

THE VIN GUARD

HUNT FOR CLUES
Maureen at court



EVIDENCE
Corks, labels in US wine fraud trial

How to spot a fake

- Poor quality labelling, possibly with spelling mistakes.
- If the seal is broken, don't drink it. Even if it's not illegal, it could have been tampered with.
- Does it look its age? Shiny new labels are often stained with tobacco or dirt.
- Bordeaux corks are typically 52-55mm long, and are branded, rather than inked. Check for corkscrew scoring marks.



RISK
Bottles of top names are filled with cheap plonk

Woman whose mission is to track down the fraudsters who cash in on fake wine

EXCLUSIVE BY NADA FARHOUD
Consumer Features Editor

MEET the woman on the trail of wine counterfeiters behind global frauds worth an estimated £800million.

Maureen Downey, dubbed the Sherlock Holmes of wine, says old bottles flogged on eBay help fuel the trade.

Empties that once held vintage wine are being sold with original corks for hundreds of pounds.

Swindlers then fill them with inferior wine and shift them to unsuspecting buyers for thousands. An estimated 20

per cent of all "fine wine" is fake – around £800million-worth.

The problem has got worse in recent years as investors pour money into vintage wine, sending prices through the roof, says a BBC documentary.

Maureen, the world's top wine expert, said: "Counterfeit wine is far more prevalent than people realise, affecting every level of the industry.

"In 15 to 20 years we have seen this highly lucrative, low-risk business explode, especially across Europe, where organised crime gangs are involved."

American Maureen, who studies labels with a magnifying glass looking for the tiniest clues, helped put the biggest ever wine fraudster behind bars in 2013.

She was a prosecution witness in the trial of Rudy Kurniawan, who mixed fake vintage wine in his California kitchen.

Kurniawan was jailed for 10 years for selling £400million of fake plonk – much of it believed to be still in circulation.

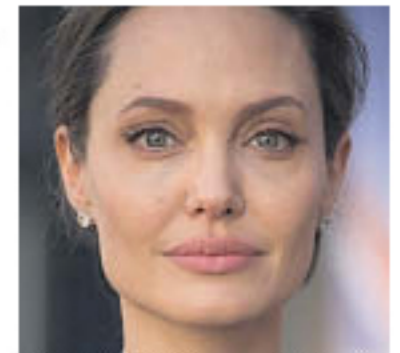
Experts say the industry is not doing enough to tackle the problem due to the embarrassment of being duped. Documentary presenter Susie Barrie said:

"There are three ways to create a counterfeit bottle: refill an empty original with lesser wine, recreate an existing wine including the label, or make a vintage that never actually existed."

"While most of us don't buy super-expensive bottles of wine, there are also examples of everyday wines being faked."

She found a 1984 Romanée Conti – a top Burgundy – with the original cork for £280 on eBay. Originals sell for £13,000.

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■ The Wine Detectives, BBC Radio 4, tomorrow, 8pm.



SEARCH Hollywood's Jolie

Angelina eyes £65k a month cinema pad

BY SHARON FEINSTEIN

ANGELINA Jolie is looking to rent a spectacular property in North London for £64,000 a month.

The 1930s five-bedroom house in Primrose Hill, worth £24million, boasts a cinema, swimming pool, orangery and roof terrace.

Hollywood star Angelina sent her people to view it as son Maddox, 15, is keen on studying at the capital's Slade School of Fine Art.

A source close to the mum of six said: "Angie wants a home good for the whole family." Tina Turner and David Bowie have been previous tenants.

A nice rich shade

FIFTY Shades of Grey author EL James earned £10million in 2016 taking her fortune to £57million, company accounts show.

Great journalism starts with you

“ Exposing hypocrisy was at the heart of our investigation into Keith Vaz MP. The chair of the Home Affairs select committee himself admitted those who hold others to account, must themselves be accountable. ”

- Caroline Waterston
Deputy Editor - Sunday Mirror



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