champagne tasters could detect differences between sparkling wines, their perception of the proportions of different grapes in sparkling wines was influenced by other factors instead.

The researchers from Oxford University and the Centre for the Study of the Senses, University of London, conducted a blind tasting experiment. They asked participants to drink a selection of different sparkling wines from black tasting glasses and to report back on the proportion of white grapes in each. The champagnes ranged from blancs de blancs, composed of 100% white grapes, to blancs de noir, from 100% red grapes.

Although the researchers hypothesised that the expert tasters might be better able to distinguish the types of grape in the wine, the results showed that no one was able to accurately judge the proportion of white grapes. Instead, the perceived proportion of white grapes in the wines was dependent on the sugar and alcohol content.

While the expert champagne tasters were not able to judge the percentage of white grapes in the wine, they were able to discern the difference between the wines more readily and rated them differently than did social drinkers.

'We hypothesise that success in blending has made it more difficult for tasters to identify the particular contributions made by each grape variety to the overall flavour profile,' says lead researcher Professor Charles Spence of the Department of Experimental Psychology at Oxford University.

The results reported in the journal *Flavour* add to previous work suggesting that a complex combination of factors plays a strong role in forming people's opinion on the taste or quality of a wine.

In the case of [champagne](#), the perception of flavour depends on different factors, including price and brand, as well as alcohol and sugar content.

More information: Study paper:
www.flavourjournal.com/content/2/1/25

Provided by Oxford University

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