

ABSTRACT

THE AGEING POTENTIAL OF CHAMPAGNE

which wines are worth cellaring

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Motivation

Browsing through wine lists at restaurants or private cellars, the champagne section is often quite short, and one often hears that champagne should be drunk soon after its release. Being a passionate champagne lover, I wonder if its image as a festive drink and luxury product somewhat stands in the way for its appreciation as a wine. In my opinion, especially with some bottle age, it is maybe the most versatile wine of all and deserves more recognition for this.

Objective of study

The objective of the study was to research which factors contribute to the ageing capacity of champagne wines, and to assess which wines in particular have improvement potential. I wanted to compare wines from big houses to wines from established, but smaller grower-producers and try to determine if there is a difference in ageing potential for their respective wines.

Methods

Assuming that high quality is a prerequisite for ageing potential, top champagne producers of different sizes were interviewed on their practices in vineyard and winery. Naturally books and articles about winemaking and champagne were also consulted. Additionally, a blind vertical tasting was conducted, with the

purpose of evaluating how the champagnes change with bottle ageing after purchase. Wines from a few producers and several vintages were scored on intensity and complexity of flavour.

Content

The study is divided into five sections, first of which is an introduction, where the project is presented. The next section covers viticulture and vinification and discusses which steps might improve quality versus which ones would rather influence the intended champagne style. Other factors influencing the ageing potential of champagne bottles are discussed in the following section and section four covers the results from the vertical tasting briefly. The latter is covered more extensively in Appendix 1. Section five is a short conclusion of the study.

Summary of conclusion

With many factors influencing the ageing potential of champagne, general conclusions were hard to make. Grape quality is however essential for making exceptional wine, with healthy and ripe berries being the result of good viticultural practices and a sensible yield. An extended time on the lees will improve the ageing potential of the wine, giving it more complexity and an enhanced structure. Champagne being more fragile than still wine, making sure the champagne has been transported and stored properly is also necessary. Finally, the drinking occasion does have an impact on the impression of the wine, and for some occasions a young champagne would still be a better choice than an older one. Nevertheless, the study shows that many champagnes do indeed improve with bottle age regardless of producer size and price tag.