

Wine Tasting 101

Here are some helpful hints that will add to your increased pleasure while discovering wines. Write down your impressions in this booklet next to the wines tasted so you will remember which ones you really enjoyed!

Look

Check the colour and clarity.

Hint: Hold it over a white napkin or white table cloth. What color is it? Look beyond red, white or blush. If it's a red wine, is the color maroon, purple, ruby, garnet, red, brick or even brownish? If it's a white wine, is it clear, pale yellow, straw-like, light green, golden, amber or brown in appearance?

Is the wine watery or dark, translucent or opaque, dull or brilliant, cloudy or clear? Can you see sediment? Tilt your glass a bit, give it a little swirl - look again, is there sediment, bits of cork or any other floaters? An older red wine will be more translucent than younger red wines.

Smell

To get a good impression of your wine's aroma, gently swirl your glass. This helps vaporize some of the wine's alcohol and release more of its natural aromas. Then take a quick whiff to gain a first impression. Still Smelling- Now stick your nose down into the glass and take a deep inhale through your nose with your mouth open too. What are your second impressions? Do you smell oak, berry, flowers, vanilla or citrus? A wine's aroma is an excellent indicator of its quality and unique characteristics. Gently swirl the wine and let the aromas mix and mingle, and sniff again.

Taste

Start with a small sip and let it roll around your tongue and on to the inside of your cheeks. There are three stages of taste: *the Attack phase, the Evolution phase and the Finish.*

Attack Phase: This is the initial impression that the wine makes on your palate. It is comprised of four pieces of the wine puzzle: alcohol content, tannin levels, acidity and residual sugar. These four puzzle pieces display initial sensations on the palate. Ideally these components will be well-balanced; one piece will not be more prominent than the others. These four pieces do not display a specific flavor per se, they meld together to offer impressions in intensity and complexity, soft or firm, light or heavy, crisp or creamy, sweet or dry, but not necessarily true flavors like fruit or spice.

Evolution Phase: Also called the mid-palate phase, this is the wine's actual taste on the palate. Here you are looking to discern the flavor profile of the wine. If it's a red wine you may start noting fruit – berry, plum, prune or fig; perhaps some spice – pepper, clove, cinnamon, or maybe a woody flavor like oak, cedar, or a detectable smokiness. If it's white wine you may taste apple, pear, tropical or citrus fruits, or the taste may be more floral in nature or consist of honey, butter, herbs or a bit of earthiness.

The Finish: Is the final phase. The wine's finish is how long the flavor impression lasts after it is swallowed. This is where the wine culminates, where the aftertaste comes into play. Did it last several seconds? Was it light-bodied (like water) or full-bodied (like the consistency of milk)? Can you taste the remnant of the wine on the back of your mouth and throat? Do you want another sip or was the wine too bitter at the end? What was your last flavor impression – fruit, butter, oak? Does the taste persist or is it short-lived?