



LIBATIONS

What causes wine to be 'off'?

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Published: Wednesday, July 15, 2009 at 1:00 a.m.

Last Modified: Tuesday, July 14, 2009 at 3:00 p.m.

If you pay strict attention to the wines you buy, you may notice that there is a slight but noticeable difference from one bottle to the next.

This phenomenon is called bottle variation, and wine makers know it's a pitfall that is hard to prevent. In particular, with wines made in the millions of cases, the variations can be great.

I have heard little from consumers about the bottle variation in the Charles Shaw wines sold (for \$1.99 in California) at Trader Joe's stores because the typical "Two-Buck Chuck" buyer isn't concerned about slight bottle variation.

But it's hard to answer the question I get all the time, "What do you think of that wine?" Some bottles are better than others, even when the label identifies the wine as "identical."

An old saying goes, "There are no great wines, only great bottles of wine," and it is this very issue that intrigues Dean Banister and James Gabbani of Diam corks.

The two men head up the "technical cork" company that makes an agglomerate cork composed of tiny cork pieces that undergo a patented treatment to eliminate cork taint.

Diam's treatment process, using
cleanse the cork bark.

Still, say the men, bottle variations
they are thinking of ways to identifi
variations we see in wine bottles.

"It's sort of like the way Guinness (stout) tastes better in
Dublin than it does in other countries," said Banister, a
resident of Australia.

"Sure," added Gabbani, who lives in Engla
erages don't, as they say, 'travel well.' And
out what the issues are."

Not traveling well is a real phenomenon. I have had
superb Gavi in Italy, where it's produced, but rarely have
I had one in the United States that was as good.

Some bottle variation issues are beyond the control of
the consumer, such as the closure used. Because of the
capsule that blocks the view of the cork, consumers usu-
ally cannot determine what sort of closure a bottle has.
Since about 3 percent of all bottles are tainted by a moldy
smell, this means that if you open 33 bottles of wine
sealed with natural corks, one of them will be "off." If it
happens to be an expensive wine, you're stuck and prob-
ably have to return the bottle to the store for credit, a
pain in the neck.

Screwcapped wines and those sealed with plastic or
Diam corks will not be corked, but may well have other

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a bottle of sauvignon blanc bottled in a flint (clear)
glass bottle that was in a refrigerator box illuminated
by fluorescent bulbs, chances are the wine smells like a

A highly professional Napa Valley winery didn't know
this four years ago, and at a patio luncheon had a
dozen bottles of its excellent sauvignon blanc sitting
on tables in direct sunlight. Every bottle was ruined.

Banister and Gabbani don't yet know how they will go
about researching bottle variation, but the topic in-
trigues them enough to be willing to do scientific trials.
Details when we know more.

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ter. Contact him at danberger@rocketmail.com.