

Words **Jeremy Oliver**

ULTRAVIOLET LIGHT AND SWINGS IN CELLAR TEMPERATURE CAN **DESTROY A GREAT DROP.** SO HOW DOES A WINELOVER FIGHT SUCH FOES?

Darn it, not again!" At least that's the printable version of what I shouted the other day, having opened up what had, for all intents and purposes, appeared to be a decent bottle of wine.

The wine was not corked. In fact, the cork was in considerably better shape than the wine it had a duty to protect. Neither was the level in the bottle low, the cork weeping or the bottle itself showing any external visible sign of maltreatment. And, when I poured some wine into a glass, its appearance was just as I would have expected it to be.

So what had happened? The worst possible thing. It had been badly – sorry, very badly – cellared.

The first sign of the problem is a stale, flat and almost plastic-like smell. There is less bounce and freshness about the fruit in the wine, especially if it's relatively young. The palate is typically thin and hollow, dull and lifeless. I often find a cooked cranberry-like flavour that certainly wouldn't have been there had the wine been cellared properly.

You'd be amazed at how many wines I come across in this condition, and there's absolutely nothing you can do to reverse the process.


If a bottle of wine is kept in a place where the temperature is not constant from day to night and relatively steady from season to season, things usually go awry. After a couple of days, the longer you leave

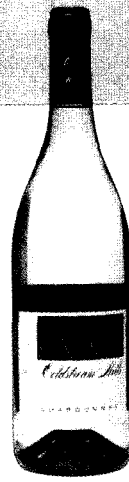
wines exposed to changing temperatures, the greater the risk that, like Frank Sinatra's *Duets* album, the magic might have gone missing.

The scary thing is that not only are too many of these wines traded via the secondary market, but, as I suggested earlier, you can't tell you've bought one until it is in your glass. By then, it's too late.

So where does that leave the amateur wine collector with a few dozen stashed away at home? For starters, never leave wine near a window. If you have to leave it next to an external wall, make sure the wall is either thick or well insulated. If you're not certain what the temperature does where your wine is cellared, get a maximum-minimum thermometer and plot its progress over a week. If that looks OK, then plot weekly figures for the next year.

If an underground or insulated wine cellar is out of the question, give yourself a birthday present and lash out on a refrigerated and humidity-controlled wine cabinet. Otherwise, put your wine into one of the growing number of commercial wine cellaring facilities popping up in major cities around Australia. As a last resort, there's always the option of moving house.

Sound drastic? It is. But so is the noise I make each time I've been outfoxed by a dud bottle with contents that can no longer live up to the promises on its label. 



WINES OF THE MONTH

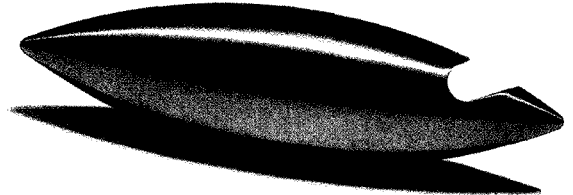
Coldstream Hills Chardonnay 2001 (\$24)

Bright, pure, lively and very approachable. This soft, creamy Yarra chardonnay puts forth a fresh and lightly tobaccoey expression of melon and citrus flavour, carefully balanced with assertive vanilla oak and refreshing acidity.



Vasse Felix Cabernet Sauvignon 2000 (\$31)

There's excellent value in this fine and very elegant cabernet sauvignon. Its penetrative flavours of violet, cassia and red berry are dusted with a light leafiness and harmoniously matched with smoky cedar/vanilla oak and powder-fine tannins.



A FINE BEER DESERVES TO BE OPENED WITH STYLE. FOR THAT, SERIOUS BEER-LOVERS NEED THE RIGHT ACCESSORIES. THE AKANTUS SOLID STAINLESS STEEL **SHARKY BOTTLE OPENER**, \$110, WILL DO JUSTICE TO ANY REFRESHMENT. FOR INFORMATION CALL TOP 3 BY DESIGN, (02) 9906 4433.

BEER OF THE MONTH

Five years ago we saw the premium beer explosion; now every brand is spawning a "premium light" offshoot. Some makers have struggled to reduce alcohol without stripping body and taste, but those crafty Esk River Tasmanians have the flavour to back up their marketing push. Enjoying a more malty aroma than you'd expect from a beer this pale, Boag's Premium Light is crisp and light, with a clean finish and just a hint of green apple. — Jason Davis

