

## Winning the taste test

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Merlot sales dropped between 20 and 25 per cent in the United States after the cult success of the movie *Sideways*, in which two rather bewildered mid-life crisis males meandering on a wine-soaked Californian stag do were constantly rude, unkind and downright bitchy about anyone who confessed to liking merlot.

Now, from the people who brought you that film comes another about wine.

*Bottle Shock* is something of a sleeper. The drama had its debut at the 2008 Sundance festival and has received the kind of critical acclaim usually reserved for off-beat and art house films.

It's based on a true historical event known as The Judgment of Paris – a remarkable watershed that elevated the Californian wine industry to a level it would never have thought possible.

On May 24, 1976, Steven Spurrier (now consultant editor of English magazine *Decanter*), put together a blind tasting competition between French and Californian wine.

At the time, Englishman Spurrier lived in Paris and ran a wine shop and school, l'Academie du Vin. His knowledge of French wine was considerable and he'd become impressed and infatuated with the wines of California that came his way from visiting winemakers.

Simple idea – organise a contest judged by well-known highly respected wine experts in the hope of putting the spotlight on a new generation of wines and impressing on the French that some very fine winemaking was happening elsewhere in the world. But the unthinkable happened.

Napa Valley's Chateau Montelena 1973 beat some of the best the Burgundy area of France had to offer. It got worse. Quelle horreur, Bordeaux got cleaned out by Stags Leap 1972. This was a defining moment for the American Wine Industry in general and the Napa Valley in particular. You don't have to like wine to enjoy *Bottle Shock*.

However, if you are French it may not give you pleasure. Now, about my idea for a movie about putting New Zealand's best wines up against the rest of the world...

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#### 2005 Chateau du Seuil

From a magnificent French vintage, this is a blend of cabernet and merlot, with black fruit with typical tobacco and dusty tannins. Good value.

Price: \$42

#### 2004 Ravenswood Sonoma

This is an old vine zinfandel, Californian turbo-charged – big, brash and in your face with a taste of brambles, raspberries, spice and lashings of oak.

Price: \$35



2005 Chateau du Seuil.  
Photo / Greg Bowker