

Is there any way to tell if a bottle of wine is spoiled before you open it?—P.L., Denver, Colorado

Sure, if you own a nuclear magnetic resonance machine. A chemist at the University of California–Davis rigged an NMR machine, which uses the same technology as clinical MRI scans, to hold a corked bottle of wine. He tested bottles from the university's enology department for the presence of acetic acid, a.k.a. vinegar. Sample bottles from 1950, 1960 and 1968 had apparently spoiled (though their corks and seals showed no leaks), while bottles from 1956, 1970 and 1977 appeared to be drinkable. The chemist believes the technology might be useful for auction houses and wine collectors. We're trying to make room in the cellar.