Wine Fraud – Catching the Cheats

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Industry Overview

Massively diverse, complex industry over 10,000 different grape varieties.
The term varietal
Prices range from sub £5 to well over £10k per bottle
Premium priced commodity product with huge price differentials
Is fraud/cheating inevitable?
Where is the fraud?

Helpful to separate into 3 very broad categories

1. The Fine Wine Market
2. The Mass Volume Market, in terms of the UK the £5 to £20
3. The Mass Market, not necessarily price related but sub £5 to £10 Inevitably some overlap with 2

Clarify what is wine!
The Fine Wine Market

Premium prices, comparatively low volume

Recent auction prices (per case of 12 bts ex VAT)
- Chateau Lafite 1982 £ 19k
- Chateau Lafite 1983 £  3k
- Romanee Conti 1990 £139k (over £11k per bottle)
- Echezeaux 1990   £ 11k

Analytically very similar, detailed product knowledge essential.

How wines are made, aged, bottled, coded etc

Need overwhelming circumstantial evidence
Neutralised case histories

- Champagne, Chemistry and closure
Bordeaux

• Bottle and batch code
The Mass Volume Market

Very high volume both bottled at source and bulk shipped
Modern filling operation can pack 1 million litres/day
Certain varietals carry premium prices e.g. Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Noir
Not yet a reliable positive varietal test for wine. Grapes – yes, not wine
There are some methods - can be challenged
1p per litre differential
The Mass Market – low price point

Some analysis can be helpful
Wine knowledge and interpretation crucial
Look for bottlers/packers code
Some wines not allowed to be bulk exported
Combination of science, product and package knowledge
The Mass Market – low price point

The phrase “Imported and bottled by W (then 4 numbers)” would indicate bottled in the UK.