

Knowing when to pop the cork on fine wine

By Will Lyons, Wall Street Journal

Fine-wine collectors know the drill well. Every year, you allocate a small sum to buy a case of that special wine you know will improve your cellar. Having bought it on release, you lay it down for maturing until the time comes when its tannins, fruit and acidity are perfectly aligned and the wine is approaching its optimum taste.

Well, that's the theory. In reality, every collector faces the intriguing question of whether to pull the cork or to leave the wine quietly maturing for another year.

In this information age there is a swathe of resources to call upon. Specialist wine magazines, columns like this, books, websites and high-end wine merchants are constantly reviewing and updating tasting notes on recent vintages and will be able to give you a steer on the present condition of a particular wine. But for those who regularly buy wine to lay down, there are a few catchall rules worth committing to memory.

Any fine wine, well made and stored properly, will last much longer than you think. I categorize fine wine as anything costing more than £15 a bottle from one of Europe's recognized classic regions such as Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhône in France or Barolo in Italy. I'd also include German Riesling, Champagne and wines from Napa.

Wine has an uncanny ability to surprise and I have tasted wines from every decade of the last century and a few from the century before that have tasted far younger than their years.

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