

Best of both wine worlds

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It was one of those rare tastings. Three tasters, each with unique palates and prejudices, tasted 20 wines of vastly differing backgrounds and styles. The result: 60 ecstatic tasting notes and a unanimous declaration that here was the most consistently enjoyable and stimulating tasting any of us had attended in the past year.

It probably won't be a surprise to learn that the company responsible for this suspension of journalistic cynicism was an independent wine merchant - The Winery in London (see page 82 for the full monty). After all, it's pretty much a rule of thumb for your average wine enthusiast that if you're after wine with character and individuality, made and sold by people who care about the product, then you're not going to find it in either a supermarket or a specialist chain.

At Wine & Spirit, given the choice, the time and the budget, we would all prefer to do most of our wine-buying at independent merchants such as The Winery. It's not simply the wines themselves; there's something about the shopping experience, too. Perhaps it's because so many of the best independents in the UK are run by people who have abandoned their first career and made their hobby their main source of income. They're in it for the love as much as the money, in other words, and their passion is infectious.

Which is not something you hear very often about the supermarkets. Indeed, if you were to believe all the bad press about supermarket wine, you'd have to conclude that it was all purchased by blank-eyed automatons, concerned only with achieving the lowest possible prices and inflicting the maximum misery on the wine industry. And yet, recent research by W&S's sister title, [Off Licence News](#), suggests specialist independent wine merchants account for just 5 per cent of off-trade wine sales. Supermarkets, meanwhile, have almost three-quarters, and rising. They must be doing something right.

In W&S's opinion, that "something right" extends far beyond devious price promotions. The supermarkets do a highly creditable job of serving their vast range of customers, many of whom simply don't have the time, money or inclination to shop at a specialist. OK, so a tasting of supermarket wines is unlikely to reach the consistent heights of our tasting at The Winery. But as The Winery's owner, David Motion, once said to me, they're not trying to: "They're doing a different job, and they're very good at it. There's room for us both."

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