

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

Author: Ray La Foy

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Table of Contents

Buying Wine: How To Read A Wine Label.....	5
Fine Wine Italian Style: The Beauty Of Italian Wine.....	7
Food and wine choice advice from an expert wine taster.....	10
German Wine - The New Commodity On The American Market.....	12
How To Begin Wine Collecting	14
Take A California Wine Country Tour	16
Wine Clubs - A Convenient Way to Know Wine.....	18
Wine Storage Do's and Don'ts.....	20
Wine Tasting: Four Easy Steps to Hosting a Great Wine Tasting Party.....	22
Wine: How To Get Started	24

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

Buying Wine: How To Read A Wine Label

I must admit, that for many of us, walking into a store to buy a bottle of wine can be a little like visiting a foreign country and not knowing the language. If you're buying wine for yourself that's probably not a big deal, although it might be nice to be somewhat knowledgeable so that you're more likely to buy something you will enjoy. However, if you are buying a bottle of wine as a gift, then being able to interpret information on the label becomes a bit more important. But, first things, first.

Your first consideration should probably be **where** you will be shopping. If you live in a state where alcohol sales are controlled or restricted, your options may be limited. I happen to live in Pennsylvania where consumers are only permitted to purchase packaged wine and alcohol from state-operated Wine and Spirits Stores or a privately owned Pennsylvania Winery. You may, of course, travel out of state to purchase a limited amount of alcoholic beverages, but these purchases are subject to an 18% state tax. (However, I can't say that I know anyone who has travel out of state to buy wine and actually fessed-up, claimed their booty, and paid that outrageous tax.) To find the best selection of wine in a state where alcohol sales are controlled check on the internet for information and locations of any retail outlets. For example, PA has premium wine stores and you can get a listing of their locations by visiting the PA Liquor Control Board web site.

If you live in a state with more liberal alcoholic beverage laws, you probably have more options available for buying wine: Large retail chains like Wal-Mart and Target, large drug store chains, supermarkets, independently owned liquor stores, specialty wine shops and wine warehouses. You can buy excellent wines at all these venues, but the independently owned stores have the potential to vary in the quality and quantity of their inventory. One of the best avenues for selection and price is a wine warehouse and if you're really lucky, you live in a state where you can order wines online from a wine distributor.

Not all wine shops are created equal so there are some issues you should be concerned with when choosing where to purchase wine. One consideration is how the wine is stored. Exposure to excessive heat, wide temperature fluctuations, and bright spotlights may cause deterioration, so take note of any wine that may be stored next to radiators or heating vents. You should also observe the general aesthetics of the store. Are things well-organized, and neat or is the merchandise dusty and in disarray? A sign of a quality wine shop is when a store carries more than one vintage of a particular wine. This would indicate the shop owner is interested in the depth of their offerings as well as the breadth.

Every retail store has organization and a wine store is no exception. Even though all those bottles may look deceptively similar, a closer look will probably reveal some system of how the wine is displayed. They may be broken out in such wide categories as the type of wine i.e. red, white, or sparkling. They may also be categorized by region: Napa Valley, Sonoma, Loire, Finger Lakes, Italian, South African, etc. or by varietals: Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Zinfandel, Chenin Blanc, etc. Getting an idea of the layout of the store will at least help you find a particular section you may be interested in.

Now on to the label...

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There are laws that mandate what information must be included on a wine label. These laws vary from country to country and are based on where the wine is marketed rather than where it is produced. Much to the dismay of the producer, this may mean that one wine will have several different labels. After the label is designed it must be approved by various governmental agencies.

Most wines bottles will have two labels affixed to it. In addition to these labels providing the legally mandated information, they are intended to help market the product. The front label is designed to attract the consumer's attention by the use of marketing tactics such as logos, interesting graphics, color and lettering. The back label will often try to entice your senses. A Pinot Noir that I have in my inventory but have not tried yet states "...Rich in texture with a lingering finish and versatile enough to compliment just about any cuisine." It caught my attention! These optional endorsements are not governed by law.

Labeling requirements for the United States are established by the Treasury Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. These requirements include:

Identifying brand name or brand identification- This may be the owner's name, trademark name, winery name, growing area, appellation or grape variety. The brand name must not be misleading as to the quality, origin, age, or grape varietal. In the U.S., a wine cannot be labeled a particular varietal unless it contains at least 75% of that varietal. For example a wine may not be called zinfandel if it only contains 74% zinfandel grapes.

Class of wine, type or designation- The wine is labeled with the class number or with a description similar to those described here:

Class 1 - May be labeled "Light Wine", "Light White Wine", "Table Wine", "Sweet Table Wine" "Red Table Wine", or something similar. A Class 1 wine must have an alcohol content between 7% and 14% by volume.

Class 2 - May be labeled "Sparkling Wine" or something similar. A Class 2 wine has been made sparkling by a natural method only.

Class 3 - May be labeled "Carbonated Wine" or something similar. A Class 3 wine has carbon dioxide injected into it.

Class 4 - May be labeled "Citrus Wine" or something similar. A Class 4 is wine that was produced primarily with citrus fruit.

Class 5 - May be labeled "Fruit Wine" or something similar. A Class 5 wine was produced primarily of fruits other than grapes or citrus.

Class 6 - Wine that has been made from agricultural products such as vegetables.

Class 7 - May be labeled "Aperitif Wine" or something similar. A Class 7 wine has an alcohol content of not less than 15% by volume; the grape wine has been compounded with added brandy, or alcohol, and flavored with herbs and natural aromatic flavoring.

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

Class 8 - May be labeled "Imitation Wine" or something similar. A Class 8 wine contains man-made materials.

Class 9 - May be labeled "Retsina Wine" or something similar. A Class 9 wine is a grape table wine has been fermented or flavored with resin.

Alcohol content by volume- The alcohol content must be listed on the label only if it contains more than 14% by volume. Wines that contain more than 14% alcohol are taxed at a rate four times higher than those containing less alcohol. These are considered "fortified wines" even if the high alcohol volume is attained by natural fermentation. For wines with an alcohol content of 14% or greater, a 1% variation is allowed. Wines that have less than 14% alcohol by volume are permitted a 1.5% variation. Wines containing less than 14% alcohol must state it on the label or be labeled by the appropriate class or description such as "light table wine".

Net volume of contents- In 1977, the U.S. government mandated that metric measurements be used as the wine industry standard. The most common bottle volume is 750ml. If the volume does not appear on the label, look for it molded into the glass bottle.

Name and address of the bottler, producer and country of origin- This information is required on all American wines and the words "**bottled by**" must immediately precede the name and address of the bottler. The term "**produced and bottled by**" may be used if the bottler also made no less than 75% of the wine by fermenting the must (juice) and clarifying the wine. "**Made and bottled by**" may be used if the named winery fermented and clarified at least 10% of the wine or if the winery changed the class of the wine by fortifying it, adding carbonization or making it a sparkling wine by adding a secondary fermentation process. When the words "**cellared**", "**vinted**" or "**prepared**" are used, it means that the named winery cellared, clarified or barrel aged the wine at that location. "**Blended and bottled**" indicates that the named winery mixed the wine with other wine of the same type and class at that location. The country of origin indicates where the wine was produced and not necessarily where the grapes were grown.

About the Author: Nicole Adams is a successful freelance author who specializes in writing articles about wine and wine-related products. You can find more articles written by Nicole at:

www.wine-reviewer.com

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Fine Wine Italian Style: The Beauty Of Italian Wine.

Fine **wine** often brings to mind images of French rolling hills and elegant dinners; however, Italy's twenty regions bring to the pallet an array of **fine** wines for your dining pleasure.

Italian **wine** making enjoys tradition rich in both modern and rustic methods, although much of the country's wineries now employ scientific and technological tools to create quality wines. The country's wines are made primarily from two types of grapes, Nebbiolo and Sangiovese. The Nebbiolo grapes are used in the northwestern part of the country, creating the red wines Barolo and Barbaresco. The Sangiovese grapes create one of the better-known Italian wines, Chianti, and are native to the central Tuscany and Umbria regions.

Italy's wines are divided into four categories based on origin, quality, and purity. When shopping for a **fine** Italian wine, look for those with the designation of "Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita D.O.C.G.," which is awarded to wines with a solid reputation. This designation considers region, production yields, and a DOC of at least five years. DOC indicates the origins of a wine, the type of grapes used in making the wine, and the methods of production. DOCG is a designation following stricter guidelines than the DOC, which includes a guarantee of origin.

The five regions of the Northwest produce over a quarter of the country's DOC wines, but only about twenty percent of the country's total **wine** production. This, then, is a good place to begin when shopping for Italian wine, as many **wine** sellers group Italian **wine** by the region, whether in general terms, such as Northwest, or by specific region, such as Piedmont. The Piedmont region creates a number of DOC and DOCG wines.

The Northeast region is home to two of Italy's **wine** schools, and generates about a third of the country's DOC wines. The three regions create about a fifth of Italy's total **wine** production. Veneto, one of the regions, now produces the most **wine** of any region in the country.

Central Italy, comprised of six regions, accounts for about twenty percent of both **wine** production and DOC wines. The tradition of **wine** making in this region has often been traditional, the region is moving toward more contemporary **wine** making methods, and the overall quality has improved. Some **wine** experts believe that this region will continue to make great strides in **wine** making, so for those who love red wine, this is an area worth watching. Tuscany creates the well-known Chianti wine, as well as a variety of other

Tuscan reds.

The Southern region, which includes the islands, is comprised of six regions. These regions produce about forty percent of the total production, but only about fourteen percent of DOC and DOCG wines. The region is focusing on overall quality, and this, too, is a region worth watching. For those interested in consistent quality wines, many of the region's production offer just that.

For those new to Italian **wine** or wanting additional information, there is an abundance of sources. An importer specializing in Italian **wine** is one of the best sources for information on **fine** Italian

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

wines, and can provide suggestions based on your individual preferences. You can also do your own research and **wine** tasting based on your **style** and preference. As with many things Italian, the wines are among the finer indulgences.

About The Author:

Italian Wine Facts is an information site that contains articles, a directory and other Italian Wine Resources. It can be found at:

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Food and wine choice advice from an expert wine taster

Food and wine were meant to go together. In my big Italian family, no gathering was complete without plenty of both. Winter feasts were easy for the food and wine lovers among us - a hearty red table wine is the perfect foil for most southern Italian dishes. A pitcher of table wine drawn from the cask in the basement was the typical accompaniment to our everyday meals.

Red, white or rose, Italian table wines are meant to be imbibed in the casual atmosphere of a family dinner. They are light enough to be enjoyed even by the casual food and wine enthusiast, and robust enough to complement the full-flavored richness of smoked and barbecued food. Which leads us to the subject of this little soliloquy - mixing and matching food and wine for the barbecue. My own tastes run to Italian jug wines, and if it was up to me, I'd tell you to just go out and buy a jug of Chianti and a jug of Lambrusco. It's what I grew up with, and I happen to love the little sparkle that a good Lambrusco (yes, they do exist!) adds to food.

In the interests of presenting a fair and educated view, however, I decided to check with an expert. Austin Liquor has been voted Best Liquor Store in Worcester for the past 5 years, mostly on the strength of its weekly wine tasting. A Friday night tradition in Worcester since the late 1970s, each tasting offers food and wine based around one or two specific vintages. I was directed to Richard Beams, Austin Liquor's resident wine expert, and directed my question to him: "What food and wine combination would you recommend for a summer barbecue?"

I did get my recommendations - but I also got a wonderful overview of Rich's philosophy of choosing wines, especially for fun or everyday occasions.

"I don't think it's necessary for people to spend more than \$12 for a bottle of wine for an everyday dinner," he told me. "For a special occasion like an anniversary dinner, sure, you can spend \$20 or more for a bottle. A barbecue is a fun occasion, though. For a barbecue you can get really good quality wine for under \$12."

That may come as a surprise to those of us who have been intimidated into believing that the only true quality wines come with corks and high price tags.

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

Said Rich to that: "I like wine to be fun. It should be fun. Too many people try to snob it up and break down the flavors so far that it's not fun anymore. I advise people to find something they like and enjoy it. I like to steer people to the less expensive wines that are excellent quality."

So what does Rich recommend to go with the food at a summer barbecue?

"I like to recommend a nice, light Riesling, " he told me. "Something crisp and fresh."

In fact, he told me, several of their recent wine tasting afternoons have featured barbecued food and wine that complements it. He recommended several wines that he feels are 'fun wines' with good value.

Flaio Primitivo (Salento, Italy) Primitivo is a grape varietal grown in the heel of Italy's boot. It's very similar to a good California Zinfandel - in Rich's words it's "almost an exact copy". It retails for about \$7 a bottle and is a great accompaniment for burgers and ribs.

Bonny Doon Big House Red (California) Bonny Doon has a lot of fun with their wines, according to Rich, and he does believe that wine should be fun. Big House Red is a blend of 7 or 8 grapes. According to Bonny Doon's own web site, those varietals include syrah, petite sirah, Grenache, barbera and malbec. It retails for about \$12 a bottle and its robust licorice and raspberry-accented bouquet stands up to the spiciest barbecued ribs.

Monte Antico (Tuscany, Italy) - "very similar to a Chianti Sangiovese," said Rich. At \$12 a bottle, it's got great fruit, balances a barbecue, holds up well, and has a very Italian looking label." To quote Monte Antico's own press, this wine is "Dark ruby in color, its bouquet of leather, earth, herbs, black cherries, licorice and plums is confirmed on the medium to full-bodied palate - round, spicy, elegant, attractively fruity and extremely versatile with any fare from pasta or risotto, to meat, fowl and cheese."

Rich's final recommendation was another 'fun' wine, one that he says is a great 'food wine'. The top in his book is:

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

Three Thieves 2002 Zinfandel was voted #8 as one of the Hottest Small Brands of 2005. The wine comes in a 1 liter jug with a screw top, and is marketed as a 'fun thing', says Rich, but the wine inside is a full bodied red zinfandel that goes great with burgers or eggplant parmigiana.

"The wine is excellent, and it's about \$11," Rich added. He also added the following advice for would-be wine fanciers. "You don't have to spend a lot to find excellent quality wines. If you find something that you like, make a note. You can go into a store and tell someone there that you liked 'this brand' and they'll steer you to other similar wines for you to try."

Final analysis? Good food and wine that's fun are the cornerstone of a great summer barbecue. Skip the fancy labels, vintages and price tags and pick out a wine that you like. Who cares what the noses think as long as your nose is tickled pink?

About the author:

Chris Robertson is an author of **Majon International**, one of the worlds MOST popular internet marketing companies on the web. Visit this **Food Website** and **Majon's Food directory**.

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German Wine - The New Commodity On The American Market

German wine is something that is finally catching on in American and for good reason. German wine is wonderful wine with many different notes and harmonized flavors to it. One of the most common and popular of all German wines is the Riesling. This German wine has gained some serious ground in the wine world in the last decade or so thanks to its fabulous flavor.

Riesling is a popular German wine because it can grow in stony areas that have little moisture. These grapes are hardy and tough and they do not require the pampering that some other varieties of grapes need which makes them perfect for German wine. And this type of German wine can last for many years due to its favorable acid levels.

The crops of the grapes used in this German wine are always plentiful. This is due in part to the great growing conditions and the grapes ability to thrive with little water as well as their tough exterior. These grapes used to make this German wine are very frost resistant. They do not shrivel and wither when it gets cold out which is great for German weather.

This particular German wine, the Riesling wine, will take a little longer to make in that the grapes need some more growing time when compared to other kinds of grapes. German wine grapes are ones that mature a little later in the year, sometimes not until late October. This is not a bad thing though because this German wine is one of the most favorable of all wines with its vital and fresh taste.

This German wine also has a very distinctive fragrance that also makes it popular among the wine connoisseurs of the world. This German wine is one to share with friends and take on picnics no matter where it is that you live. A good German wine is always welcome at any table and it will bring out the best in just about any meal it is served with.

In fact this German wine, the Riesling, is getting to be so popular that it is one of the most planted of all German wines. Of all the German wine made and all of the grapes grown to make it Riesling makes up over one fifth of all the grape plantings for German wine. This is quite a feat.

About the author:

What was started as an online store, has turned into a growing collection of internet resources on subjects ranging from Network Marketing, Investing, Health, Travel and even Wine. Visit <http://www.mj-sales.com> for our store or <http://www.mj-sales.com/articles.htm> for more articles. This article may be reproduced only in its entirety.

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How To Begin Wine Collecting

A wine gift is the perfect gift for those hard to shop for people in your life. Everyone, and I mean everyone is happy to receive a wine gift during the holidays. A wine gift is classy and it is full of lovely flavors to savor and the best part is that even if you don't spend much on your wine gift it is going to look like you did. There is just no better gift to get for anyone than a wine gift.

If you would like to get something like a wine gift for someone in your life but you are worried about the alcohol factor then you need to look into non-alcoholic wine gifts. There are many of these out there and they are just as fabulous as the old fashioned wine gift only they will not get anyone intoxicated. None of the full flavors will be lost however and this is the main concern for many people when they are looking at a non-alcoholic wine gift.

A wine gift is great for any occasion whatsoever but you will still need to work out your budget before you go shopping for the perfect one. You need to know your budget before you start shopping for a wine gift because there is a wide range of these gifts on the market and they can vary drastically in price. If you go into the store with a good idea of how much you can spend you are less likely to get swept away by a wine gift only to find out that it is way out of your price range. If this were to happen when you were shopping for your wine gift then you would never be satisfied with the wine gift you end up getting.

You can give a wine gift to your best friend or your parents or your boss or co-workers, the versatility of a wine gift is enormous and that is why they are so popular and they have been for so many years.

The wine gift that you choose could simply be a good bottle of wine or you could choose a wine gift that is actually a basket. This type of wine gift will come with many other tasty treats such as cheese and crackers or chocolate or both. You can even find a wine gift with meat in the basket if you would like.

A wine gift is a great gift for anyone on any occasion so look into giving a wine gift today.

About the Author: What was started as an online store, has turned into a growing collection of resources on subjects ranging from Network Marketing to Wine. Visit <http://www.mj-sales.com> for more information or <http://wine.mj-sales.com> for more wine articles. This article may be reproduced only in its entirety.

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Take A California Wine Country Tour

There many different California wine tours that you can go on when visiting this fantastic state. The climate of California is very diverse and this helps California create some of the most fantastic yet very different wines. California wine is unlike other wines in this diversity and each California wine is perfect in its own way. When you go on a California wine tour you will get to see the mild coastal areas or the fantastic inland valleys and hills. Each of these California wine regions make their own gorgeous wines for you to see and taste.

These differences where all of the California wine regions make the tours all fun and exciting. You will be able to enjoy glorious tasting wines in their own natural habitat. You will be able to tour the California wineries in person and you will have a ball.

It is easy to visit California wine country for yourself. There are tons of different places that you can stay at while you are checking out California wine. You can stay at one of the many bed and breakfasts or if you like things a little less personal there are also many hotels to stay at.

Purchasing California wine is even easier. You can buy California wine in almost any liquor store or cold beer and wine store. Most of this type of California wine will be the kind that you just buy and drink. If you are looking for California wine that you will be able to store and age for awhile yourself you should talk to a local wine merchant in your area. These wine merchants should be able to tell you everything that you need to know about California wine and get you some of the finest for your own collection.

You can also find many different sources of California wine online. This way you will be able to search for a particular California wine if you have one in mind and compare all of the prices at the same time. Shopping for California wine online is always a great idea. You will be able to enjoy your California wine in the comfort of your own home and this is always the best way to enjoy it. California wine is something that all wine enthusiasts should enjoy at least a few times a year.

About the author:

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Wine Clubs - A Convenient Way to Know Wine

Wine clubs have been sprouting up in recent years as a result of an increased interest in wine and greater wine consumption. In fact, according to figures from the Wine Institute, sales of wine in the United States went up four percent in 2004. Exports of wine by other countries to the U.S. remain steady since foreign wineries have found the United States to be a lucrative place to do business. For wine lovers and would-be wine drinkers, joining a wine club would bring numerous benefits. Many wine clubs count expert vintners or sommeliers among their members. But you don't need to be a wine aficionado to be able to join a wine club. A great many clubs welcome both newbies and experts. They offer much information not only about various wines out in the market, but also about many wine-related topics; for instance, which type of wine should be served with a certain entrée; or news about the latest goings-on in the wine industry.

Wine clubs offer varying membership programs. For the fee you pay, you will receive wine selections from vineyards whose offerings meet the club's standards. Clubs can send you their handpicked selections, or give you the opportunity to make your own selections. Most clubs usually send two bottles of wine to each member per month; they can be two bottles of red or two of white, or one of each. Along with the wine, you will also receive pertinent information about them, such as the winery where they came from, any awards, publicity or accolades that have been accorded to the vintner, and a description of the conditions under which the grapes used in the wine were grown.

Wine club membership offers several other perks. For instance, premium members are offered the ability to buy wines at discounted prices. If they have a Wine of the Month program, you can be sure that you'll realize significant savings from being a member than if you just bought the featured wine at regular prices. Joining a wine club would be a good investment if you are a regular wine drinker -- which many people are becoming because of much publicized news about how regular wine consumption has numerous health benefits. Also, most of the wine clubs today offer gift membership program, which you can give to people who would enjoy wine either by itself or with a meal.

Many wine stores or retailers have their own wine clubs, which you can join for a fee. Some clubs offer open-ended programs, meaning you can cancel your membership anytime. You should base your wine club choice on several factors. Are the services they offer worth the rate they are charging? What are their expert credentials -- do they have wine experts who can give sound wine recommendations? Do they have additional activities for members, such as wine tastings or perhaps visits to vineyards? You should evaluate these factors and more before you select a club to join. There are hundreds of wine club web sites online, and they provide detailed information on what you get for your money.

People enjoy the benefit of receiving their wine at their doorstep -- no more need to zip around to a wine seller's physical location for a bottle of vino. However, you should remember that most U.S. states have strict laws regarding the shipping of wine from state to state. Perhaps you might consider choosing a club that has a branch in your particular state because in such cases the law is not as strict. This is another factor that you should look at when you are evaluating which club to join.

You can choose to join a wine club that has international coverage -- one that features wine produced in the world's most popular winery regions, and whose membership runs in the thousands

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

-- or you could opt for a smaller, more specialized wine club, which focuses on only one or two specific wine-producing regions. Then there are clubs that concentrate on providing only a certain type of wine, such as red, white, or champagne.

As you can see, there are many factors to consider when choosing a wine club to join. But then, as you can also probably see, there are numerous benefits you can experience if you choose the right wine club.

About The Author

Jason Connors is a successful writer and wine connoisseur providing valuable tips and advice on wine cellar design, wine making, and wine basics. <http://www.about-wine.net>.

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Wine Storage Do's and Don'ts.

Wine begins to spoil the moment it is opened. While short term exposure to oxygen or "breathing the wine" can open the aromas and flavours of various red wines, any contact with oxygen before opening a bottle and its all over, down the sink.

When the wine is in an upright position as many are at your local liquor store for months and sometime years, the drying out of the cork will have disastrous effects due to oxidation. So try to buy wines that are stored lying down, or as becoming more popular, screw capped bottles.

Keep your wine at home in a wine rack or if you are serious about your wine collection, keep it in a temperature controlled wine cellar or cooler.

Heat and humidity are also important to the welfare of your wine, for longer storage humidity should be around sixty percent and will keep the corks fresh and expanded.

An ideal temperature range for the longer term storage should be at about 55 degrees, for storage of up to six months 55 to 70 degrees should be ok, it's important to realise that wines can be stressed by variations in temperature so try to keep it stable by cellaring.

Ultraviolet light affects your wine! That new wine rack you have in your dining room, sure it looks great in the afternoon sun but don't expect the wine to be that way, keep your wine away from fluorescent lights, sunlight and from heat sources such as the furnace, hot water heaters, water pipes, other appliances, and especially the top of your fridge!

It's clear that proper storage of your wine is critical for day to day wine and high quality wine that you want to enjoy in years to come. A wine cellar is your best choice if you have the space, why not make it a special place incorporating a bar and tasting facilities. If you can't cellar your wine or prefer to buy wines that are ready to drink a good quality wine rack kept in the basement, under a stairwell, or other cool area of your home is a must.

Visit www.aboutwineracks.com for more information and suppliers of wine racks, wine cellars and building a home wine cellar.

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

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A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

Wine Tasting: Four Easy Steps to Hosting a Great Wine Tasting Party

Thomas Jefferson said, "Good wine is a necessity of life for me". No wonder he was one of our founding fathers!

More and more people are drinking wine these days and why not? It's readily acknowledged by the medical community that drinking red wine in moderation has a myriad of health benefits including lowering your risk of contracting heart disease, breast cancer, prostate cancer and cataracts. I don't know about you, but for me, that's a good enough reason to enjoy a glass or two every night. In addition, it's a nice way to relax after a rough day and getting together with friends over a glass of wine is a great venue for socializing and having fun.

One way to do this is by hosting a wine tasting party. Besides being a lot of fun, this is an excellent approach for learning about wine and maybe finding a few new wines you really enjoy. Below are some guidelines that will help you to organize a wine tasting that's sure to be a hit.

Inviting your guests- The first thing you need to consider when organizing a wine-tasting party is how many people to invite. Generally speaking, 8 to 12 is considered the optimum number of guests. This size group is large enough to promote spontaneous interaction and small enough to be easily manageable.

Whether you telephone, email, or sent written invitations is a personal choice. I happen to prefer sending email invitations. American Greetings has a great card site that includes "eInvites". It's a wonderful service where you can send invitations and your guests can simply click a button to RSVP. You can even schedule follow-up reminders. The American greeting site has a \$20.00 yearly membership fee, but for all the ecards and services, I think it's worth it.

Choosing the wine- In my opinion, choosing the wine to taste at your party is the best part of the planning stage. But then, I happen to get mesmerized every time I walk into a large wine store. There's so much to choose from.

There are many different ways you can handle wine selection. One option is to consider a themed party. For example: "California Chardonnays", "German Rieslings", "Wines Under \$10.00", or "Italian Reds". The possibilities here are endless, so don't be afraid to be creative. Another option might be to choose wines from a particular winery or even to select different vintages (years) of the exact same wine. Selecting different vintages of the same wine is called a vertical tasting and this may be more costly to do since older vintages tend to carry a higher price tag.

When buying the wine for your party, keep in mind that for tasting purposes, each pour should be about two ounces. This means that for eight people or less, one 750 ml bottle should be enough. The question of food- No party would be complete without food. However, depending on your goal for the event, you may want to wait until after tasting the wine to serve food because food affects the taste of wine and visa-versa. If your goal is to have an informal gathering of friends and experience new wines with good food, by all means serve food paired with the various wines. In fact, an easy and fun way to have a wine tasting party is to ask your guests to bring the various courses (appetizers, soup, salad, dessert) along with a paired wine while you provide the main course and wine.

If your primary goal is tasting and judging new wine, it is more appropriate to wait until after the tasting to serve the food. Instead, during the tasting, provide only unflavored crackers (saltines) or bread to cleanse the palette between wines.

Tasting and rating the wine- Remember to limit your pours to two ounces (visually, two ounces is

A World of Opportunities to Explore and Enjoy Wine

about two inches in a normal size wine glass). Place pitchers of water out for your guests to rinse their glasses or cleanse the palette between tastings. Also, have buckets available for those who choose to spit out the wine instead of swallowing it. Spitting is not necessarily an indication of not liking the wine. Many wine tasters spit so they will not be affected by alcohol consumption.

Especially if the tasting is to be followed by socializing and drinking wine.

One suggestion for tasting and rating the wine is to simply hand out paper and pens to each of the guests as they arrive so they are able to make notes on each wine tasted. To make this process more structured and organized, you can download and print wine tasting forms from the internet. Clicking on the link "wine tasting form" link in the resource box at the end of this article will take you to Wine-Reviewer where you may download and print several different forms.

You may reduce the chance of ratings being influenced by personal preference or prejudice by having a "blind tasting". To do this, completely wrap each of the bottles with aluminum foil and label it with a number. The wine will then be identified and judged by the number on the bottle.

To make the evening a bit more interesting and educational, research the wine, winery and wine-making region. Your guests will probably find the information interesting and will appreciate your effort.

Using these guidelines, having a wine-tasting party is as easy as 1-2-3-4. Have fun, but please remember to drink responsibly and do not let others drink and drive. If possible, have someone be a designated driver to insure that everyone gets home safely.

About The Author

Marcia Parks is a successful free-lance author and wine reviewer. You can find extensive wine reviews and education at <http://www.wine-reviewer.com>.

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Wine: How To Get Started

Wine can be a confusing thing. There are so many types of wine to choose from that the beginner wine-drinker feels totally confused by what is on offer. He feels he needs a huge amount of knowledge to even begin to understand the subject. Never mind choosing a bottle of wine to drink!

But it really doesn't need to be a difficult task. Just remember one rule: wine is made to be enjoyed. And so the first thing you need to do when choosing your wine is remember that it doesn't matter what the experts say. Just concentrate on what you think of the taste.

That sounds simple, and it is. But it's something that a lot of people forget when starting to drink wine. What you think of the taste of the wine is the most important thing.

But there is a warning. In order to really appreciate wine, you need a few pointers. Not to the "best" or the most expensive bottles of wine. But actually away from the "worst" and the cheapest. (Though that's not so say that a cheap bottle of wine can't be enjoyable. It can. But some wines are really not worth trying, and can put the budding wine enthusiast right off the subject before he even gets a partial feel for what makes a good wine.)

So instead of worrying about what you should drink, it's better to discover what you definitely shouldn't drink.

And once the newcomer to wine is away from the worst and the cheapest, he will find a wonderful world of tasty (and often inexpensive) wine, right at his doorstep. Then once he begins to get a feel for the various tastes and bouquets of the various wines, he will be able to begin to make his own judgments as to what makes a really good wine.

Then the fun really starts.

So the best advice about wine is to take a bit of advice about wine. But not too much. Take just a little advice about wine. And then just enjoy the wine.

About the Author:

David Flinthoff is an avid wine drinker and publishes the online wine resource <http://www.wine-excellent.com>

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Enjoy the Opportunity to Explore New Wines

There's a huge variety of ways to explore the world of wine. There are wine tasting events, vineyards to visit, reviews to read, and of course, wines to taste. The resources at <http://www.winecountryworld.com> can help you organize the opportunities wine enthusiasts have to choose from. You'll never miss the event or review that could introduce you to a fabulous new wine.

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