

## DRINKING WINE

Whatever the characteristics of the liquid in the bottle, there are things worth doing to make drinking it more pleasurable.

### What about food?

The most general rule is that wines of the Old World (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Austria) are “better” with food, while wines of the “New World” (US, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, South Africa) have been made for drinking alone. The rule is overwhelmed by its exceptions, but I have one thought consistent with the rule. The Australian wines made with Grenache and Syrah (Shiraz) in the \$18-75 price range provide abundant examples of exceptional “sipping” wines.



Turkey (and its dressing) goes well with Pinot Noir, Red Beaujolais, Chianti, and Barbara, all of which are lighter red wines. However, the Pinot Noir from Burgundy (“all” red Burgundy is Pinot Noir) is often too intense, especially for bottles costing at retail more than \$50. Among whites, look for a Sauvignon Blanc from California (or Texas) labeled “Fume Blanc” or from the French Loire Valley labeled Sancerre, a Gruner Veltliner of Austria, or the Friuli, Italy wine made of Ribolla Gialla grapes, all of which are wines with a good punch. Salmon and tuna share this same group of wines, except I would not drink the Fume Blanc with it.

The “hot,” “spicy” foods of Thailand, the Caribbean Islands and India match well with wines that either actually do, or appear to the mouth to, offer mild sweetness. The classic and inexpensive wine of choice for many is the blush wine, White Zinfandel. Often – but it varies from year to year – the classic wines of Germany have the right sweetness: Riesling and Gewürztraminer. Wines using these grapes are also produced in the US, France, Italy, Australia. The wine made of Chenin Blanc grapes from the Vouvray region in the Loire Valley comes in a slightly sweet version as well as one bone dry.

The classic American wine with classic American barbeque (made with tomato) is Zinfandel. Some Southern barbeque has no tomato and no sugar in the sauce, and for it the wines of my choice are the same as those for turkey. (Do not have Chardonnay with barbeque.)

What to have with Chardonnay? Most of us who say we do or we do not like “Chardonnay” are speaking of our experience with wines of California costing less than \$25 a bottle. This is a very small segment of what is available, while at the same time it is a very large part of wine sales in America. Wines using the Chardonnay grape vary widely in characteristics; the grape makes good to brilliant wines with and without the use of oak, with or without malolactic conversion, and with short and long aging – it also picks up the soil elements from where it is grown. One could spend a lifetime just concentrating on learning the wines of this one grape. “All” Chardonnay goes well with the most common shellfish: shrimp and crab. But for lobster, you will want almost any Chardonnay of Italy or of Spain, or a white Burgundy (“all” white wine of Burgundy is 100% Chardonnay), but only an expensive, mature California or Australian wine. For white fish, almost all Chardonnay is a nice companion, but the more

expensive wines amplify their difference in quality only when the fish is itself of high quality and is more simply prepared.

Finally, Champagne and other sparkling wines do so well with all food except for steak. Do not think of Champagne as only an aperitif, or only for toasts. It is the supreme food wine.

### **Temperature, Breathing and Decanting.**

In England and France, the term “room temperature” most often meant 65 degrees, not the 72-75 degrees we think of in our twentieth and twenty-first century central-heated American homes and restaurants. While restaurants will seldom co-operate, at home you should think to put the bottle of red in the refrigerator for up to a half hour before drinking. Here are the commonly recommended temperatures for different wines: Sparkling and Dessert wines: 45-50°; Light Reds: 55-65°; Full Reds: 62-68°; Whites and Rosés: 50-60° (except inexpensive New World whites, which in fact are better at 45°). Just as reds are often served too hot, your white wine will be much more pleasurable if it does not sit in a bucket of iced water.

If the wine is more than about ten years old, you should decant the wine. Red wine, especially, throws off its dissolved solids into larger solids that sink to the bottom (which is going to be the side of the bottle, since a wine of this age is surely going to have been stored on its side).

Almost any red will benefit more or less from being aerated if drunk at some specific time in its life. Few wines more than ten years old need to be aerated, but younger wines will need it based on a wine-by-wine basis. Few Oregon Pinot Noirs ever need it; for drinking in 2010, most California and Washington Cabernet Sauvignon wines of the years 2001-2006 will benefit; Bordeaux reds of 2005 and newer are not ready to drink, but 2000-2003 wines will benefit; Burgundies of 1999, 2002 and 2004 will benefit (avoid 2003); Barolos and Barbarescos of 1998-2004 will benefit (avoid the 2002 and 2003); Tuscan reds of 1999-2004 (avoid 2002) will benefit from aeration. Few whites benefit from aeration but those some few do; white wines of the Rhone and all Ribolla Gialla will benefit from aeration if the wine is more than three years old and less than ten. Aeration is not opening the bottle and letting it sit, which does nothing; aeration is pouring the wine through air.

### **In Restaurants.**

Give the waiter or sommelier some information about your likes, including information on price, and then listen carefully. If you will want the wine only during the meal, say that; for reds ask for it to be slightly chilled during that wait time. Be selective of restaurants' own ways with wine: take your “wine meals” in restaurants with low markups (Ibiza, Catalan, Haven) and patronize those that allow you to bring your own (Lucio's, Bistro des Amis, La Vista, Just Dinner).

### **Glassware.**

Those with noses and palates much more educated than mine have long concluded that glassware shaped for a specific wine does improve the experience. While for wine tastings and classes I have a hundred “tasting” glasses of one shape that go in the dishwasher, for fine dining at home I have six different shapes: Bordeaux/Cabernet, Burgundy/Pinot Noir, Burgundy/Old Chardonnay, Chablis/Chardonnay, Barolo/Syrah and Dessert. I drink a wide variety of wines from around the world and so I use several differently shaped glasses, but if you focus mostly on,

say, California Cabernet or Bordeaux wines, then your wine experience will be heightened when you drink from a glass shaped for that wine.

**Storing Wine.**

Wine will not deteriorate in your home in only a matter of weeks, but wine kept at room temperature for more than about a year or two is very likely to decline. If this is an issue for you, write a date to drink by on your bottles, taking into account an estimate of the time a bottle was in the store. Always store bottles on the side, as a cork not kept wet will deteriorate in a matter of weeks.

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