

WONDRIUM

Topic
Better Living

Subtopic
Food and Wine

The Instant Sommelier

Choosing Your Best Wine

Guidebook

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WONDRIUM

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Mr. Wagner is the coauthor of *Wine Marketing & Sales: Success Strategies for a Saturated Market*, which won the Gourmand Award for the best wine book for professionals in 2007



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Mr. Wagner is the founder and president emeritus of Balzac Communications & Marketing. His clients there included the Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux; Caymus Vineyards; Seagram Chateau & Estate Wines Company; Consorzio Vino Chianti Classico; FurmintUSA; La Rioja Alta, S.A.; Constellation Brands; Sogevinus; Bodegas Salentein; Villa Trasqua; Consorzio del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano; Regione Siciliana; and a host of other wine, food, and regional tourism clients.

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THE INSTANT SOMMELIER

CHOOSING YOUR BEST WINE

With nearly 150,000 wines for sale in the US market, the world of wine can seem needlessly complex. However, in just a few short lessons, this course gives you an easy-to-understand foundation for choosing the kinds of wines you're most likely to enjoy.

Lesson 1 explores how to use four of your five senses to explore a glass of wine. In Lesson 2, you will learn how to identify and understand the elements that sommeliers talk about when they discuss wine.

Lesson 3 provides an overview of some of the best-known white wines and their characteristics. Lesson 4 does the same for red wines. Once you are familiar with these, you'll be able to order wine in any restaurant without fear.

While 90 percent of the world's wines fall into the categories of red and white, Lesson 5 helps you discover the rest, including sparkling wines, dessert wines, and aperitifs. Lesson 6 changes gears and looks at the role of wine throughout human culture and history.

The penultimate lesson explains each step of formal wine service in a restaurant and gives tips on navigating it. Finally, the concluding lesson leads you through the ways that you can find the wines that are best for you and your guests to enjoy.

A close-up photograph of a woman with blonde hair, her eyes closed and a slight smile, as she smells a wine glass. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a restaurant or wine cellar. A dark red banner with an orange border is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the title and subtitle.

**HOW TO EXPLORE YOUR
GLASS OF WINE**

Lesson 1

People have five physical senses, and four of them come into play when tasting wine. Each of those four senses—sight, smell, touch, and taste—can be used to learn a little more about the wine in a glass. This lesson looks at how. To proceed through the lesson, you may want to pour a third of a glass of wine. (Filling it a third of the way leaves the rest of the glass to capture the aromas of the wine.)

LOOKING AT THE WINE

- First, look at the wine, because the first sense that comes into play is vision. There are two factors to look at in a glass of wine: clarity and color.
- Clarity is simple: Is the wine really clear, or is it a bit cloudy? In general, this has very little to do with how the wine tastes. However, if it's cloudy or has a lot of sediment, that may reveal a bit about how the wine was made, because it probably wasn't filtered much. That can leave more flavor in the wine, but it can also leave more sediment. (Sediment is relatively unimportant: Its presence does not matter if the wine tastes good.)
- Color is different. Don't make the mistake of thinking that a deep color always means a more powerful wine. It doesn't. Some wines, like Pinot Noir, can be lightly colored but still full of flavors and aromas.
- When it comes to color, look for freshness. If the color is vibrant, then the wine is probably fairly young. If the color is beginning to show a little tan or brown around the edges, then it's showing its age.
- In white wines, age will make the color seem darker and a bit brown. In red wines, age will also make the wines browner; however, reds will become lighter in color. Again, the color won't tell you if the wine tastes good or not—only if it is fresh and lively, or older and more evolved.

If you have glasses of two different wines in front of you, they will often be slightly different colors. You can show off by pretending to taste them blind and guessing them correctly, simply because you noticed they were two different colors.

SMELLING THE WINE

- Next, smell your wine. Wine is made from grapes. Grapes are plants, and so most of the smells in wine come from some element of nature. Many of the smells in wine smell like other plants.
- Some wines don't have much aroma at all. Others seem to explode out of the glass. Additionally, cold wines don't evaporate into the air so quickly, so you can't smell them as well. Warmer wines will always have more aromas, because the warmer wine is evaporating more molecules of aromas into the air.
- One way to approach the aromas of wine is to focus on different kinds of plant smells: fruits and herbs and vegetables. Ask yourself: Does this wine smell more like fruit, or more like a vegetable or an herb?
- Red wines are usually described as having aromas like cherries, raspberries, plums, and so forth. White wines are more likely to be lemony, or reminiscent of apple or pineapple. Both can also have some herbal or vegetable-like characteristics, too. For instance, many people notice blackberries in Cabernet Sauvignon or fresh-cut grass in some Sauvignon Blancs.



- Some wines present a very simple scent. Others are more complicated. Complex is not necessarily better. Part of choosing the wine you will like the best is knowing if you like wines that are simple and clean or rich and complex. Neither is better, unless you like one better.
- Additionally, here are three more smells to keep in mind:
 1. Some wines are aged in oak barrels, which gives them a vanilla or cinnamon type of smell. This is true of many Chardonnays and most red wines, such as Cabernet or Merlot. Most people like this smell.
 2. If a wine smells funky, the cause is usually some kind of problem in the wine cellar. However, some people like a bit of that smell in a wine, especially if it mimics the food in a meal. Don't discount such wines immediately; instead, taste to see if you like it. If you do, there are certainly wines that have that character regularly, including many wines from the Rhône Valley in France.
 3. A third smell to look for is a mold smell that usually comes from bad corks. If you get a wine that has some of that smell, it's almost certainly due to a bad cork or bottling. It is likely that you can return such wines at a restaurant or store for a refund, as long as you do so promptly.

Fooling the Experts

Even experts are fooled when they receive a glass of white wine that has red food coloring in it. They immediately smell red fruits.

TASTING THE WINE

- Humans can only detect six aspects of taste, covering these flavors: salty, sweet, bitter, sour, spicy hot, and a meaty character called umami.
- Salty is simple: There are very few wines that have any real amounts of sodium in them and very few wines that taste salty.
- Next is sweet: There are wines that are obviously sweet, like cream Sherry, and wines that aren't so obviously sweet but still have some sugar in them, such as German Rieslings. These taste quite dry but still have some sugar in them. Additionally, there are wines that are truly dry, like a crisp Sauvignon Blanc. Dry means that the wine has no sugar in it. All the sugar in the grapes was eaten by the yeast and turned into alcohol.

- Sourness in a wine means acidity. Most wines have almost as much acid as lemon juice, and some have more. However, winemakers know how to balance that with other things to make the wines taste good. Acid plays an important role in giving wine a fresh, lively taste. It can also keep wine fresh longer.
- Like acidity, bitterness also plays a role in appreciation of wine. Bitterness in wine generally comes from tannin in the grape skins and seeds. In general, red wines have more of this tannin than white wines. If you drink your coffee black and your tea unsweetened, then you might like wines with tannins more than other people do.
- The last two flavors are a bit different. There are very few wines that are actually spicy hot. These are not worth dwelling on.
- Umami is a meaty flavor that may be found in a few wines in low levels. The winemakers don't add umami, but it can appear in very small amounts in wine.
- Warm temperatures bring out the smell of a wine, but they also change the taste. Cooler wines tend to taste fresher and brighter. Warmer wines can taste richer, but they can also taste tired and lifeless. Most restaurants serve red wines a bit too warm. A good starting range for red wines is 60 to 65 degrees. Whites should be colder.

Sugar in wine can mask both acidity and the bitterness from tannin. Good winemakers can manage the levels of all three of those elements in the vineyard, in the cellar, and in blending to create the kinds of wines and flavors they want. A balanced wine is a wine that will not stand out because it has too much sugar, acid, or tannin.

THE SENSE OF TOUCH

- Touch is amazingly powerful in affecting how much you like a wine. The term *body* is used to describe how a wine feels. A thin-bodied wine is one that feels very light and delicate in your mouth, like skim milk. A full-bodied wine is much more like whole milk. Both types of milk have the same flavor, but they have very different feelings in your mouth.
- The most popular wines in America today are Chardonnay and Cabernet, and they are both considered fairly full-bodied wines. However, full-bodied wines aren't always better. For example, on a hot summer day at the beach, sometimes an icy bottle of

something light and crisp will taste better than a full-bodied wine. Certain foods work better with lighter wines, too.

THE FINISH

- Even after you've swallowed your sip of wine, there is a bit of that wine still in your mouth, and it continues to affect how you think of the wine. This sensation is called the finish.
- Some wines seem to disappear from your mouth the moment they're swallowed. These wines have a short finish. These can be excellent when paired with certain foods that have flavors that can linger.
- Other wines have finishes that seem to go on and on. Sweet wines do this because of the sugar, but so do big, rich wines like Zinfandel. The finish can provide more flavors and notes for quite a while after you've swallowed the wine.

SUGGESTED READING

Robinson, *Tasting Pleasure*.

Robinson and Johnson, *The World Atlas of Wine*.

"Wine 101," <https://vinepair.com/wine-101/>.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What happens to the color in a wine as it gets older?
2. Why shouldn't you fill a wine glass to the top?
3. How does our sense of touch come into play in winetasting?



KEY ELEMENTS IN WINE AND HOW TO TASTE THEM

Lesson 2



When sommeliers talk about wine, they focus on a few key elements that define wine style and character. This lesson looks at how you can identify and understand those elements, and how the elements somewhat determine the price of a wine.

GRAPE RIPENESS

- There's an old saying among winemakers that wine is made in the vineyard, not in the cellar. The saying means that if you have perfect grapes, it's easy to make good wine. If you have lousy grapes, it's much harder to make good wine. However, better grapes cost more.
- In Europe, before winemaking became important in the New World, the big challenge in the vineyard was getting the grapes perfectly ripe. Like all farmers, grape growers worried about rains that would spoil the harvest. They also worried about harvesting a big enough crop to make it worth their while to farm.
- Those concerns led them to leave a huge crop on the vines and to hope that the weather held out long enough to get the grapes ripe. Usually, it didn't. Underripe grapes make wines that are thin and watery, with low alcohol content and thin, acidic flavors.
- However, in a few special places, two things happened. For one, because the special places were usually a bit warmer, the grapes became riper. Additionally, the people who owned those vineyards usually understood that they could charge more money for really good wine. In cool years, they sometimes cut down some of the grape bunches to allow the rest to become fully ripe.
- More expensive wines usually come from special vineyards that are a bit warmer, with the perfect conditions to ripen the grapes. Because these conditions are rare, the wines cost more.
- In general, growing conditions in California, Australia, Chile, and Argentina are warmer and more predictable than in much of Europe. The challenge of getting grapes ripe is a bit easier in the New World. However, while the Europeans sometimes have to worry about the grapes getting ripe enough, the big worry in the New World is often that the grapes can become too ripe. Overripe grapes can make wines that taste tired, old, and clumsy.

- That means Californian vineyards require just as much watching as European ones. For instance, if it gets too hot, the grapes can become burned or overripe quickly.

ACIDITY

- Acid plays an important role in wine. A wine with the right balance of acid will taste fresh and lively, and it will keep tasting that way for a lot longer. A wine made from grapes that are a bit overripe will not have the same amount of acid, because as the fruit gets ripe, the acid levels drop.
- With lower acid levels, the wines can taste flat and tired. Some wines even smell like prunes or raisins because they were made with fruit that was already starting to turn into raisins.
- New World winemakers need to be very careful about that. Many top winemakers use sorting tables that allow them to inspect every grape before it goes into the fermenting tank. Any grape that looks too ripe, underripe, sunburned, or moldy gets tossed into the trash. (This also adds to the cost of the wine: The winemakers are discarding fruit as well as paying people to inspect the grapes.)

WINEMAKING EQUIPMENT

- Top wineries start out with a smaller, more selected crop of grapes. To take full advantage of those grapes, they need to spend more money in the cellar as well. Owning a winery is an expensive business.
- Winemaking equipment like stainless steel presses and temperature-controlled fermentation tanks are costly. Additionally, when it comes to aging the wine, barrels can be a huge expense, especially when it comes to the best ones.
- You can certainly taste the difference between wine aged in traditional wine barrels and new wines that were aged in used bourbon barrels. In the end, only you can decide which one you like better. That goes for all aspects of wine, no matter the cost.

EXPENSIVE VERSUS INEXPENSIVE WINES

- Expensive wines tend to be from small production lots, and the winemakers tend to take chances. They make wines that are different and unusual—wines that go beyond



normal to capture something unique and special. Some people may like that, but others may not.

- Meanwhile, less expensive wine is often more mass-produced. They have to be carefully tailored to meet the mass market: clean, fruity, and simple to understand and appreciate. The people who make these wines are really good at their jobs, and the wines deliver.
- This does not mean that expensive wines are overrated. It does mean that if you have to please a lot of people all at the same time, it is probably safer to go with a wine that is made with that goal in mind, rather than choosing a wine that is aimed at a select few who will really appreciate it.
- In the United States, wines that sell for under \$10 usually have a small amount of sugar in them. The trace amount of sugar tends to make the wines taste a little fuller-bodied and also fruitier. Most expensive wines often avoid this technique, but the sugar can make a wine stand out in a good way.

SUGGESTED READING

GuildSomm, www.guildsomm.com.

MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*.

Robinson and Johnson, *The World Atlas of Wine*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is a major difference between Old World and New World winemaking?
2. What do barrels add to a wine?
3. Do you get what you pay for in an expensive wine?

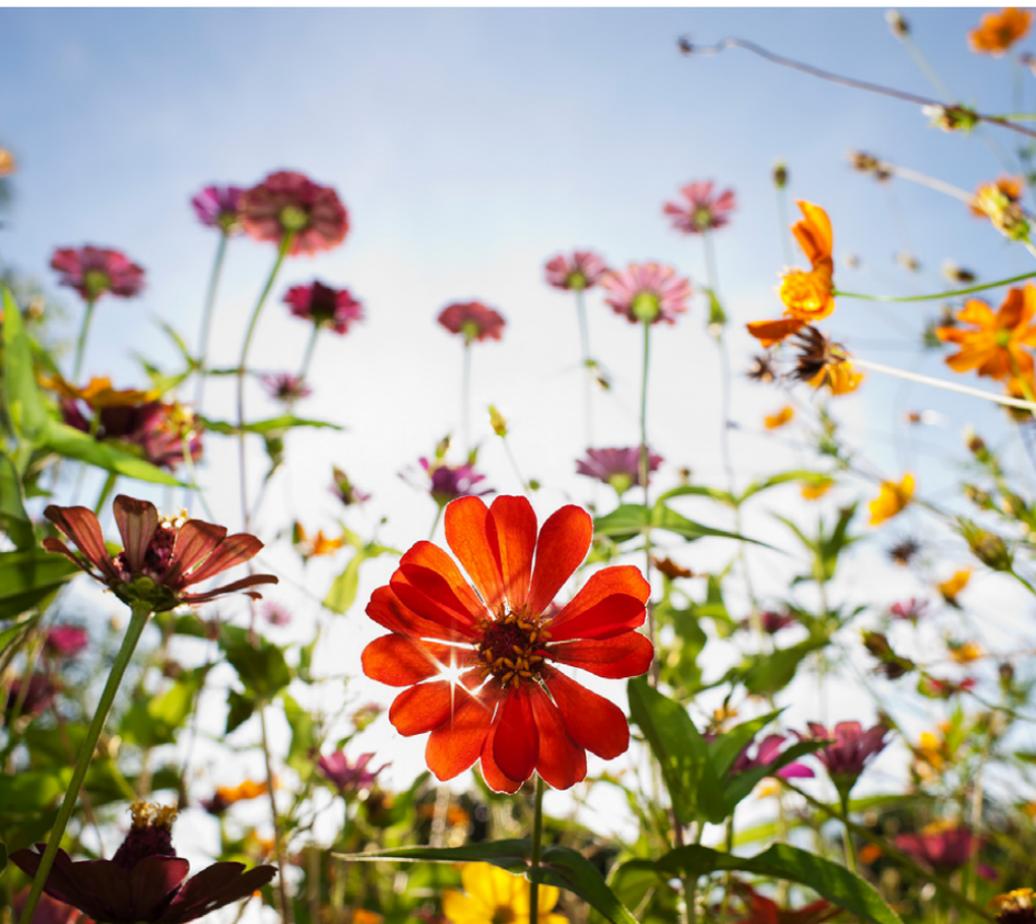


CHOOSING WHITE WINES

Lesson 3

This lesson provides an overview of the main types of white wines. In white wines, there are two basic categories: the aromatic white wines and the whites that are not so aromatic. The term *aromatic* simply means that when you lift the glass to your nose, you usually don't have to swirl or sniff very much; the aromas come right out of the glass and let you know they're there.

While a wine might smell wonderfully flowery and fruity, that doesn't necessarily mean that the wine will be sweet. That's because sweet is a flavor, not a smell.



MUSCAT AND OTHER AROMATIC GRAPES

- The most aromatic of all the wine grapes is Muscat. This grape is most famous for a couple of styles of wine, which are sweet, floral, and fruity. Muscat is found in both sparkling and still wines. Muscat grapes go by several different names, including Moscato, Moscatel, and Muscat of Alexandria. Once you smell the distinctive aroma of roses, orange blossoms, and other flowers, you will always recognize Muscat.
- A few other varieties are related and have some similar characteristics to Muscat. If you taste the primary white grape of Argentina, Torrontes, you'll find it has some of the same notes in the nose. The same goes for the Gewurztraminer grape.
- These grapes have a lovely floral character in the nose, and the wines tend to be relatively low in acidity. They also tend to pick up a little bit of bitterness from the skins, so unless the wine is made carefully, there will be a bitter note in the finish. Some people are very sensitive to bitterness, and they will notice this more than others.
- The solution is that most winemakers stop the fermentation of these wines just a bit before they ferment completely dry. That leaves some sugar, usually a tiny amount. The winemakers may also try to bottle it very quickly, so that it is quite fresh. The wine may even have a touch of sparkle to it.

CHARDONNAY

- At the other end of the spectrum is Chardonnay, the one grape that is not considered very aromatic. This grape does not completely lack aromas. They can range from notes of green apple and lemon in cooler regions to more tropical notes like pineapple in warmer climates. However, Chardonnay on its own doesn't jump out of the glass the way Muscat does. It's more subdued.
- That is one of the reasons that many winemakers will age their Chardonnay in oak for enough time to add the smell of the oak to the finished wine. The combination of apple or pineapple with the toasty vanilla of the oak can be a delicious experience.
- Chardonnay comes from Burgundy in France. That area presents a range of styles, even in the same grape. Chablis, which is Chardonnay grown in the very far north of Burgundy, is a very bright and lively version. Wines like Montrachet are a much richer version from further south in Burgundy.

LIGHT-BODIED WHITE WINES

- The other grapes fit somewhere on the spectrum between Muscat and Chardonnay in one sense. They are all usually less aromatic than Muscat and more aromatic than Chardonnay.
- However, other elements come into play, like body and acidity. Muscat is usually sweet, and dissolved sugar in the wine usually makes Muscat a fairly full-bodied wine, although adding a bit of carbonation lightens it up a bit. Chardonnay is also a fairly full-bodied wine. On the other hand, a great example of a light-bodied wine is Vinho Verde from Portugal. Another lighter-style white wine is Riesling.
- Keep in mind that lighter-style wines will have less alcohol. Alcohol adds body and power to a wine. A wine with an alcohol level of 14 percent will seem much richer than one with an alcohol level of 10 percent. However, the lower-alcohol wine will also be more refreshing because it is lighter in body.

SAUVIGNON BLANC AND PINOT GRIGIO

- Two of the world's most popular white wines are Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio. For years, people have sold Sauvignon Blanc as an alternative to Chardonnay. It is quite different from Chardonnay, and it makes a good contrast on any restaurant wine list.
- In terms of heaviness, Sauvignon Blanc fits between Chardonnay and Vinho Verde. That means you can enjoy it a bit more than a heavy Chardonnay on a summer afternoon, and yet it still has enough body to serve with slightly richer foods.
- It is in the aromas that Sauvignon Blanc truly stands out. While many white wines have aromas that are best described as fruity, Sauvignon Blanc goes in the other direction. Instead of ripe fruit, the notes are often green fruit, herbal green grass, green peppers, and even a note of cat urine, which is a surprising but classic descriptor of this grape.
- Meanwhile, Pinot Grigio is part of a larger family of grapes that also includes Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, and a few others. In Italy, it's called Pinot Grigio. In France, it's called Pinot Gris. All of the Pinot grapes have a soft, velvety texture to them. The Pinot family mainly breaks down in terms of the colors of the grapes when they are ripe. Pinot Noir is dark red, while Pinot Blanc is a light green.

- Pinot Gris and Pinot Grigio are both made from the same grape, but Italy tends to go for a less concentrated version of the wine, so wines called Pinot Grigio may be a little lighter in character. French Pinot Gris may have more pear and melon notes. Both are medium-bodied wines, and the aromas are somewhat similar.
- California wineries usually aim more for the Pinot Grigio style, and that's what they call it. In Oregon, the style leans more toward the Pinot Gris version. Every winery gets to decide how to make their own wine and what to call it, so these are general rules. There are always wineries that take the opposite approach.

VIOGNIER GRAPES

- In the Rhône Valley in France, there are some white wines that have become more popular recently. One of them seems to grow pretty well not only in California, but also in places like Virginia. The most famous of these grapes is Viognier.
- It's an aromatic grape, smelling a bit like Muscat at times. The wine is soft and medium to full bodied. However, wineries don't make this in the style of Muscat. Viognier is usually quite dry. Some people prefer it to Chardonnay because it has more fruit aromas, and yet it's still a rich and full-bodied wine.

PINK WINES

- Some wines are called white, but they are actually pink. All of the wines mentioned so far in this lesson are made from white grapes—that is, grapes that are green or golden when they are ripe. (The exception is Pinot Gris, which is somewhat gray.) To make these grapes into wine, the winemaker crushes the grapes and immediately presses them to separate the juice from the skins.
- The skins can add bitterness and tannin to wine, and that doesn't work very well with fruity white wines. The grapes are picked, crushed, and pressed within a few hours. The only thing that ferments is the grape juice itself—no skins or seeds at all.
- You can do the same thing with red grapes. When you crush red grapes and leave the white juice in contact with the red skins for only a few minutes or hours, the result is pink wine, also called rosé. Essentially, rosé is white wine made from red grapes with white wine techniques.



- There is a huge variation in rosé wines. Some are light and fresh and go perfectly with salad or an afternoon by the pool. Others are big and rich and compete with Chardonnay or lighter red wines in terms of style and food pairings.

SUGGESTED READING

Robinson and Johnson, *The World Atlas of Wine*.

Robinson and Vouillamoz, *Wine Grapes*.

“Wine 101,” <https://vinepair.com/wine-101/>.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the most popular white wine in the world today?
2. What are the names of some aromatic grape varieties?
3. How is rosé different from white wine?



CHOOSING RED WINES

Lesson 4

This lesson takes a look at red wines and their traits. It starts with Pinot Noir and Cabernet and then explores the delights of Merlot and Zinfandel, Rhône wines like Syrah and Grenache, and Italian reds from Sangiovese to Nebbiolo.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

- Cabernet Sauvignon is the most popular red wine in the United States and the most widely planted grape in the world. This grape is only about 350 years old. Back in the 17th century, Sauvignon Blanc grapes and Cabernet Franc grapes ended up crossing their genes. The result of this marriage was Cabernet Sauvignon. This happened in the southwest of France, and the grape quickly became a key part of most of the wines in Bordeaux.
- The color of a young Cabernet is dark red to purple. The aromas of Cabernet usually remind people of plums and blackberries, sometimes with a little bit of green olive as well.
- This is a wine that needs age, and wineries usually put their Cabernet in barrels for a year or two. That softens up those tannins and adds nice notes of vanilla and cinnamon to the wine. If you are looking for complexity—with many different smells and flavors in the glass—then Cabernet is a good place to start looking.
- However, not all Cabernets are meant for aging. If you're buying \$10 wines at the local supermarket, remember that those wines were not made to age a long time. The winemaker made them a bit softer and fruitier, without much tannin, so that you can drink them now.

PINOT NOIR

- Pinot Noir is the all red half brother of Pinot Grigio. This wine does have the deep color of a Cabernet. However, it makes up for that with wonderfully rich aromas of black cherries, strawberries, and sometimes hints of leather or mushroom. Pinot Noir is a chef's best friend because it goes well with a huge range of foods.
- The tannins are also softer on the tongue, which combines well with the velvety texture of the wine. Additionally, this wine can age, particularly when it is grown in cooler climates where the acidity levels are higher at harvest.

TEMPRANILLO AND GARNACHA

- Cabernet was born near Bordeaux, and Pinot is from Burgundy, but both of those grapes are now grown around the world. Some other grapes haven't made the same journeys. They are important in their own regions, but not as important in the rest of the world.
- For example, if you like the aromas of Pinot Noir, you might also like the Spanish grape Tempranillo. It's the main grape of the Rioja region, and it grows all over Spain and Portugal. It has some of those same complex aromas as Pinot Noir, although they are less pronounced in Tempranillo.
- The other important Spanish grape is Garnacha. This grape has also made it over to France, where they call it Grenache. Some of the best wines both in Spain and in areas like Châteauneuf du Pape in France use it as a major part of the blend.



MALBEC AND MERLOT

- Malbec is a grape from near Bordeaux originally, but it has become much more famous for the world-class wines it makes in Argentina. The color of Malbec is dark, and the aromas are of ripe blueberries and some vanilla from oak aging. The tannins of Malbec are softer as well.
- Bordeaux's most widely planted grape is Merlot. Compared to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot has a thinner skin, and it becomes ripe sooner. That's a good thing in cool years, when Cabernet can struggle to get fully ripe. A good Merlot is everything that a good red wine should be: deeply colored, with aromatic notes. The best ones will age nearly as long as a top Cabernet Sauvignon.

According to some estimates, thousands of different types of grape grow in Italy.

SANGIOVESE AND NEBBIOLO

- This lesson now turns to two grapes from the most famous regions in Italy: Tuscany and Piemonte. The main red grape in Tuscany is Sangiovese. Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino, and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano are all made from Sangiovese. Those are among the most famous wines in Italy.
- Where Pinot is soft and velvety, Sangiovese has much higher acidity and a nice dollop of tannin. Both vibrant and refreshing, it is excellent when paired with rich Italian food.
- In the Piemonte region, they grow a very different grape: Nebbiolo. It has a light color, and it presents fascinating aromas of violets, herbs, cherries, and truffles. The tannins are powerful, which means that they cut through the strong flavors and fat found in many heavy dishes. Barolos and Barbarescos are world-famous wines made from Nebbiolo.

SYRAH AND ZINFANDEL

- Syrah is a relatively recent grape. In France, it is best known for Hermitage. In Australia, it makes Grange, one of the greatest wines in that country. Syrah is easy to grow, and it makes luscious red wine. The color is a deep red. The aroma is full of red berries and spice. It's medium bodied and full flavored, and the note of spice makes it perfect for a barbecue wine or a rich stew.

- Meanwhile, Zinfandel came from Croatia originally, but it became famous in California. Zinfandel seems ideally suited for California: It loves the climate. Zinfandels won't have the tannins of Cabernet, but they will have big, powerful flavors. If you are serving a delicate veal dish, Zinfandel may not be your wine of choice. But with a big steak, many winemakers in California recommend that Zinfandel is absolutely the way to go. It also goes well with chocolate.

SUGGESTED READING

Robinson and Johnson, *The World Atlas of Wine*.

Robinson and Vouillamoz, *Wine Grapes*.

“Wine 101,” <https://vinepair.com/wine-101/>.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name at least two ways that Cabernet Sauvignon is different from Pinot Noir.
2. What wine would you recommend with barbecue, and why?
3. What element is in red wines that is almost never in white wines?



CHOOSING SPARKLING AND DESSERT WINES

Lesson 5

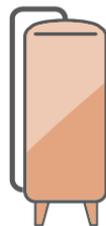
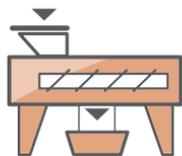


This lesson is about wines that fall outside the classic categories of red, white, and pink. The lesson spends some time on sparkling wine, and it also discusses wines that are often better served at the end of the meal: Ports, Sherries, and Madeiras.

SPARKLING WINE

- To make sparkling wine, the first step is to make still wine—that is, wine that has no bubbles. In Champagne, the grapes they use are Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and other members of the Pinot family. In Prosecco, they use the local Glera grape. In the Cava wines, they use Catalan grapes. In Germany, they make Sekt out of German grapes.
- Once that initial blend is complete, it is known as the base wine, or *cuvée*. This initial base wine is dry and free of sugar, yeast, and bubbles. At this point, the winemaker adds a little bit of sweet wine and a little bit of yeast, which starts the fermentation process all over again. However, this does not occur in the big, open tanks that are used to make the base wine. This fermentation happens either in the bottle, in the classic method, or in pressurized tanks in the Charmat method.
- If the wine is bright and fruity, it's probably like Prosecco and made in the Charmat process. Because that wine doesn't age for very long, the bubbles are usually a bit larger, and the gas seems to bubble up and out of the wine more quickly.

Charmat method

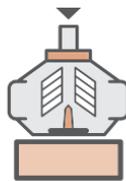
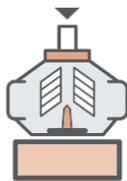
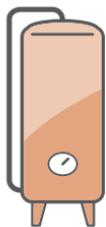


Hand-Picked
Grapes

Grape Stalk Removal
and Crushing

Soft Pressing to Separate
Skin and Seeds from Juice

First Alcoholic
Fermentation



Second Alcoholic
Fermentation in Autoclave

Isobaric Filtration
and Centrifugation

Autoclave
Refrigeration

Isobaric Filtration
and Centrifugation



Isobaric Bottling Under
Equalized Pressure

Corking and Labelling

Wine Tasting



- Wine produced with the classic method will have a more toasty, yeasty aroma. The bubbles are usually smaller and more completely part of the wine. They will last longer in the glass.
- When you taste a glass of sparkling wine, you taste it just like a normal still wine, except that you don't need to swirl—the bubbles will bring the bouquet to your nose. You can also look at the bubbles in addition to the colors.
- Sparkling wine works really well any time you might also consider a beer. Try it with Mexican food, for example, and you will be amazed. You can also serve classic-method sparkling wine with any food that you would pair with a white wine.

SHERRY

- Sherry is one of the greatest wines in the world, but it's not as popular as it used to be. That means you can get great Sherry for less money than you'd spend on most of the other great wines of the world. It is a fortified wine.
- The driest kinds are Fino and Manzanilla, and they are perfect aperitif wines. Other types of Sherry—like Oloroso, cream Sherry, or Amontillado—can also be good before dinner. They can also be much sweeter and will work after dinner as well.
- Sherries are aged in a special system called a solera. The vintages are slowly blended down through a stack of barrels, so each bottle is ready to drink when you buy it.

Opening Sparkling Wine

Whenever you open a bottle of sparkling wine, have a towel at the ready. This is to keep you from blinding yourself or someone else with the cork. Put the towel over the bottle, and then twist the wire cage open. Once the wire cage is loose, leave it on the cork. It helps you get a better grip. Grab the cork through the towel, and slowly turn the bottle and the cork in opposite directions. The pressure of the gas inside will push the cork out. Try to ease the cork out with a whisper of air and keep all the bubbles in the wine.

This whole process becomes easier if the bottle is chilled beforehand. However, do not put a bottle of bubbly in the freezer for more than a couple of minutes. If it freezes, the gas will come out of solution, and the bottle will explode in your freezer.

All you have to do is chill it. Finos and Manzanillas should be almost ice cold. You can serve Sherries with everything from almonds and olives to tempura shrimp or Spanish ham.

PORT

- The most famous of all fortified wines is Port. Port comes from the city of Porto in the country of Portugal. The grapes are grown in the Douro Valley in the heart of northern Portugal.
- There are two basic kinds of Port: ruby and tawny, distinguishable by their colors. Ruby Ports are aged only briefly in barrels, so they retain their big, fruity flavors and deep red color. Tawny Ports are aged in barrels for a long time, sometimes decades, so they are much softer and less fruity.
- Some types of ruby Port, called vintage Port, are designed to age in a cellar for a generation or more. Most of the other kinds of Ports are bottled when they are ready to drink, and you shouldn't age them. You should drink them. If a Port comes with a bar-top stopper—a little plastic-top cork that you can pull off with your hand—it's ready to drink.

MADEIRA

- This lesson's final fortified wine is Madeira. It comes from a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Morocco. Madeira is a rich and powerful wine, and it lasts for an extremely long time.
- Madeira features deep, rich flavors, sometimes with notes of orange rind, figs, and vanilla. The dry ones are nice before dinner, and the sweeter ones are great after dinner with a little blue cheese or very dark chocolate.

DESSERT WINES

- Fortified wines—like Ports, Sherries, and Madeiras—all manage to stop the fermentation or protect the wine with the addition of grape brandy. That adds an alcoholic kick to those wines. If you want something to drink after dinner with dessert, and you don't want the extra alcohol, your other options are more traditional dessert wines like late harvest or ice wines.

- The idea behind these wines is simple. The grapes are so full of sugar at the end of the harvest that the yeast cells are actually overwhelmed. If you leave a jug of fruit juice on your kitchen counter for a week, it will start to ferment. However, jam and jelly do not ferment, because the sugar content is too high. Dessert wines use this to limit the fermentation and make a sweet wine.
- When the grapes are picked, they are either extremely ripe (in the case of late harvest wines) or frozen (in the case of ice wines). These grapes produce extremely sweet juice, and the yeast can't make much progress. It ferments a small bit, and the winemakers keep these wines in very cool tanks to make sure that the yeast doesn't ferment too much or too fast.
- The winemakers watch the yeast very slowly work on the juice until they decide it's time. They then filter out the yeast, and the result is a lovely and intensely fruity wine that captures the essence of the grapes. The alcohol level on these wines is usually low.
- Depending on the grapes, these wines can have wonderful aromas of ripe apricot, peach, and pear. Because the grapes are so concentrated, the acidity can be livelier, so the wines can also be beautifully balanced.

SUGGESTED READING

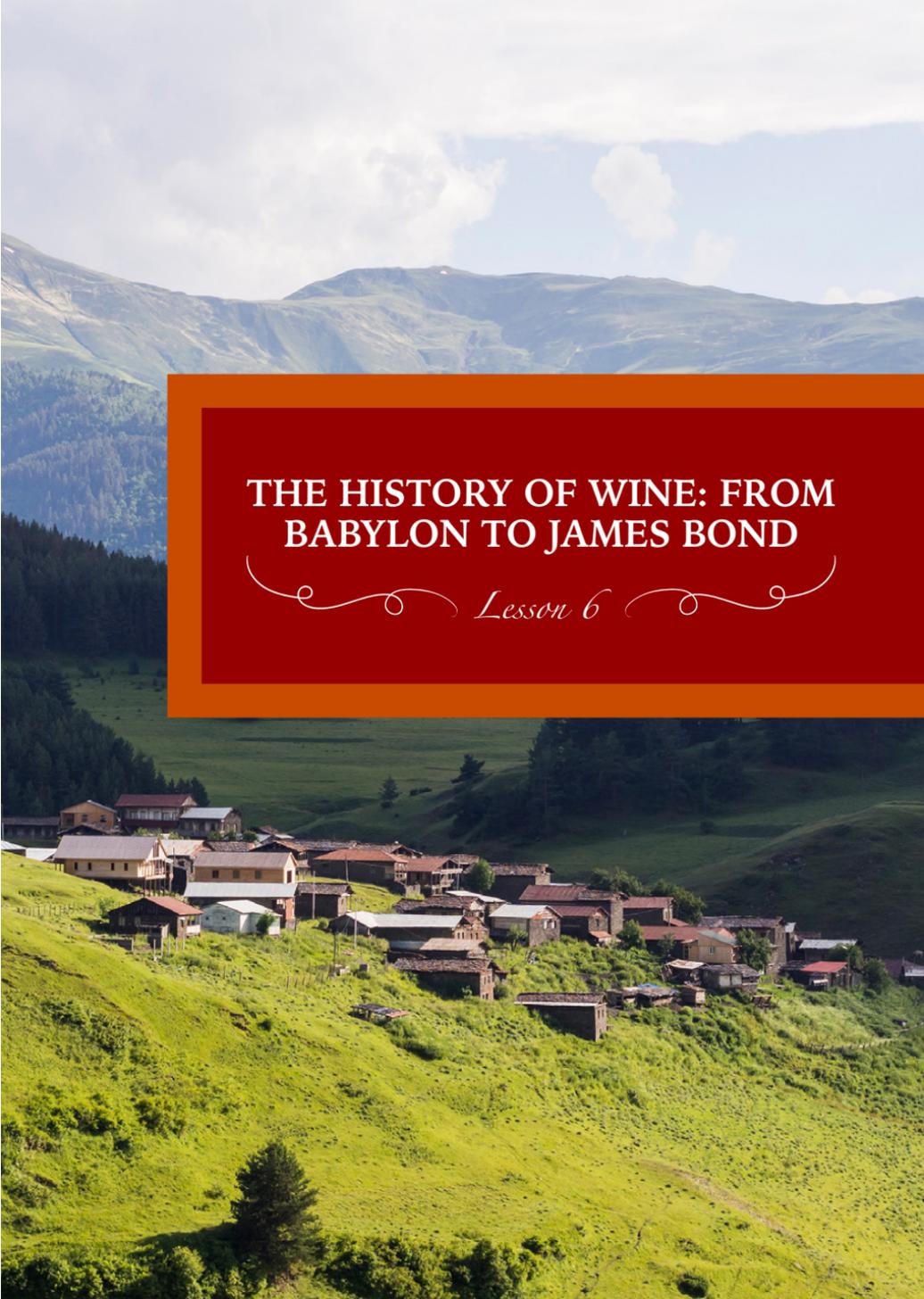
MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*.

Robinson, *Tasting Pleasure*.

Robinson and Johnson, *The World Atlas of Wine*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do Sherry, Port, and Madeira all have in common?
2. What food pairings work well with sparkling wine?



**THE HISTORY OF WINE: FROM
BABYLON TO JAMES BOND**

Lesson 6

Wine holds a special place in the world. From the beginnings of history, wine has been the beverage of celebration, culture, religion, and ritual. This lesson looks at wine's role in both culture and history.

WHY GRAPES?

- It would seem that almost any fruit would do for making wine, which raises the question: Why grapes? There are three answers.
- First, grapes are incredibly sweet. Grapes in the supermarket are generally about 16–18 percent sugar. Fully ripe wine grapes are harvested at about 25 percent sugar. More sugar means higher alcohol, and very few fruits can reach this level of sugar, so the wines from other fruits have much lower alcohol levels. That also means that they won't be as stable, because alcohol helps protect wine.

Grapes are so perfect for wine that they often begin to ferment on their own. The native yeasts that grow in the vineyard are enough to ferment many kinds of wines.

In many regions of the world, these are the only yeasts used to make commercial wines.
- Second, wine grapes have intense flavors that stand up to fermentation and show up in the finished wines. Other fruits have intense flavors, but not in combination with the sugar levels that are in grapes. These flavors are accentuated by the acidity levels in grapes.
- Grapes are also the perfect fruit for wine because of their high juice content. A ton of grapes will yield about 165 gallons of juice, which means that the grapes are more than half pure juice. Additionally, the grapes are very easy to crush and press, extracting the juice.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF WINE

- The earliest recorded evidence of wine comes from the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia, where archaeologist Patrick McGovern has found clay pots with traces of wine in them. That was about 8,000 years ago. The oldest winery found so far is in Armenia, dating to about 6,500 years ago.

- In the Caucasus, drinking vessels did not have stems or bottoms. Wine was poured for one diner into one cup. Once that wine was consumed, the server then went to the next diner with both the wine and the cup.
- Whoever held the drinking cup also had the floor to speak his or her mind, because everyone was watching. In ancient Greece, this was a key part of the Greek symposium. However, the Greeks blended their wine with water to avoid drunkenness. They assigned ritual importance to wine.
- For the Romans, matters were a little different. The Romans still loved wine, and they still mixed their wine with water. However, the Romans believed that wine wasn't just ritually important; it was important for everyday life. In fact, part of the daily rations of every soldier in the Roman army was a liter and a half of wine. (At the time, water was deadly.)
- It was expensive to ship that wine all over the world, so Romans planted vineyards everywhere they stationed their soldiers. Virtually every important wine region of Europe can trace its history back to when Roman soldiers were there.
- While the Greeks held a symposium to drink, the Romans held dinner parties. Interestingly, everyone in the ancient world ate lying down. Roman dinner parties were quite formal in structure, which called for a precise number of people lying around.

WINE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

- In the Middle Ages, people sat in chairs, but everyone still had their place. Seating at a medieval dinner was done precisely by social standing. More important people were closer to the head of the table. The head of the table was where all the food and drink started.
- Official tasters tasted the food and wine to make sure it was safe to eat. When they had tasted a dish and found it safe, they put it on a special sideboard called a credenza. It was common for the host to take the first sip of wine, not only because he was at the head of the table, but also to show his guests that it wasn't poisoned.
- The most important winemakers in the Middle Ages were monks, mainly because the monks were the only people who could read and write. They could read the old texts of the Romans about growing grapes and making wines, and they could write down what happened each year and in each vineyard.

A BIG CHANGE

- A large change in wine came in the late 1600s, because that was when someone figured out how to make bottles strong enough to ship wine. Up to that point, all wine was shipped in barrels.
- Once people began putting wines in bottles and sealing those bottles with a cork, they found out that some wines actually got better with age. Until then, the youngest wines were almost always the best wines, because the older wines were in barrels half-full of air, quickly turning to oxidized vinegar. Now, the wines could sit quietly and safely, and slowly soften up over time.
- Once the Industrial Revolution took hold, those wine bottles became a commodity. With Napoleon III insisting on a standard size, they settled on 750 milliliters. The reason for that number is that 750 milliliters is roughly how much air a glass blower can blow into a bottle and make it work. Even though the bottles were now machine made, the size traced its roots back to those craftsmen who were making each one by hand.



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE'S IMPACT

- Napoleon III's uncle, Napoleon Bonaparte, also had a big impact on the world of wine. In the Middle Ages, noble families passed their estates down to the oldest son. Bonaparte hated this system and changed the laws so that every son inherited an equal amount. (There was still nothing for the daughters, unfortunately.)
- In Burgundy, where the families had passed down their vineyards for centuries, they now had to break vineyards up into smaller and smaller parcels. Today, some of the parcels are only a few rows of vines or even a half-row of vines. That is one of the reasons there are so many small producers in Burgundy.
- In Bordeaux, instead of family inheritances, they created legal corporations to keep the estates intact. That is how some of the properties in Bordeaux have stayed the same for hundreds of years and included important owners and investors from England and other parts of Europe.

SUGGESTED READING

Hyams, *Dionysus*.

Johnson, *Vintage*.

McGovern, *Ancient Wine*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why do we make wine from grapes? (There are three reasons.)
2. What technical development in the 1600s changed the way wines taste today?

THE WINE SERVICE RITUAL IN RESTAURANTS

Lesson 7



This lesson covers the ritual of wine service step-by-step and the background of each step, from ordering the wine, to opening the bottle, to the taste the sommelier pours for your consideration. The lesson also discusses when it's appropriate to reject a bottle and when it's not.

A good sommelier will help you become comfortable with wine.

ORDERING WINE

- At a restaurant, the staff often begins with an offer to take your drink order. However, until you know what you are going to be eating, it is hard to order a wine to match with that food. You may want to tell the staff that you will figure out what you're eating and then order wines to match. (If you're celebrating something special, you may want to start with a bottle of something bubbly anyway.)
- Some wine lists are so massive that even wine experts need help. Others are full of obscure wines. That's when it's time to call the sommelier and ask for some help.
- The smart thing to do when you ask a sommelier for some wine suggestions is to tell him or her what kinds of wines you like to drink. If you can do that, the sommelier can then match up your preferences with the wines that best meet that description on the list. When the sommelier makes a suggestion of a wine, ask him or her to point it out on the list. This helps you connect the name with its pronunciation and allows you to see the price.
- If you decide to go with a few wines by the glass, you can avoid any hassle about your wine choices. By ordering a selection of wines by the glass, you can also have fun sharing tastes at the table.
- If you decide to order a bottle, the staff will bring the bottle to the table. The first step is the presentation of the bottle. The waiter should show you the bottle so that you can make sure it is the one that you ordered.
- Check to make sure it's the same wine that you ordered, noting the vintage, varietal (or grape type), and region. If something doesn't look right, or if it is not what you expected, this is the time to say so.

TASTING THE WINE

- Once you have approved of a bottle of wine, the waiter or sommelier will open it. The next step is to taste it for possible problems. In today's world, you are only looking for four possible problems:
 1. Does the wine smell like mold? If so, it is probably because of a faulty cork, and it should be rejected.
 2. Does the wine taste old and cooked? In that case, it may have been stored in too warm a place, and/or the cork may have allowed some air into the bottle. In this case, all the bottles will probably taste the same, and the appropriate action here is to tell the sommelier that the wine tastes old and tired.
 3. If you told the sommelier that you like a certain wine, and the sommelier suggested this as a recommendation, you are still within your rights to explain that his or her recommendation missed the mark. It will certainly help if you can explain why you don't like the wine.



4. Another type of problem involves the temperature of the wine.
 - White wines should be served cold, and most restaurants have a refrigerator for those. However, sometimes there are no bottles of the white wine you ordered in the fridge. Taste it, and if it is too warm, ask the staff to put it in an ice bucket for a few minutes.
 - A similar problem can happen with red wines. You may have heard that red wines should be served at room temperature, but that rule came from people in England who lived in stone houses. Room temperature there was about 60 degrees. When the restaurant serves you red wine that is 78 degrees, just like their dining room, it is way too warm. Again, the solution is to ask them for an ice bucket.
- The question remains: How much should you pour? Most wine glasses have a tulip shape that helps you figure this out. You should always pour just enough wine to fill the glass to the fattest part of the bowl, about a third of the way up the bowl. Less is better than more. For other glasses, a third of the glass is still a good rule.

SUGGESTED READING

GuildSomm, <https://www.guildsomm.com/>.

Robinson and Johnson, *The World Atlas of Wine 8th Edition*.

MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think sommeliers are important? (And if you don't think they are important, why not?)
2. Why does the sommelier pour you a taste of the wine?
3. What is the sommelier's primary purpose?



HAVING FUN WITH WINE

Lesson 8



By this point in the course, you should have a strong working knowledge of wine. This lesson is all about using that knowledge to have fun with wine.

PAIRING FOOD WITH WINE

- A great rule for wine and food pairing is to never match a wine with a food that is sweeter than the wine. For example, Champagne and wedding cake make for an awful pair.
- Cheese, however, has two components that are great to eat with wine: salt and fat. Salt makes red wine tannins go away. Fat, because it covers the surface of your mouth, does the same thing. Potato chips and buttery popcorn also go well with wine for the same reason.

WINE TEMPERATURES

- If you want to have fun with an experiment, open a bottle of wine and pour yourself a glass. Then, put the bottle in the fridge and leave it there until you've finished drinking your glass of wine. The point is to give yourself the opportunity to drink the same wine at two different temperatures.
- When you chill a wine, you emphasize the acidity and the fruit. That's perfect for white wines, but not so great for reds. When a wine gets a bit warmer, the acidity and tannins seem to soften up, and the texture of the wine is smoother. However, if it becomes too warm, the wine tastes flat and dead.
- Try drinking the same red wine at room temperature (perhaps 75 degrees). Then, try the same wine after it has been in the fridge for 10 or 15 minutes, bringing it to about 65 degrees. Try it once more after 30 minutes, when it will be roughly 50 degrees. It will taste like three different wines.

HOSTING BLIND TASTINGS

- A blind tasting involves people tasting wines without knowing what wines they are. Winemakers do this all the time, because they have learned that knowing the identity of the wine affects your ability to taste it honestly.

- If you have guests over for a blind tasting, try wrapping the bottles in tin foil. You can even invite your guests to each bring a bottle of wine wrapped in tin foil. Then, you can taste them all and see what you learn.
- It's even more fun if two of your guests bring the same wine, because most of the time, nobody will recognize that the two wines are identical. The reason is that the wine you taste before that one will affect its flavor, and the two bottles may be served at different temperatures. At any rate, to most people, the two wines will taste different.

THE EVOLUTION OF WINE

- A hundred years ago, people only drank a few kinds of wine: Bordeaux, Burgundy, Riesling or Rhine wine, reds like Hermitage and Châteauneuf du Pape, and Champagne. After dinner, they drank Ports and Sherries. All of these wines were made in a very traditional and very similar way. Back in those days, guessing what you were drinking wasn't hard.
- Today, there are more than 100,000 wines on the market, including wines from places like Romania, Sicily, and British Columbia. Even in the more traditional regions, winemaking techniques are changing and evolving. New regions like New Zealand and Napa are making wines that challenge assumptions of style, character, and quality.
- However, in one way, developments in wine are becoming easier to follow. It used to be that you had to follow the harvest report in every region to know which vintages were good and which ones should be avoided. That was true 50 years ago, but these days, the variations from vintage to vintage are not nearly as big as they used to be. Don't worry too much about the vintage on the bottle, because the differences are relatively small.
- With white wines, aim for a recent vintage, because you want the fresh fruit flavors. With red wines, you might choose older rather than younger and take advantage of the softer nature of older red wines. Still, don't sweat the specific years too much.

The main job of a sommelier is not to know a lot about wine. Instead, the real job of a sommelier is to make sure that every customer has a wonderful time at the restaurant.

FINDING WINES YOU LIKE

- This lesson concludes with some tips on finding and remembering wines you like. One of them is borrowed from wine expert Rick Kushman: Every time you find a bottle of wine you like, take a picture of it. If you find a bottle of wine you don't like, take a picture of that bottle as well, but turn the camera sideways. Once you do that, you can walk into any wine shop and show the salesperson exactly what kinds of wines you like and do not like.
- If you can find a nearby wine shop that has someone who knows about wine, share your questions and reactions to those wines with him or her. The single best way to shop for wine is at a shop where you have purchased many times before. Eventually, the staff will know what you like and don't like, so they can always steer you in an interesting and rewarding direction.
- In a restaurant setting, you can think back to your experience learning about wines throughout these lessons. Ask yourself: Which wines did you really like? What did you like about them? Tell the sommelier that.



- When it came to red wines, did you prefer the power and complexity of Cabernet or the seductive charms of Pinot Noir? Did you prefer full-bodied or medium-bodied wines? Did you prefer fruitier or more herbal wines? All of those descriptors will help you get the wine you want from a shop or a restaurant.
- Keep in mind that the hardest question any sommelier has to answer is: “What’s the wine on your list that I am going to like the most?” The answer lies in you, not in the sommelier. What you like is the key.

SUGGESTED READING

Asher, *Vineyard Tales*.

Friedrich, *The Wine and Food Guide to the Loire, France’s Royal River*.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What effect does cheese have on the flavors of wine?
2. How does the serving temperature affect the taste of a wine?

TASTING EXERCISES

This section of the book provides a few basic wine-tasting exercises for you to try. Keep in mind that people are very susceptible to influences as they taste wine. Everything from the color of the light to the music in the background can affect how a person perceives a wine. Even more importantly, wine labels, bottles, and glasses have an effect. That's why any serious wine tasting begins with covering up all the bottles in either aluminum foil or paper bags. Use a sticky note or write a number with a felt-tip marker to identify the bottles. If you are tasting with other people, it should be a cardinal rule that no one is allowed to speak, make gestures, or react to any of the wines until you are all finished. Professional wine tastings are always held in silence.

Exercise 1

Pick any bottle of wine and taste it with two or more people. Make a simple checklist to see if you agree on these basic terms: Is it clear or cloudy? Is it pale or deep colored? Is it white, golden, pink, ruby, or dark purple? Is the aroma fruity or more vegetal? Is it more or less aromatic? Is it light, medium, or full in body? Finally, is the finish sweet, acidic, or tannic/bitter? There are no right answers to these questions—they are all relative to experience. However, they will get you used to the idea of tasting wine for its basic elements.

Exercise 2

Next, expand the above criteria to two different wines. Do the same tasting as Exercise 1, but with two different grapes, like a Sauvignon Blanc and a Chardonnay, or a Cabernet Sauvignon and a Pinot Noir. Write down your notes, but keep them to yourself. Once you have finished, close your eyes and ask your neighbor at the table to switch the glasses around. See if you can identify the wines based purely on your notes and your sense. Sometimes you can do this quite easily just by looking at the color. Other times, you'll have to really focus on the small differences you might note.



Exercise 3

This exercise is particularly fun with friends. Take three bottles of the same wine. Put one in the fridge now. Put the second one in your living room. Keep the third one on hand so that you can put it in the fridge about 15 minutes before you serve it. Once your friends are ready to taste, offer them all three wines. Ask them to tell you which they prefer. They will not believe it's the same wine. Try this both with red wines and whites. It will make a difference every single time.

Exercise 4

Take a very tannic red wine, like a Barolo from Italy, and pour a glass of it. Write down your tasting notes. Then, take a tiny pinch of salt and stir it into the wine. Taste the wine again. Do you notice a difference? The tannins and bitterness are softened up by the salt. This is why people usually serve red wines with meat dishes that are salty and rich.

Exercise 5

Repeat Exercise 2, but this time, use bottles of wine made from the same grape: two Chardonnays or two Cabernets, for example. It will be harder. One way to figure this out is to use a triangular tasting. Pour two glasses of one wine and one glass of the other wine. If you can tell which wine is the odd one out, you're on your way. Next, try to determine what you think is different. You can repeat this exercise endlessly.

Exercise 6

Expand any of these exercises to include more wines and more people. There will always be a surprise. However, it is crucial to note that there are no winners or losers in wine tasting. Every person has a different set of taste and aroma sensors, and some people are much more sensitive to one thing or another. Additionally, it doesn't matter what other people think of the wine you are tasting. The thing that matters is what you think of it.

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RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT WINE

GuildSomm. <https://www.guildsomm.com/>.

VinePair. "Wine 101." <https://vinepair.com/wine-101/>.

Wine, Wit, and Wisdom. <http://winewitandwisdomswe.com/>.

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