

Wine competition pits France v US

The US has emerged victorious in a blind tasting by experts in London and California pitting US and French wine against each other.

The contest recreated a tasting 30 years ago in which France was defeated after French experts decided wines from California were better that year.

The result was seen as a blow to French national pride and shocked the country's wine industry.

In recent years, new world wines have overtaken global sales of French wine.

The tasting took place at two locations.

One tasting was in London at the Berry Brothers and Rudd wine shop in St James's Street - one of the UK's oldest wine and spirits merchants.

The US tasting was held at Copia, the US centre for wine, food and the arts, in the Napa Valley, California, a region famous for its wine production.

Nine judges there sampled ten unlabelled glasses of decades-old wines.

The combined scores from both panels gave victory to wines from California's Napa Valley. A 1971 Ridge Monte Bello Cabernet from Napa received the highest praise.

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Steven Spurrier
British wine writer

"I'm very impressed," said Christian Vanneque, a French judge who was at the original tasting in 1976.

"I don't know if I will be able to go back to France," he added. "After a second time, they will kill me."

On the European side, the contingent was headed by British wine writer Steven Spurrier, who organised the original tasting.

"I expect the outcome to be much friendlier this time," Mr Spurrier said.

"The results last time caught the judges off-guard, and I'm afraid many of them reacted rather badly."

Landmark tasting

Back in 1976, in a contest called Judgment of Paris, nine French experts agreed that the

Californian wines they had blind-tasted were better than the French.

It was a result that turned the industry in France on its head as well as being a deep blow to French pride, says the BBC's Caroline Wyatt in Paris.

Until then, it had been taken for granted that US wines were never going to improve on the French.

The rematch included all the original red wines tasted in 1976 to see how they had aged, as well as newer vintages from both nations.

The French wine industry has suffered badly in recent years because of the glut of wine on the world market and strong competition from abroad.

Thousands of hectares of vines in France have been destroyed to deal with over-production, with some Bordeaux wines even being turned back into industrial alcohol.

To add insult to injury, the world's leading wine critic, Robert Parker, is also an American - and a man whose tastes are irrevocably changing the way some French wines are made, our correspondent adds.

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