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Nose for wine to suit all kinds

Clare Peddie | The Advertiser | September 24, 2011 12:30am

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Researchers may be able create specialised wines to suit certain tastes. Picture: Tait Schmaal

Source: The Advertiser

SCIENTISTS are tapping into subtle differences in sensory experience that winemakers can use to their advantage.

Australian Wine Research Institute senior sensory scientist Patricia Osidacz says there are more than 100 million chemical receptors in the nose. A good deal of genetic variation, combined with other factors shaped by past experience, means different people perceive different flavours.

"Not everyone likes the same thing," she said. "It would be a boring world if everyone liked the same wine."

Experiments in the sensory laboratory with a panel of 50 trained tasters have shown that most people fall into one of three or four groups with similar preferences. By understanding what is going on in the nose and mouth, the sensory scientists hope to create wines better suited to the tastes and desires of consumers.

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The research will be presented at the AusBiotech conference next month.

"With all of this training and the tests that we do here, we can actually detect the aroma and the flavour compounds that specific groups of consumers like," Ms Osidacz said.

"Then the winemakers can produce wines tailored to these particular groups of people. They can choose, for example, different yeasts ... We know different yeasts will produce wine with different flavours. Some yeasts produce more green flavour compounds.

"We know not all consumers like these flavours, but some do.

"Approximately 20 per cent of consumers prefer wine with this green flavour compound."

Green flavours include "cut grass" and "capsicum".

Research has also revealed a compound that 40 per cent of people can't detect, called beta-ionone, that smells like raspberry and violet. About 25 per cent can't perceive a black pepper compound, discovered at the institute, called rotundone.