

Does a Warming Climate Mean Better Wine?

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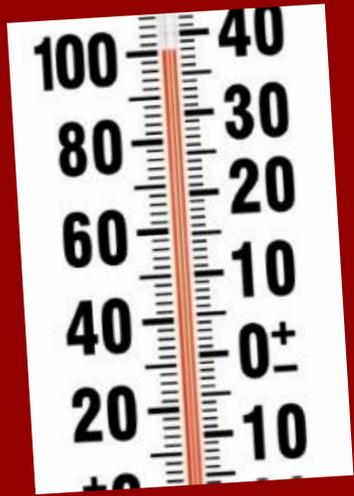
Wine Auction Prices

THE BLUE BOOK OF WINE VALUES

“Warming Climate, Better Wine?”

Wine is on the front lines of climate change.

The many issues and threats presented by rising temperatures and unpredictable, destructive weather are more often **feared than cheered.**



Wildfires



Photo Napa Valley Register/Tim Carl Photography



Drought in Australia

**“Warming
Climate,
Better
Wine?”**

Is it nonetheless possible that the altered climatic patterns which took hold in the second half of the 20th century could actually have given us better wine?

What constitutes a “better” wine...
how is climate implicated?

It comes down to ripening: wine quality is associated with optimal maturity of the grapes.
This applies to sugar, acids and polyphenols.

**“Warming
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A Better Red

Finer-grained tannins, greater richness and dimension of flavor without sacrificing aromatic expression, all while avoiding the heat of excessive alcohol.

A climate-improved red would need to retain a degree of freshness and be free of cooked or overripe flavors.

**“Warming
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A Better White

Heightened aromatic intensity along with more weight and flesh while retaining sufficient acidity to offset its generosity.

A warming climate which fosters ripening tends to favor red, not white wine.

“Warming Climate, Better Wine?”

At higher temperatures, berry sugar content escalates, acidities drop and juice pH is altered. Aroma, flavor and phenolic compounds may also be negatively affected if heat intensifies.



Photo: Champagne.com

BUT it is difficult to establish the exact upper limit a variety will tolerate.

Temperatures in some regions are already pushing beyond the theoretical limits.

“Warming Climate, Better Wine?”

From 1950 to 1999, growing-season temperatures in the world’s principal wine regions increased by 1.26 ° C (2.27° F) according to a benchmark report of Gregory V. Jones.

90, 91,
92, 93,
94...

It would be logical that human actions have contributed to better wine, **but how much?**

Jones: **10% to 60%** of higher vintage ratings were linked to higher growing season temperatures.

**“Warming
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**“the observed warming of the late
20th century appears to have been
mostly beneficial for high-quality wine
production worldwide”**

GV Jones

And this phenomenon has intensified
in the early 21st century...

“Warming Climate, Better Wine?”

While rising temperatures are hardly advantageous in already-hot regions, warming may have helped locales where grapes did not ripen dependably every year.

Surprisingly, these areas include some whose wines are among the most coveted and expensive in the world... Bordeaux, Burgundy and Piedmont.

“Global warming has helped to establish a reputation of Piedmontese wines not only for Nebbiolo but also for Barbera. Especially before 1995, the acidity was outrageous, often very high.”

Angelo Gaja

(TerlatoPiedmont.com)



“Warming
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The **Loire Valley**, long considered cool and marginal, has seen dramatic changes in its weather patterns...

Its best-known red wines, particularly **Chinon and Bourgueil**, have lost the “greenness” common in earlier times and have gained in richness and suppleness.



**“Warming
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**In once-cool areas such as the Loire...
Red wines have clearly benefitted;
the verdict for dry whites and
sparkling wines is more complicated.**

White wine grapes in cooler zones have experienced an analogous boost in sugars together with a drop in acid levels.

Photo: Domaine Serge Dagueneau & Filles



“Warming
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German Riesling, boasting high acidities and low pH, has mostly profited. The vine has coped successfully with dry summers...

On the other hand, warm end-of-season weather has been a death knell for Eiswein.

“The danger of late-ripening grape varieties not reaching optimal ripeness has long ceased”

(GermanWines.de)



“Warming
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The world-famous white wine of
nearby **Chablis**, just to the north,
has evolved in a similar fashion.

“We always used to
chase sugar when I was
younger. Now we have
to look after our acidity.”

Jean-Marie Raveneau
(Jefford, 2012)



“Warming Climate, Better Wine?”

Rising temperatures have had a positive impact on many European cooler-climate wines, reds above all, over recent decades.



There have always been “great” (ideally ripe) vintages in the history of admired European appellations; **they are now far more common.** Disagreeably meager, thin vintages are a **rarity** as grapes mature with greater regularity, every year.

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The concern is that gains from a changing climate appear to be approaching their theoretical maxima in various parts of the global vineyard.

Ever-hotter conditions threaten to push vulnerable grape varieties in some regions beyond the sweet spot of balanced ripening.

The world **will not lack for good and perhaps even better wines** in the near to medium term...

There will be **pleasant surprises** in store from places where wine grapes once struggled to ripen.

CONCLUSIONS