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'Hearty' French wine just what the doctor ordered

By NICK CHURCHOUSE - The Dominion Post | Monday, 18 June 2007

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An Auckland doctor has found the elixir of life, or something close to it, in the foothills of the Pyrenees.

Devonport GP Erica Lauder first heard about the health properties of wines from the Madiran region in southwest France through medical research done by English professor Roger Corder.

She sent her husband, Rob, out to find some.

The wines were reported to be unusually high in procyanidin, a substance Dr Corder showed could lower blood pressure, prevent clotting and blocking of the arteries, and reduce cholesterol-related hardening of the arteries.

With those medicinal characteristics, Dr Lauder guessed they would taste dreadful.

Mr Lauder used his importing company to source some sample bottles from Madiran, and the couple's neighbour Bob Campbell, a master of wine, helped pick a couple of good ones.

"I thought they would be awful, but they were lovely," Dr Lauder said.

She is recommending the wines, as well as other high-procyanidin sources - raspberries, cranberries and walnuts - to her patients. Dr Lauder and her husband have started importing the wines.

The tannat grape, found in Madiran and Sardinia, was renowned for high procyanidins, but the local winemaking made the real difference.

"They leave the juice sitting on the skins and the seeds for three to five weeks," Mr Lauder said.

"New-world wines might only do it for a week."

Dr Corder had rated wines with four and five out of five hearts on a rating system he devised, and had compared the Madiran wines to Australian reds.

"Five hearts is up to 1200mg (of procyanidin) per bottle, whereas an Aussie bottle might only have 30mg in it," Mr Lauder said.

"They are as healthy as you can get."

It would take about two bottles of Australian cabernet sauvignon a day to match the benefits in a glass of Madiran wine.

Even pharmaceuticals could not match the wine, Mr Lauder said.

"Nowhere in the world where populations have been given drugs, have they managed to achieve the low levels of heart disease as they achieve in the Madiran, where they just drink the wine.

"With a glass a day, after two weeks your cardiovascular system will be benefiting," Mr Lauder said.

The Madiran taste, now selling on lifestylewines.co.nz, has found favour with one restaurant and local supermarkets were interested too, he said.



JOHN SELKIRK/Dominion Post
GOOD MEDICINE: Rob and Erica Lauder with some of the French wines they say have health benefits.

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