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Times Online

From The Sunday Times

March 7, 2010

Producers in denial as blight leaves some French white wines 'almost undrinkable'



Matthew Campbell

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THE French wine industry has been accused of trying to cover up a blight that is cutting a swathe through some of the country's top vineyards.

It is not yet understood why, but premature oxidation is making many white burgundy vintages almost undrinkable just when they should be coming into their own.

“Everywhere else in the world this worrying problem is the subject of internet websites dedicated entirely to it,” said Bernard Burtschy, a highly respected French wine critic. “But there is a real ‘omerta’, or code of honour, on the subject in France.”

Producers are under attack for refusing to replace highly expensive “grand cru” bottles of white burgundy that should have been at their best a decade after being bottled but which instead tasted like sherry.

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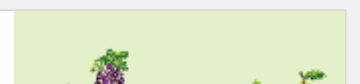


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▶ Vineyards turn to non-
drinkers to cash in

on the cork, but they won't give
you a new bottle," another expert
told Le Figaro newspaper.

Several explanations have been put
forward, from global warming and
subtle changes in production techniques to the declining quality of
corks and increased yields of grapes.

All white wine gradually oxidises in the bottle, going a darker
colour and developing a distinctive flavour and smell, but this
should not happen to the finest white burgundies for several years
— and in some cases decades — after being bottled.

The wines worst affected include some of the most prestigious in
Burgundy, including Meursault and Montrachet. The problem was
noticed in the 1995 wines but Steven Tanzer, an American critic,
was the first to raise the alarm in public when the 1996 vintage
turned out to be similarly blighted. The problem seems to have
intensified since. Although producers appear to be in denial,
foreign experts have set up a website called "oxidised burgs".

"It has affected between 9% and 23% of the very top wines of each
of the top vintages from 1996 to 2001," says the website, "and
those percentages seem likely to rise with time."

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Lord Snooty wrote:

"Producers in denial as blight leaves some French white wines
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Almost {hic}.

March 7, 2010 4:28 AM GMT

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