

Little things make a big difference at tasting bar

By Monique Beech
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The quality of a wine should matter most when a consumer decides whether or not to buy a bottle. Or perhaps the price.

But what often makes a big difference at the winery tasting bar till are little things winery owners don't often think about, said Brock University associate marketing professor Antonia Mantonakis.

Through her ongoing consumer behaviour research, Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute fellow has learned that the order in which wine is served to customers matters -- a lot.

Pour two or three glasses, and customers always choose the first, Mantonakis and her Illinois-based research colleagues discovered in a widely circulated study published by U.S.-based journal Psychological Science last fall.

Pour four or five glasses, and more seasoned wine consumers are inclined to choose the last, Mantonakis found after testing 142 Brock students and area residents at the university's consumer laboratory. Experienced wine lovers are determined to keep looking for the next best thing, she said.

Study participants were given several glasses of Ontario wine, for example, a Chardonnay, and told they were all from different wineries. In reality they all came from the same bottle.

"The order shouldn't matter but it does," Mantonakis said.

"It has a huge impact on what they choose."

Tasting order is just one of many consumer insights Mantonakis plans on sharing with the Ontario wine industry on Monday.

Mantonakis is part of an ongoing lecture series organized by Brock's wine institute.

Winery owners sometimes overlook the way consumers go about buying a wine, she said. Mantonakis paints a picture of wine drinker from the way she first selects a wine (i. e. the influence of labels or logos) to how she tastes it to what she remembers about the experience later on.

Finding ways of connecting with a consumer's life experiences and sense of nostalgia is a

powerful marketing tool, she said.

It's also the subject of Mantonakis' ongoing research. Will tapping into a person's fond memories prompt them to buy more bottles?

"There are so many little things that make a difference that if they can learn even just a little bit about what some examples are, it can make a huge difference to the consumer experience, which can make a huge difference to their bottom line, ultimately," Mantonakis said.

The third annual free CCOVI lecture series, which started Feb. 1, runs every Monday through May. Mantonakis will be presenting her lecture "Little things that make a difference, but shouldn't: Insights into consumer behaviour" on Monday at 3 p.m. in room H313 at Brock University.

The lecture will also be shown as a live webcast at www.brocku.ca/ccovi. Previous lectures can be watched on http://www.brocku.ca/ccovi/pages/ccovi_lecture_series/

This year's series features 13 experts examining topics ranging from grape growing and winemaking techniques to the marketing of Canadian wines.