

A-Z

- OF WINE ENJOYMENT -

Where is the best place to keep your wine?

What is the ideal temperature to serve wine?

When it comes to food and wine pairing, do you choose white or red?

These and many other questions are expertly answered by Wade Bales, who, having immersed himself in the wine industry more than 18 years ago, has many a wise – and fun – recommendation.



WADE BALES
WINE SOCIETY

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AGEING

When has a wine reached its peak? Today, most wines are sold when ready to drink. However, in the case of reserve-style wines, especially reds, bottle maturation could well add to their ultimate enjoyment. To establish the ideal time to enjoy a wine, I recommend that you monitor it by opening a bottle from the case every 6 months or alternatively, consult the winery.

BALANCE

This to me is one of the primary requirements for wine enjoyment. The term relates to the way in which the various attributes such as alcohol, acidity, tannin, fruit and wood (if used) are combined. Excessive amounts of any one of these ingredients will cause disharmony on the palate, while complete harmony indicates a wine of good quality.

CORK OR CAP?

You will notice that more and more trendsetting wineries are opting for a screw cap instead of a traditional cork seal. The reason? An increasing amount of wine is being contaminated by cork taint, leaving the wine tasting musty and dull. The cause is a frighteningly potent little molecule called trichloroanisole, or TCA, which can develop from a reaction between organisms (spores) and chlorine in the cork bark at any stage from tree to bottle. To their credit, APCOR, the Portuguese cork organization, seems to be on the track of the pesky TCA, having finally admitted that they have a problem. Plans are afoot involving high-tech purification and a 'detection kit' which should see the incidence decline over the years.

DECANTING

Bottle-aged wines, typically red, may throw a sediment after a number of years. Apart from being displeasing to the eye, this sediment is of course also displeasing in the mouth. To decant such a wine, stand the bottle upright for at least twenty-four hours to enable the sediment to drop to the bottom before gently decanting the clear wine into another vessel, ensuring that the sediment stays behind. In some cases younger wines can also benefit from decanting – not to get rid of any sediment, but simply to aerate it

ETIQUETTE

I have always maintained that wine enjoyment should not be an intimidating process. At the same time, I have to admit that 'correct' wine etiquette does contribute to the enjoyment. Herewith just a few examples:

- Before serving wine to your guests, allow it to breathe at room temperature and ensure (discreetly) that the wine is sound.
 - When serving wine at a sit-down dinner, place the wine glasses above the dinner plate and pour from left to right.
 - Fill wine glasses one-third so that the wine may be swirled to release its aromas.
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FOOD & WINE PAIRING

Thank goodness the so-called 'Pairing Rules' are far more flexible these days. Do you prefer Sauvignon Blanc? Then match it with a dish of your choice. Do you enjoy Shiraz but are a strict vegetarian – who said red wine should only be enjoyed with red meat? As a general rule, light wines go with light foods and hearty wines with hearty foods. For the rest simply follow your instincts and make your own creative pairing!

GLASSES

Rule one is to always serve wine in squeaky clean glasses. It is also worthwhile remembering that wine looks and tastes better when served in a well-designed glass with enough space to allow for swirling. Clear glasses of course allow the taster the opportunity of appreciating the colour of the wine, while a long stem ensures that the wine is not affected by the temperature of the hand holding it. And then, if more than one wine is served, make sure that they are either served in different glasses or that the glass is rinsed before the next pouring.

HOSTING A PARTY

INVITATION

This should be fun! Especially when remembering that there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' choices when selecting the wines. If you know your guests' taste preferences, try and cater for them, but as a general rule, ensure that you have a selection of wines to match every possible taste.

IDEAL TEMPERATURE

Temperature affects the taste of a wine – so it's important to keep these basic rules in mind: If white wine is served too cold, the flavours will be masked. At the same time, a red wine shouldn't be served at too high a temperature.

JUDGING A WINE

While credible wine awards are always good indications of quality, one has to bear in mind that not all wine producers enter wine competitions. In my opinion, the wine enthusiast personal verdict remains paramount.

KNOWLEDGE

There can be little doubt about it: one's wine knowledge adds to one's wine enjoyment. Thus a specific wine region may have a specific wine profile; a particular terrior may yield a particular wine style; an individual winemaker may have his or her individual flair. In short, the more you know and understand about the background of a wine, the better you can appreciate it. (And, the more interesting it becomes!)

LABLES

Wine labels come in all shapes and sizes. The question is: what can you as a wine lover learn from the label and how can it add to your enjoyment of the wine? The perfect wine label (front and back) will not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the wine, provide legal requirements such as variety, origin and percentage alcohol, but also give a succinct description of what to expect from the wine and even food recommendations.

MALOLACTIC FERMENTATION

What does this term imply and how does the process influence the taste of a wine? Malolactic fermentation is a natural process that sometimes occurs spontaneously after the normal fermentation of wine. The result is a softer acidity, often considered desirable, particularly in red wines.

NOBLE ROT

Noble Rot refers to grapes affected by the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*. It spoils the grapes if they are damaged by rain, but if they are ripe and healthy, and the weather is sunny, it causes the grapes to shrivel and concentrate the sugar, so that top quality sweet wines can be created.

ORDERING WINE

Let's start with the 'can I bring my own wine?' scenario. Since restaurant policies vary, I recommend that you phone ahead and ask – also enquiring about the corkage fee. However, whether bringing your own or ordering from the wine list, it is the custom that the wine steward pours the wine. If you prefer to do so yourself, say so. In doubt as to which wine to order? A good wine steward should be able to advise you – based on your preference and the food ordered by your party.

PLANNING A CELLAR

As a new collector of wines, where do you start and who do you consult? First of all, draw up a short-list of the varietals, blend combinations and styles of wine you prefer. Then, get in touch with a reliable retailer or wine expert such as The Wade Bales Wine Society who will be able to advise you on collectible wines that suit not only your taste preference but also your pocket.

QUALITY

Aroma, flavour, balance, finish ... these are but a few attributes contributing to the quality of a wine. To define your ultimate quality, it is always worthwhile remembering that the best wine is the one you prefer.

REGIONS

In South Africa there are at present some 90 officially declared wine appellations covering more than 100 000 hectares. These range from the tip of the African continent, where the two great oceans meet at Cape Agulhas, to deep in the arid Karoo. With more than 6 000 different wines produced annually, South African wine lovers are indeed spoiled for choice!

STORAGE

Not all of us are lucky enough to have a dedicated, custom-built wine cellar in our home. This shouldn't be a problem however, because if your collection is not too big, any largish dark cupboard, underfloor area or loft with a cool, even temperature will do. Store the bottles horizontally and do heed the producer's recommendation as to how long the wine will last.

TOASTING

What is the origin of the expression 'drinking a toast'? During the 17th century it was the custom to give the name of a lady or a cause to a spiced piece of toasted bread, which was then floated on the surface of the wine in the glass. This was perceived as linking the wine with the particular person or cause! Today, toasts are a celebratory expression of friendship, thanks, praise or good wishes.

UNFINISHED BOTTLE OF WINE

Another question that is often asked is 'What is the best way of preserving an opened, unfinished bottle of wine?'. The secret is to minimise the amount of oxygen in the bottle. So, use the original cork or a wine stopper to seal the bottle as soon as possible and then store it in the refrigerator for no longer than two days.

VARIETAL

This term refers to the wines made from a single grape variety, e.g. Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc. Wines containing more than one variety (e.g. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) are known as blends.

WINE FUTURES

The concept of investing in young wines while they are still maturing in the cellars is a centuries-old European tradition. The obvious advantage to the buyer is that the price of a pre-release wine is invariably considerably lower than the future price of the wine. Since its inception in 2000, the Wade Bales Wine Society's unique Wine Futures Plan has annually offered wine lovers and investors the opportunity of obtaining the country's most prestigious and promising wines while they are still maturing in the barrels.

X-FACTOR

Is it the terroir? Is it the winemaker? Is it the varietal? Or is it the blend? When it comes to wine enjoyment it could be any or all of these things ... plus that elusive element called 'personal taste'. So, whatever your preference, simply relax and enjoy!

YIELD

Yield is generally seen as a quality factor: the lower the yield the more concentrated the flavours. According to Richard Gawel "The relationship between wine quality and grape yield is the stuff of which wine legend is made." I couldn't agree more: The greatest wines of the world all originate from lower-yielding vines. At the same time however, it is true that a low yield in itself will not ensure wine quality.

ZERO TOLERANCE

It has been said before, but allow me to say it again:

Life is too short to drink bad wine!

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