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Final Edition

You can judge a wine by its label, study finds; The more pricey it seems the more enjoyable it is

BYLINE: Adam Sage, The Times, London

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Forget the bouquet, the colour and the aromas. What really matters when it comes to choosing a wine for your dinner party is the label. Get one from an expensive bottle, stick it on to plonk, don't tell your guests and the chances are they will be enraptured.

A study by Coco Krumme, a researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discovered that novices were able to determine the value of wine from the drawings and words on the bottle with a high degree of accuracy.

A second piece of research suggests that this is the decisive factor in determining whether drinkers enjoy the drink. If they know that a wine is expensive, they will be happy. If they think it is cheap, they will turn up their noses.

But ask them to differentiate a \$100 wine from a \$10 one without seeing the label or knowing the price and they are at a complete loss. Indeed, recent studies indicate that most ordinary consumers tend to prefer the cheaper bottles in blind tastings.

The research has been carried out by members of the American Association of Wine Economists, and suggests that smart vintners should spend more time designing labels than pressing grapes.

Krumme asked hundreds of non-connoisseurs to estimate the price range of 300 or so bottles based on their labels. Seventy-two per cent of the answers were correct. The panel rightly guessed, for instance, that an animal on the label probably signalled a cheap product, while abstract art or landscapes were likely to come from a prestigious vineyard.

Take Château Lafite Rothschild, the celebrated bordeaux that released its 2009 vintage last month at \$689 a bottle. It has a black and white drawing of a harvest scene in front of a

château on the label. Contrast this with the Australian Little Penguin wines, which cost about \$7 a bottle and are adorned by a penguin on a coloured background.

But if the labels speak clearly, the contents do not. In a 2008 study published by the American Association of Wine Economists, for example, 506 people blind-tasted wines costing from \$1.65 to \$150. There was no evidence that the tasters enjoyed the pricier wines more. They broadly said that they favoured the cheaper ones.

In another American study, 20 people were each asked to drink three wines, which they were told varied greatly in price. In fact it was all the same product. But the tasters said that they preferred the supposedly costly bottles. "This means that if you're having a dinner party, you should get a wine with a label that looks expensive," Krumme said. "Your guests will enjoy it more."