

Selection of wine a fine art and science

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The Consumer Perception and Cognition Laboratory at Ontario's Brock University is said to be the first academic facility in North America dedicated exclusively to studying the link between consumer approval and wine's origins and flavours.

When Canadians put corkscrew to cork, the lab's team of experts wants to know why.

"People worry about the decisions they will make after consuming wine -- and of course there is some basis for this concern," says Antonia Mantonakis, a consumer psychologist at Brock.

"(But) what we are interested in examining is how decisions are made before consuming wine."

Mantonakis, co-leader of the new lab, will focus her research on how psychological factors such as nostalgia and previous experiences, as well as prior brand exposure, can determine whether a consumer reaches for a red or white wine, a Canadian or international label, an unfamiliar vintage or a personal favourite, and so on.

The \$150,000 lab will conduct studies generated independently by its own researchers and on behalf of wineries. And they are recruiting ordinary Canadians to imbibe a little vino in the name of science (consumerlaboratory.ca).

"People may not realize . . . the poor decisions they make before they even take a sip," says Mantonakis.

Lab co-leader Isabelle Lesschaeve says her husband tends to choose wines based on the colour of the bottle and the attractiveness of the label, characteristics that rarely reflect the quality of the vintage or the likelihood of its ability to please the tastebuds.

Lesschaeve, a sensory scientist born and raised in France, wants to look at this type of buying behaviour, among others, to develop ways to predict consumer preferences and help wine producers tailor their products and packaging for the marketplace.

If the lab is successful in its aims, consumers could be less likely in the future to make the wrong decision when choosing one bottle over another.

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