

Rewards of patience

Lack of storage, our 'want it now' culture and the expense of purchasing already-mature wines mean that fewer wine lovers are enjoying well-cellared bottles. And that's a shame, says Anne Krebiehl MW

ARE YOU MISSING out on the most fascinating aspect of wine? Most drinkers are abundantly familiar with the primary, varietal aromas of young wine; say the blackcurrant notes of Cabernet Sauvignon or the peachy perfume of Viognier. Likewise, they recognise secondary winemaking aromas such as vanilla from new oak or the creaminess associated with malolactic fermentation. Tertiary aromas, however, which only develop with time, slowly unfolding as a wine matures – and possibly the most arresting scents – are lost on so many.

There are clear reasons for this. Few of us have the luxury of a real cellar, or the space to lay down wines. Even if one has a wine fridge, it never seems big enough. It is also tempting to drink rather than wait. Those who pay for expert storage, say at a bonded warehouse, usually only go to that expense for blue-chip wines. Then there is cost: drinking mature wines either means bidding at auction, paying for aged wines or attending formal vertical tastings. Again, usually only wines considered top-notch are offered in their mature state – at the commensurate premium, of course.

All of this means that most wine, even good and fine wine, is drunk far too young. Unless ➤

Photograph: Mike Prior

Passage of time: Marqués de Murrieta's Castillo Ygay, Gran Reserva Especial, shows the Rioja's change in colour over 22 years, from 1985 to 2007



you are lucky enough to own a well-stocked, mature cellar, or have friends with one, then a whole universe of wine flavours will remain unexplored to you.

More people than ever enjoy wine and most of it is made for ready consumption. To a degree, this has also changed expectations: wine is meant to be drinkable at the moment of purchase. The wine world has obliged by making wines that won't need a decade in a damp cellar to become palatable. However, earlier approachability doesn't mean that a wine is not capable of ageing and developing. Many drinkers also lack the confidence to decide which wines will improve, so they play safe with younger vintages.

While we live in an unprecedentedly vibrant and diverse world of wine, it is sad that many wine lovers rarely have the opportunity to appreciate the more complex hues of age. They miss out on the ethereal scent of a mature Nebbiolo, the oak-leaf earthiness of evolved Pinot Noir, the tobacco savouriness of aged Cabernet; likewise the heady camomile lift of seasoned Riesling, or even the softest mousse and honeyed languor of long-aged Champagne.

Aged before release

This throws up many questions. What happens as a wine matures? Which wines age? When is a wine mature? And, most importantly, do I like these flavours which, admittedly, are an acquired taste?

Luckily for curious drinkers, there are appellations with in-built ageing mechanisms and numerous wineries who, with increasing regularity, are giving us a taste of time with releases of so-called museum or library stock. Both give drinkers the opportunity to see, smell and taste what happens when wine is allowed to reach its full potential.

Cathy Corison, one of Napa Valley's most thoughtful winemakers, planned it from the start: 'I've held wines back for re-release since the very beginning, 30 years ago,' she says. 'I knew the wines would age because of the long, distinguished history of the Cabernets grown on benchland between Rutherford and St Helena. My aim was to make structured wines for ageing with good, snappy natural acidity, moderate alcohol and bright flavours.'

She remembers: 'It took a while for people to get used to the idea of a winery selling >

'It would be great to release more wines with bottle age, but economically that is difficult'

Kevin Glastonbury, Yalumba (above)

older vintages. Not because inventory had backed up, but because the wines were at a very good stage in their development. After a while, restaurateurs began to count on these re-releases and distributors got used to working with older wines.'

Late releases have gained currency in the US and Australia. 'It appears that the everyday drinker is now bombarded with younger and younger wines for immediate drinking,' says Kevin Glastonbury, head winemaker for Yalumba in South Australia's Barossa Valley. 'Many of the premium wines from the 2014 and 2015 vintages are a long way off their best drinkability now. Museum wines are released at a time when they are closer to the optimum drinking window.' He confesses: 'It would be great to release more wines with bottle age, but economically that is difficult.'

Nonetheless, he says: 'We have always had the ability to bottle small premium parcels of wine without necessarily having a release date in mind, other than "some time in the future".' Among these is Yalumba's FDR1A – which, in straightforward Australian fashion, stands for Fine Dry Red. Glastonbury says: 'The key with the FDR1A Museum Release is that Yalumba has not just held back a portion and reserved it for later release, they are specifically different blends.' (See p32 for tasting notes)

'Wine is like a kaleidoscope: the same elements constantly form new and often beguiling images'

Regional tradition

While the release of library or museum stock is not widespread, it certainly is no longer uncommon. Villa Maria and Neudorf in New Zealand have made such releases, as have Jim Barry and Henschke in Australia, the latter with its famous Hill of Grace. In California, Silver Oak Cellars continually offers mature vintages for sale, as does the understated Spring Mountain Vineyard. Its mature Elivette bottlings are a rare bargain.

Some appellations have anchored pre-release ageing in law. In Italy's Piedmont and Tuscany, 'riserva' is a legally defined term that prescribes barrel- and/or bottle-maturation before release. In the Spanish regions of Rioja and Ribera del Duero the same goes for the terms 'reserva' and 'gran reserva'. Considering that wineries have had to age these wines, some represent fantastic value, effectively saving you the cost of cellaring.

Appellation rules prescribe minimum ➤

What happens as wine ages?

As an aqueous solution of alcohol, acids, phenolic and flavour compounds, wine is a complex liquid undergoing constant changes. Its different elements constantly react with each other: water, glycosides, phenolics, alcohols and acids connect and disband, break down and hydrolyse, only to reconnect all over again, at varying speeds and in varying combinations.

In this respect wine is like a kaleidoscope: the same elements constantly form new and often beguiling images. At no two junctures will a wine be the same. That certain flavours emerge and develop is nothing short of alchemy and not yet fully understood. Fresh flavours evolve to evoke dried and even candied fruits; while hints of earth and stone, honey and mushroom, petals and herb appear magically. Even decay can smell sweet.

In red wine, importantly, phenolic compounds de-nature over time causing them to form long chains. This process of polymerisation decreases their reactive surface and makes the wine less astringent: this is why reds become smoother with age.



Some of these phenolic chains become so large they eventually precipitate as sediment.

With time, the vibrant purple and crimson hues of a red wine turn into vermilion and garnet, while the bright straw colour of white wine becomes increasingly golden and eventually amber. The passage of time thus affects the look, smell, taste and texture of wine.

Above: over time, a wine's colour changes – going lighter in red wines and darker in whites



Above: reservas and gran reservas from regions like Ribera del Duero in Spain are aged in barrel and bottle for a minimum period of time before release

maturation periods, but most Italian riservas will require further ageing on release. Spain, however, offers a great glimpse of maturity in its gran reservas. Rioja Gran Reserva requires a minimum of five years' ageing before release for reds, but some wineries go beyond that.

'At Marqués de Murrieta, we have always had a commitment to create wines with amazing ageing potential,' explains winemaker María Vargas. Extended time in oak adds to this ageworthiness. Over the past decade we have seen an increase in the younger, fruitier styles of red wine with sales of joven and crianza. We don't release wines younger than reserva, because our vineyards – La Plana, Capellanía and Dalmau – lend themselves to ageworthy wines. We have records of some vintages of Castillo Ygay being bottled after more than 40 years of age.'

Style choice

Corison in Napa describes the trajectory of her Cabernets as they mature: 'At their first, fruit-driven peak upon release, they have been in

Buying advice: mature wines

David Dudley-Jones of Dudley-Jones Fine Wines says: 'If property is all about location, location, location, then buying mature wine is surely about provenance, provenance, provenance. One must look at ullage as a marker of how well the wine's been stored, as lower fill levels [in the bottle neck] and

resultant seepage usually point to heat exposure and poor storage.

Late-released wines seem to have added prestige, and therefore market value, because there's an assumption that these have been matured in perfect cellar conditions.'



Left: a low ullage level is a marker of how well a wine has been stored

the bottle just long enough to settle down and knit. After a few years they close in, only to blossom at about 10 years. They are still very fruity then but have had time to develop lovely tertiary perfumes. This is one of my favourite times to drink them, in their sweet spot.

'They continue to evolve in the bottle, gaining more and more complexity with the fruit slowly taking a back seat. I'm not sure how long they'll live – the first vintages are >

MATURING WINE

nearing 30 years and are still full of life. The wines go through a series of peaks and valleys with something to offer all along the way.'

And it's not only red wine that becomes more alluring with age. Certain whites are sublime in their maturity – Hunter Valley Semillon, Vouvray, whites from Bordeaux, Rioja and Rhône...

However, chief among mature whites is Riesling, which can achieve an elixir-like state. An increasing number of dry Rieslings are offered with bottle age, from Germany and from New World wine regions. The first mature release of Pewsey Vale's Contours Riesling from Australia's Eden Valley was the 1995 vintage, in 2000. Winemaker Louisa Rose explains: 'We always knew how good the wines were with age; we just waited for the right moment. The timing was perfect and the wine received accolades from the minute it was released.'

Rose loves mature Riesling from across the

world: 'Bottle-aged Riesling has all the freshness and life of a young Riesling,' she says, 'but with more complexity and richness that makes it a beautiful drink to enjoy with more complex foods.'

The high alcohol and sugar content of fortified and sweet wines, respectively, allows them to age much longer without falling victim to decay. But fine sparkling wines also offer delicious development.

Jean-Hervé Chiquet of Champagne Jacquesson has been releasing late-disgorged Champagnes for a while. The first late-release of his famous numbered non-vintage cuvées was No733 in 2014. 'Too bad we didn't think about it earlier,' he smiles. 'We wanted to show how a serious Champagne benefits from ageing. It adds layers of complexity. You don't change the wine's character; you just make it more complex, and also keep a lot of freshness due to the late disgorgement.' ➤

Below: Gnadenberg Church by Henschke's Hill of Grace vineyard, whose famous single-vineyard Shiraz is always released with bottle age



Photograph: Mick Rock/Cephas



Photograph: Mike Prior. With thanks to Negociants UK Ltd (www.negotiantsuk.com) for the loan of the bottles

Above: the first museum release of Pewsey Vale's multi-awarded The Contours Riesling was in 2000, with the 1995 vintage

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Wisdom of years

Clearly a wine needs to have certain attributes to age: concentration and structure are vital, as is a firm backbone of acidity. What it does not need is an illustrious label or price-tag.

Even well-made, affordable wines can age beautifully. Perhaps not as long as classed growths or grands crus, but who wants to wait a lifetime when five to 10 years will often give great pleasure already. David Dudley-Jones, who specialises in older vintages at Dudley-Jones Fine Wines, explains: 'More often than not wines are considered blue-chip because they've proved they age well. With maturity comes added prestige and therefore value. Wines age well because they are from superior vines and vineyards that imbue them with the requisite fruit, tannin and acid to age.'

But Dudley-Jones is no snob, and waxes lyrical about mature Beaujolais as much as

about Burgundy and Barolo: 'These developed, mature flavours are the holy grail of wine appreciation,' he says. 'The fascination is, as much as anything, a philosophical exploration of the possibilities and extremes of complexity, and therefore pleasure.'

So when to drink? Pewsey Vale's Rose knows the answer: 'I never say when a wine is best drunk: some will like it young and others older. What I try to do is describe how a wine will evolve so that everyone can learn.' You will simply have to taste and explore.

Time is precious – even more so when given freely to a drink as mutable and protean as wine. Make sure you do not miss out. **D**

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Rewards of patience: pairs of vintages to compare and contrast



Jacquesson, Cuvée No739, Grand Vin Extra Brut, Champagne, France NV 93
 £45 Bottle Apostle, Fortnum & Mason, Hedonism, Highbury Vintner, Philglas & Swiggot, Selfridges
 Blend based on 2011. Fragrant nose of yellow apples and citrus-imbued shortcrust pastry with a lively spritz of fresh lemon. Compact and impactful yet light-footed, with notions of stone, oatmeal and salt. Very refreshing with richness on a creamy apple finish. **Drink** 2016-2027 **Alc** 12%

Jacquesson, Cuvée No734, Dégorgement Tardif, Grand Vin Extra Brut, Champagne, France NV 94
 £69 Harvey Nichols, Highbury Vintners, The Good Wine Shop
 Blend based on 2006. Hints of tarte tatin with caramelised apple and overtones of dark fir honey. The palate has immense stony, chalky depth with restrained honey echoes. Soft but lively mousse gently carries the precise and zesty flavours to a long and moreish finish. **Drink** 2016-2027 **Alc** 12%



Pewsey Vale, The Contours Riesling, Eden Valley, South Australia 2010 93
 £18 AC Gallie, Amazon, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Hennings, Highbury Vintners, Love Wine, Philglas & Swiggot, SH Jones, Slurp, The Solent Cellar
 Lifted nose of candied lime peel, subtle smoke and flinty stone. Bone-dry, flowing palate of honeyed roundness with concentrated notes of candied lime, camomile tea and buttered, toasted brioche. Depth draws you in and echoes long. **Drink** 2016-2046 **Alc** 13%

Pewsey Vale, The Contours Riesling, Eden Valley, South Australia 2005 94
 £27-£30 Dulwich Vintners, Highbury Vintners, Noel Young
 Closed at first, but with a little air the scent of dried hay, flowers, candied lime and dried citrus foliage opens up to become heady and direct. The slender, succinct palate has a linear seam of citrus, buffered with butter and toast,

with smoke and cashew nuts around the edges. **Drink** 2016-2046 **Alc** 13%

Fattoria Selvapiana, Vigneto Bucerchiale, Chianti Rufina, Tuscany, Italy 2011 91
 £26 Widely available via UK agent Liberty Wines
 Initial hints of earth, cypress and leather reveal a rich seam of red cherry, both sweet and tart, and lifted notes of fresh bay leaf. The palate is a savoury blend of leather and dried cherry, earth and autumnal oak leaves. Clove spice hovers, as does Morello cherry and dried rose petal. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 15%



Fattoria Selvapiana, Vigneto Bucerchiale, Chianti Rufina, Tuscany, Italy 2007 94
 N/A UK www.selvapiana.it
 A wonderful nose of juicy, ripe brambles plus black and red cherry with a full aromatic lift of dried bay, mint and camphor. There's still grip on a tightly woven palate. Very refined and seductive version of rusticity. Aromatic and lip-smackingly fresh. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 15%

Marqués de Murrieta, Castillo Ygay, Gran Reserva Especial, Rioja, Spain 2007 92
 £65-£80 Fortnum & Mason, Harvey Nichols, Selfridges, The Tasting Room, The Vineking, Jeroboams
 Sumptuously rich nose of ripe forest fruit coulis drenched in double cream. Super-smooth, velvety, rounded palate highlighting still-fresh red berry fruit and ripe red cherries, edged with fenugreek and dried dill. A lovely vein of acidity keeps everything fresh. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 14%

Marqués de Murrieta, Castillo Ygay, Gran Reserva Especial, Rioja, Spain 1985 93
 N/A UK www.marquesdemurrieta.com
 Musk gives way to notes of dried cherry and even sultana. A slight vanilla edge touches on tart barley sugar on the smooth, redcurrant-driven palate. A nuance of mushroom and earth too. Sprightly and fresh, mature but totally alive and very moreish. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 13%



Corison, Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California, USA 2013 94
 £75 Roberson Wine
 Still closed, but underneath there's an air of precise, pure wild blueberry fruit. The soft, plush palate is unforced and gentle, concentrated but not extracted, still tight and all about the fruit and velvet texture. A little oak spice on the finish to lift it all. **Drink** 2022-2046 **Alc** 13.5%

Corison, Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California, USA 2001 94
 £100 Roberson Wine
 This takes a while to open up, but then reveals lifted blueberry and wild forest fruit. This has barely started on its journey: the tannins are still tight, and for now it shows rich, elegant and unforced fruit with glimpses of liquorice. **Drink** 2016-2046 **Alc** 13.6%

Yalumba, FDR1A Cabernet Sauvignon-Shiraz, Eden Valley, South Australia 2012 91
 £23-£25 AC Gallie, Cambridge Wine, Corks Out, DVine Cellars, Hailsham Cellars, Love Wine, SH Jones, Slurp, Winedirect
 Heady, dark berry fruit with hints of tar and eucalyptus. The palate assumes the welcome tartness of redcurrant and wild blackberry. Dense and fresh, sumptuous and sprightly – like an untamed if elegant giant waiting to settle down. If you like it rich have this now, otherwise wait. **Drink** 2016-2036 **Alc** 14%



Yalumba, FDR1A Cabernet Sauvignon-Shiraz, Barossa, South Australia 2005 93
 £35 BI Wine, Corking Wines, Flagship Wines, Hoults, Planet of the Grapes, SH Jones, Slurp
 Heady fruit with an edge of aromatic herbs. Tar and vanilla mingle with something more ethereal, like pine and camphor. The palate is still tense but shows complete fluidity and unfurls silkily. This has an immense store of lively fruit and power at its core. **Drink** 2016-2040 **Alc** 14%

For full details of UK stockists, see p133