

# A new study shows that wine experts differ by geographic region

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Credit: Concordia University

When it comes to wine experts, some are more alike than others.

Concordia researcher Bianca Grohmann found that [geographic location](#) is a factor affecting how Canadian wine experts rate quality, as well as some of wine's sensory attributes—things like balance and acidity.

"We discovered a 'two solitudes'-type situation in the results between two panels of wine experts from distinct geographic areas: one panel from the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, and one panel from Montreal, Quebec," says Grohmann, a marketing professor at Concordia's John Molson School of Business, who co-authored the study with Camilo Peña and Annamma Joy.

"This has implications for the general public because consumers shouldn't think of wine experts as having one voice, but as distinct and influenced by their location and tradition," says Grohmann, co-director of the Centre for Sensory Studies.

"Our work shows how flavour profiles are perceived and received differently in two regions, which can inform marketing decisions."

Grohmann's findings, published recently in *The Journal of Wine Research*, note that Montreal wine experts detected more acidity, bitterness, oak, spice, green bell pepper, balance, vegetal and taint or "off" flavour compared to the Okanagan panel.

Oddly, both groups detected a stronger berry aroma in completely different wines. Additionally, the Okanagan panel gave higher quality scores where they detected more spicy aromas, whereas the Montreal panel put more weight on a wine's balance.

## **2 provinces, 7 labels, 22 experts**

In two 60-minute blind tasting sessions, the panelists tasted seven bottles of red wine—merlot, pinot noir, shiraz, and four red blends. Experts

evaluated each label on seven aroma attributes and nine flavour attributes.

"Wine professionals in B.C. lean toward the U.K. education model—a certification called the Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET)," says Grohmann. "Whereas the Quebec panel of experts came from the French sommeliers tradition and wine journalism. We see these differing education backgrounds and socio-cultural contexts as important influencing factors."

In the blind tests, both panels agreed that the 2014 30 Mile shiraz from South Eastern Australia was the best quality, denoted by the highest overall score.

Yet, the panels disagreed on the 2015 Apothic Red from California. It rated much higher in quality by Okanagan tasters.

"That particular bottle of red is interesting because it's engineered to convey good balance and taste, rather than being a pure wine from a vineyard," says Grohmann. "The Montreal panel—perhaps more purist—was less forgiving. However, they were more tolerant of wine with faults and 'off'-flavour perceptions."

She sees the disagreement over the 2015 Apothic Red as an Old World versus New World wine tradition, tied to geography and [wine](#) training.

"For the marketing of wines, an awareness of differences in training, sensory assessments and subsequent consumer preferences is critical in either targeting distribution or direct marketing," says Grohmann.

**More information:** Bianca Grohmann et al, Wine quality and sensory assessments: do distinct local groups of wine experts differ?, *Journal of Wine Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/09571264.2018.1532882](https://doi.org/10.1080/09571264.2018.1532882)

Provided by Concordia University

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