

From Times Online
February 25, 2006

Myths, misconceptions and fallacies

"The trouble with wine is that it is a much more complex subject than people imagine"

By Jane MacQuitty

I took a quiz set by the *Daily Mail* to test whether or not I was a wine buff. I scored four out of six and was told I was “not quite a wine connoisseur, but you do like a fine wine. Why not book a vineyard trip to pick up some tips?” Hey ho. But how can this be? you ask. Well, the reason is, of course, that the *Daily Mail*'s answers were wrong.

The trouble with wine is that it is a much more complex subject than most people imagine. The two answers I disputed with the quiz masters were the meaning of “full-bodied” and how pink wines are made. From the multiple choice answers offered, I selected “heavy to drink” as the closest answer to the first question. Apparently, I should have ticked “powerful in aroma and flavour”, but neither aroma nor flavour is directly linked to the fullness or structure of a wine. Some fairly light wines are highly aromatic and flavoursome. The answer to the pink wine question was the incomprehensible “drawing out the juices from red grapes then continuing production as per white wine”. If that were true all champagne made with pinot noir grapes would be pink.

Another question open to dispute was the meaning of appellation. OK, it isn't a wine made from apples and grapes but is it “a type of wine” or a “method of quality control”? Those who chose the former could be forgiven because quality control is not guaranteed with any appellation contrôlée wine, despite the authorities' pretences.

All this set me thinking about common wine myths and misconceptions. The old chestnut that wine is a living thing and needs to “breathe” is the most ruinous of these and much beloved by the decanter brigade – those who open up bottles on the morning of a smart dinner, erroneously believing that their £3.99 bargain buy will mutate, given exposure to air, into something magnificent. It won't. It will oxidise and go stale, just as a cut apple turns brown and tastes flat.

Other common fallacies include the notion that vintage and single varietal wines are made exclusively from the grapes declared on the label. In fact, lots of wine-producing countries allow as much as 15 per cent from other years and varieties. I hate the idea, too, that the more expensive a wine is, the better it must be. Or that white wines and



champagne need hours of chilling in the fridge when 30 minutes is all that's usually required. Ditto all reds being best served at room temperature when lighter reds like beaujolais often taste better when slightly chilled. Or that red wines never go with fish when meatier fish are fine with reds.

The worst myth of all, though, is that the best way to store wine glasses is rim-down on the shelf, allowing the trapped air within to form a musty, malodorous film that taints any wine poured into them and can only be removed by re-washing.

Drinkers and diners, take note.