

INTRODUCTION TO WINE TASTING

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There is no mystique to Wine Tasting. If you can taste the difference between Cheddar, Brie and Gorgonzola you can taste wine. All you need to know is how to go about it.

Tasting wine is about using 3 senses , not one. As well as Taste you also use Sight and Smell (probably the most important).

There are 4 steps to Wine Tasting.

Step 1 . What does the wine look like ?

Step 2 What does the wine smell like ?

Step 3 What does the wine taste like

Step 4 What are your overall impressions ? Do you like it ? Would you drink it ?

Equipment

Tasting wine is best out of reasonable size glasses (25cl) that are tapered allowing the aromas to be directed to the nose and taste buds. Make sure they are clean and do not smell of detergent.

TASTING METHOD

Step 1 . Appearance

Much can be determined from the colour of a wine. It can give an indication of the condition, age, maturity, grape variety and also style.

Tilt the glass at 45 degrees preferably against a white background., this will show the variations in colour from the main body to the rim.

Young white wines tend to be pale and turn more golden with age

Young red wines may be purple, opaque

Red wines become paler and more tawny in colour with age.

Look out for “legs” on side of glass (traces that are left on side of glass). This can be a clue to alcohol and sugar content. The longer the legs the higher the content.

Clarity – Clear, bright, no haze or cloudiness,

Intensity – Light, pale, deep, opaque

Colour – check variation between main body and the rim

Whites – waterwhite, lemon, straw, gold

Rose – salmon pink, deep pink, orange

Reds – Purple, crimson, mahogany, tawny

Step 2. Nose

Swirl the wine in the glass to release the aromas. If musty, dirty or vinegary this is a fault. The smell gives an indication of the condition, character, and stage of development.

Wine tasing vocabulary is very subjective. Whether the wine smells of strawberries or raspberries is not important, it’s what it says to you that counts. The essential is to build your own list of descriptive terms which help you enjoy wine.

Condition – clean , faulty

Aroma – closed, subtle, fragrant, pronounced

Character – Floral , Fruity, Nutty, Vegetal, Mineral , Spicy, Oaky

Development – Young, ready to drink, in decline

Step 3. Taste

Finally you can actually taste the wine. This should confirm what you discovered on the nose, many wines taste what they smell like. Take a good swig and make sure it covers every part of your tongue as sweetness, acidity and bitterness are detected on different parts of the tongue. Break the analysis down to its component parts :

Sweetness – Dry, medium, sweet

Acidity – Flat, crisp, refreshing

Tannin – soft, rough, astringent, bitter

Body – light, medium, full

Level of fruit – low , high, concentrated

Fruit Character – floral, fruity, nutty, vegetal, spicy

Alcohol – low, high (sensed as “burn” at back of throat)

Finish – Short, Medium, Long (How long can you taste the wine after you’ve drunk it).

Step 4. Overall impression

Most important is your overall impression of the wine. Is the wine average or good quality ? Is it typical of it’s origin ? Should the wine be drunk now or would it benefit from further ageing ? Do you like it ? Would I drink it ?

Quality – poor, average, high, fine

Maturity – too young, ready to drink, oxidised

General Descriptive Terms :

Floral – rose, acacia, honeysuckle, jasmine, violet

Fruity – lemon, lime, grapefruit, blackcurrant, melon, apple, peach, cherry, gooseberry, mango, passion-fruit, raspberry, strawberry

Spicy – pepper, clove, liquorice, aniseed, cinnamon, vanilla

Mineral – stoney, gravelly, chalky, earthy, petrolly

Others – nutty, dried fruits, raisined, prune, toast, coffee, honey, smoky, tobacco, tar

Vegetal/Animal – grassy, truffle, hay, gamey, musky, leather