

Cornell study shows wine labels can ruin a restaurant meal

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Cornell Professor Brian Wansink observes how wine label switching influences the taste of diners. Credit: Gilberto Tadday

Changing the label on a wine changed diners' opinions of their wine, opinions of their meal, and their repatronage of the restaurant, according to a Cornell University study.

Forty-one diners at the Spice Box restaurant in Urbana, Illinois were given a free glass of Cabernet Sauvignon to accompany a \$24 prix-fixe French meal. Half the bottles claimed to be from Noah's Winery in California. The labels on the other half claimed to be from Noah's Winery in North Dakota. In both cases, the wine was an inexpensive Charles Shaw wine.

Those drinking what they thought was California wine, rated the wine and food as tasting better, and ate 11% more of their food. They were also more likely to make return reservations.

It comes down to expectations. If you think a wine will taste good, it will taste better than if you think it will taste bad. People didn't believe North Dakota wine would taste good, so it had a double curse – it hurt both the wine and the entire meal. “Wine labels can throw both a halo or a shadow over the entire dining experience,” according to Cornell Professor Brian Wansink (Ph.D.), author of the book *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (Bantam 2006).

To confirm this, a similar study was conducted with 49 MBA students at a wine and cheese reception. Again, those given wine labeled from California rated the wine as 85% higher and the cheese as 50% higher.

“Small cues such as origin or a wine or whether the label or name catches your eye often trick even serious Foodies,” said co-author Dr. Collin Payne. “He (Wansink) has even conducted demonstrations of this at at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and Apicuous Culinary Institute in Florence.”

For restaurants and wineries, it's important to keep a keen eye on the possible halo or shadow of wine labels. Diners, on the other hand, should be careful to not overpay for a pretty bottle.

Source: Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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