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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

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Chicken or Egg Question

An alert reader from Big Timber sent along an article originally published in Time/Health. I have edited it for space considerations.

In 2015, scientists confirmed what all but the most serious wine drinkers have long suspected: That bottle of vino will taste better if you think it costs more. Now, in a new study published in *Scientific Reports*, researchers say they've pinpointed the exact mechanism by which this marketing placebo effect happens.

Researchers at the business school INSEAD and the University of Bonn in Germany asked 30 people to taste samples of three different wines while lying in an MRI scanner. Each person received 108 tiny samples—1.25 milliliters each, less than one glass of wine in total—over 90 minutes. Before each taste test, everyone was told how much each wine supposedly cost: either 3, 6 or 18 euros per bottle. In reality, each of the three wines were identical and came from a bottle of red that retailed for 12 euros, or about \$14.

People tended to rate the samples they were told were more expensive as better tasting. That was true regardless of whether they had to “pay” for the samples or not. (During some taste tests, people had a fraction of the wine's stated price deducted from a monetary credit they received at the start of the study. During others, they were told the samples were free.)

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The 2015 study also showed that people with greater volume in brain regions associated with reward-seeking behavior were more susceptible to the placebo effect of higher prices. In the new research, MRI scans revealed exactly which brain regions became more active when people were told samples cost more.

One region, the anterior prefrontal cortex, is known for integrating new information from the environment with long-term memories, which could translate into making price comparisons and forming expectations, researchers say. This brain region has also been shown to play a role in the brain's response to placebo medications for pain and anxiety. "Participants might recruit this brain region when reflecting on the external information from the price cue and their subjective beliefs and memories about how expensive and less expensive wines should taste," the authors wrote in their paper.

Another region, the ventral striatum, is part of the brain's reward and motivation system. Together, activation in these areas help explain exactly how higher prices trick the brain into forming higher expectations—and feeling more rewarded—when a person tastes pricier wine, the authors say.

In the meantime, co-author Hilke Plassmann, associate professor of marketing at INSEAD, says the best way to evaluate wine—or chocolate, coffee or any type of food or beverage that varies widely in price and quality—is to sample it before you know the cost. "If you want to get at your enjoyment of the product itself, then a blind consumption is best," she said in an email.

On the other hand, knowing the cost of something can also have its advantages, he adds. "Our findings also show that high price tags (within a range of acceptable qualities) makes you happier," he says, "so you get what you pay for."

Summer delights

Summer is the time for cookouts, camping, neighborhood parties, visits from friends and relatives. We have been looking at wines that would fit the summer social schedule. While many of them are in limited supply we have at least a case of each on hand.

Lake County California is home to the **Guenoc Victorian Claret**. Lively and balanced, it possesses fragrant notes of black cherry jam, black currant, clove spice, Earl Gray tea, and hints of oak. This blend of Merlot, Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Sauvignon is a steal! It rated 90 points from Wine Enthusiast and is just **\$10.95**.

Only 285 cases of the **2014 Renegade Grenache** was produced, and after drinking a bottle, you'll wish we had more! This Grenache is mostly farmed off of the old riverbed in Walla Walla known as the "Rocks" District. The wine was barrel aged for 15 months in neutral French oak barrels before bottling. Like all the Renegade wines, this drinks as well as something twice the price! **(\$15.95)**

From Macedonia, the **2013 Tikves Bela Voda** tastes like a southern Rhone with its spicy, licorice and black raspberry/cassis-dominated bouquet. The inky-colored Bela Voda is medium to full-bodied, supple and sexy, with good acidity and a great finish. Aged in 75% new barrels, it will drink nicely through 2020. Wine Advocate had it at 91 points. **\$19.95.**

If you are looking for summer white, check out the **Klinker Brick Albarino**. This American Albariño is clear and vivid with a dazzling light golden hue. Aromas of stone fruit, pear, and honeydew melon lead into full, elegant flavors of green apple and peach laced with a subtle minerality. I think it is best paired with fresh white fish, chicken and a variety of cheeses. **(\$14.95)**

We also have the **2015 Ca del Bosque Reserve Sauvignon Blanc**. On the nose, intense aromas of sliced lemon, melon, and celery burst forth. In the mouth, bright flavors of ginger, citrus zest and white pepper give way to a tight mineral backbone and fresh acidity. Medium bodied, dense and fresh with delicious fruit it finishes with bright fruit. James Suckling had it rated at 90 points. **(\$13.50)**

If your taste goes to sparkling wine, we have the **2010 Contratto Extra Brut** from Italy. A wonderfully stylish and savory sparkling wine has dominant pinot characteristics. It starts with scented fragrant notes of flowers, berries, cherries and fresh bakery yeasts. That is all backed by meaty, nutty and creamy complexity with underlying notes of cinnamon. Medium to full-bodied, it's round and generous, with a smooth, vinous presence extending all down the palate. James Suckling rated it at 92 points and Vinous had it at 90. **(\$27)**

If you wish to order any of these wines, remember there is a 10% by the case. You may order by calling us at 586-8828 or by sending an e-mail to bozemanwinegallery@gmail.com

Wine Gallery closed Labor Day

The Wine Gallery will be closed Monday, September 2, in observance of Labor Day. We will be re-opening on Tuesday with normal hours.

Wine Keeps Bones from Creaking

A new study suggests that regular alcohol consumption decreases the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis and can lessen the symptoms of the disease for those who already suffer from it. The authors of the study, a team of doctors at the University of Sheffield U.K., caution that the results are limited, but the findings could lead to valuable new research for limiting this painful, often disabling condition.

Arthritis affects an estimated 1 percent of the world's population, attacking joints with painful inflammation. The cause is unknown. Moderate consumption of wine is known to help reduce inflammation, and previous studies have shown that wine can reduce the risk of arthritis in rodents.

The study, published on the website of the journal *Rheumatology*, takes a closer look at wine's effects. The Sheffield team examined 1,877 volunteers—873 who have been diagnosed with arthritis for at least three years and 1,004 healthy subjects. They measured levels of inflammation in bone and cartilage using radiographs and asked participants to fill in questionnaires on their lifestyle habits.

They found that nondrinkers were four times more likely to develop arthritis than people who drank wine on more than 10 days a month. For those with the disease who drank, levels of inflammation were lower.

The study does have limitations, however. "We studied alcohol frequency, rather than exact amount, and cannot differentiate between different types of drink," says lead author Dr. James Maxwell. The wine questions were very broad. Drinkers were asked if they drank on one to five days per month, six to 10 or more than 10.

"It would be entirely possible that one [type of] drink would have stronger or weaker effects, based on the other constituents of the alcoholic drink," says Maxwell. But at this stage, he adds, "It would be entirely speculative based on our results to suggest that wine would be any better than beer or spirits."

Still, the authors say the results are promising. "I tell my patients that a small amount of alcohol, consumed responsibly on two to three days per week, is unlikely to be harmful," says Maxwell, who is also a rheumatologist at Rotherham Hospital. Any stronger recommendation will have to wait for further studies.