



# Basic Wine Training

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## Introduction:

A guest's dining experience is not complete without proper wine service. A server is not maximizing income opportunities without proper wine service skills. A meal is not truly complete without the accompaniment of wine. Proper wine service *brands* a restaurant and ensures repeat clientele and positive reputation. Guests will return often and recommend the place to their friends, thus causing the restaurant and the team members to prosper. Second, the sale of a glass or a bottle of wine adds to the guest's check thereby automatically increasing tips. Third, wine adds to the profit of the restaurant.

## Purpose:

The information in this manual is intended to provide team members with the foundation on which they can develop wine confidence through knowledge. This knowledge will not only benefit you as a food server, but will ultimately provide the team member with personal satisfaction as a consumer of wine.

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## Common Questions about Wine:

### What is wine?

Wine is the pure, naturally fermented juice of ripe grapes or other fruits. In fermentation, yeast, which forms naturally on the grape and is most often added to the juice, converts the natural sugar of the juice into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Fermentation is stopped when the alcohol in the newly created wine reaches a level, typically above 12.5% by volume, mortal to the yeast. When all the natural grape sugar is converted to alcohol, a wine is described as dry, once again typically over 12.5% by volume. When a wine has residual or unfermented sugar still in solution it is described as sweet. The level of sweetness is determined by the percentage of residual sugar.

### What are the different categories of wine?

Wine fits into the following categories:

- **Table Wine:** Red, White or Rose. Most have an alcohol content of below 14% and are made to accompany any food.
- **Fortified /Dessert Wines:** They have an alcohol content of 15% to 24% and have had neutral grape spirit added at some point during vinification.
- **Sparkling Wines:** These wines contain carbon dioxide as a result of a second fermentation either in the bottle, Champagne most famously, or in large closed tanks, Asti, Prosecco, inexpensive *brands*.

### What gives wine its color?

The juices of nearly all grapes are white; the color comes from the skins.

- **Red Wine** is fermented with the skins of the grapes, thus the natural pigment from the skin enters the wine and gives it the color.
- **White Wine** is fermented without the skins, which is removed right after crushing.
- **Rose Wine** is fermented with the skins for a short time and then the juice is drawn off to finish the fermentation alone.

### What is a varietal wine?

**In the United States**, a varietal wine is labeled according to the predominant grape from which it is made. Examples of varietal grapes are: Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chenin Blanc. A varietal wine in the United States must be comprised of at least 75% of the grape stated on the label.

**In Europe**, wines are normally not named after the grape variety, but rather after the region where the grape was grown.

## How is sweet wine made?

There are two commonly encountered wines with sweetness, fortified and late harvested. Fortified wines, Port, Sherry and Madeira, plus a world of imitators, are produced by adding neutral grape spirit to a fermenting wine, thus raising the alcohol environment to a mortal level for the yeast. Port and some Madeiras are naturally sweet as the residual sugar comes only from the grapes while Sherry and some Madeiras are sweetened after being fermented to dryness by the addition of sweetening agents. Late harvested wines contain only natural residual sugar from the harvested grapes. Late harvested wines as the name suggests are produced from over-ripe, late picked grapes, most famously Sauternes from France or Beerenauslese from Germany. In the United States a wine labeled late harvest must state grape sugar at harvest and residual sugar in the finished wine. Most late harvest wines contain 9-12% alcohol by volume. Fermentation is typically halted naturally as the sugar rich environment causes difficulty for the yeast.

## What is generic wine?

American generic names like Burgundy, Rhine, and Sauterne came into use when European emigrants first made wine in this country and named them after areas from which the wine had similar characteristics. U.S. wineries prefer to use varietal labeling for their premium wines, specifying the grape variety used.

## What is “tannin”?

Tannin is an organic acid present in the grape skins and seeds, responsible for the astringent quality in a young wine. It is more pronounced in red wines because it is extracted from the skins during fermentation. The amount of tannin often relates to a wine's aging potential; it is deposited as sediment, along with other substances, as the wine ages in the bottle. Tannin is felt on the gum line, inside the cheeks, and when very powerful on the roof of the mouth and tongue. It is the chewy, puckery, dusty quality in a red wine.

## Why are red wines generally enjoyed best at room temperature and white wines chilled?

Bear in mind room temperature refers to a room's temperature prior to artificial environment. Lighter red wines are best served at 58-62° F while fuller reds are better at 62-65°F. White wines contain very little tannin and have a higher acidity than red wines. Chilling white wines brings out the fruity flavor of the wine, and makes the acidity more pronounced and the wines more enjoyable and refreshing. Be careful not to over chill, 46-48° F for Champagne and sparkling wines, 47-52° F for lighter whites, and 52-55° F for fuller whites. Always remember to ask the guest how they like the wine, as they are the final arbiter of proper service temperature.

## **Can wine that is served chilled be safely stored in the refrigerator?**

Yes, but it is best to use the wine within one to two weeks to avoid harm to the cork. Once the wine is chilled it should not be stored again at room temperature.

## **Why is it important to let red wines “breathe”?**

Red table wines generally will benefit if uncorked and decanted then allowed standing at least 20 minutes before serving. Wine is a living body and when the bottle is decanted, the wine absorbs oxygen from the air. Simply removing the cork does little, as the dime sized surface area in the neck of the bottle is insufficient for oxidation. Oxidation activates the development of the bouquet and aroma and gives depth and smoothness to the wine. Older wine (20 years+) should be opened just before decanting and drinking.

## **Why does one bottle of wine cost twice as much as another same size bottle of the same type of wine?**

The location, soil, drainage elevation, etc. where the grapes grow is probably the most important factor when producing quality grapes, which, with superior wine making skill produces great wine. Great vineyards are a limited resource and therefore great grapes typically have a greater cost. Other factors could be that the wine may have been aged for many years in small casks to develop complexity or additional character. Supply and demand plays an important role in the determination of the value of a wine.

## **What does “vintage year” mean?**

Since grapes are harvested every year, there is a vintage every year. An exceptional vintage is the result of a year of exceptional weather when all factors have been especially favorable.

## **Why should some wines be decanted?**

Many old and increasingly younger red wines tend to throw sediment or a deposit. This can cloud the last few glasses poured from the bottle. This wine should be poured slowly and steadily into another container and stopped when the sediment is coming to the neck of the bottle. A light source, typically a candle though a pocket flashlight is acceptable, is placed below the bottle to allow a translucent view of the wine. More importantly decanting allows contact with the air. This contact greatly benefits full flavored reds.

## How Wine is made

### **Harvesting:**

Most grapes ripen in late summer and early autumn. The earliest picking of wine grapes starts in the warmest regions in early August, but the main harvest, or vintage, comes in September and October. Frequent tests determine when to pick the grapes. This determination is predicated on sugar ripeness and increasingly over the last decade, flavorful ripeness and balance. As grapes mature, they gain in natural grape-sugar sweetness and decreasing fruit acidity. For wines in which tartness is desired the grapes may be picked earlier, while their fruit acid is still high.

### **Crushing:**

Most quality wines are no longer de-stemmed and crushed. A more gentle process of juicing and whole berry fermentation is now employed most often, even the more thick-skinned varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, receive gentle treatment.

### **Fermentation:**

The grape must (juice) is pumped into fermenting vats. Complete fermentation takes from a few days to a few weeks. When some sweetness is desired, the fermentation is stopped while the desired amount of residual grape sugar remains. Expert control during fermentation is one of the most important factors determining the wine's quality.

### **Aging:**

Immediately after fermentation, the new wine is placed in large storage tanks to begin aging, which could take months or years depending on the wine involved. As the wine is aging, the grape solids (sediment) slowly settle to the bottom of the tanks. The aging tanks can be large or small, oak or stainless steel.

### **Racking:**

During the aging, the wine must be drawn off periodically from the sediments and moved into a clean cask. This process is called "racking". As the wine matures, many producers complete the aging in smaller oak barrels.

### **Bottling:**

Bottling is a delicate procedure, requiring absolute cleanliness to avoid spoilage. Special equipment is used to avoid causing damage to the wine. Once wine is bottled and corked, it continues to develop and age, each one at its own pace. Some wines, especially most dry whites and light reds, are best when young. Most fine and complex wines will continue to improve in the bottle until they reach maturity.

## How Champagne is made

Champagne is a uniquely French product, although makers of sparkling wines all over the world, who use the same process, have borrowed the name. Despite its worldwide fame, French Champagne comes from a rather small area in northeastern France where it is made by a slow, methodical process.

The grapes that make Champagne are the white **Chardonnay** and two red grapes: **Pinot Noir**, and the area's major grape, the **Pinot Meunier**. Champagne begins as a white table wine (no carbon dioxide), though two of the grapes that comprise the wine, typically 75% of the blend, are red. The most commonly encountered Champagne is not from a single vintage; rather it is a blend of several vintages. Hence, no vintage appears on the labels of *Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label*, *Moët & Chandon Whitestar*, or *Mumm Cordon Rouge*. Most multi-vintage, often incorrectly referred to as non-vintage, Champagnes contain 75-90% wine from the year in which the Champagne was produced. The remaining 10-25% is from the preceding 2-5 vintages and has been held in stainless steel tanks, large neutral oak casks, or magnum bottles. This is known as reserve wine. Thus Champagne is truly a blended wine. Three different grapes from five different regions and wine from as many as five different years combine to create the non-sparkling *cuvée*. The non-sparkling *cuvée* is then portioned in the bottles, which are eventually shipped around the world. To create the second fermentation in this bottle, the heart of the *Methode Champenois*, a precisely measured amount of sugar, grape must, yeast and yeast nutrients are added. The bottle is then sealed either with a crown cap (pop bottle top) or cork (very rare these days). Fermentation then takes place under pressure. The result is the addition of .5-1.0% alcohol and carbon dioxide infused into the wine. We now have Champagne.

Bottles of completed Champagne are stacked in horizontal tiers or large boxes for a few months to several years. The sediment from the second fermentation in the bottle must eventually be disgorged from the bottle. Champagne laws states that this sediment must remain in the bottle for 15 months for a multi-vintage blend and 36 months for vintage Champagne. Vintage Champagne is simply that, Champagne produced from a single year, which must be stated on the label.

In less expensive champagnes the second fermentation occurs in large stainless steel tanks instead of the original bottle. To enable the consumer to differentiate these from the more expensive bottle-fermented product most countries require the terms *Classic Method*, *Method Traditionelle* for bottle fermented wines and *Charmat* or *Cuve Close* for bulk fermented wines.

The following are the major designations on a champagne label which will tell you how sweet or dry it is:

Ultra-Brut	-	Bone dry
Brut	-	Dry
Extra Dry	-	Off-dry
Demi-sec	-	Sweet

Champagne should be served chilled and in a tulip shaped or tall flute glass. Saucer-shaped glasses should not be used since they will dissipate the bubbles too quickly.



## Wine Tasting

There are five things to look for when evaluating wine, appearance, **aroma**, taste, finish and balance.

### **Appearance:**

With about 2oz of wine in a glass, observe the color of the wine by viewing it in front of a light. The wine must be clear in a glass. Cloudiness can indicate bacterial spoilage or, it may simply mean that natural sediment has been stirred up. Sediment in old red wines, and crystals in white or red wines are seldom indicators of spoilage.

Color, or hue, tells about a wine's type, age, and substance. Each wine has its own characteristic color. For example, young and healthy Beaujolais has purple tone; Chablis is pale straw yellow with a greenish tinge. As wine ages, it's color changes. Red wines are often deep purple when young, than become ruby or garnet. White wines usually become darker, changing to old gold.

### **Aroma:**

Much of what we perceive to be taste is actually smell. Swirling the wine glass releases the "wine aroma". Bring the glass to your nose and inhale the aroma. Smell helps you define how fruity or flowery a wine is and to point out both positive qualities and faults. By the time you are ready to sip the wine, you should have a very good idea of how it will taste. Over 90% of what you taste is determined by smell.

### **Taste:**

Tasting is a completely subjective experience, and each person will react differently to a particular wine. Evaluate several taste components at the same time: sweetness, acidity (sourness), tannin (astringency), varietal taste, body or "mouthfeel", overall balance, etc. Look for attributes of taste, both desirable and undesirable, before you make your evaluation about the wines acceptability an overall quality level.

### **Balance:**

One of the most important qualities to look for in tasting wine is balance. Are all the components of the wine in harmony? Your mouth, which is capable of distinguishing sweet, sour, bitter, and salt, can also judge the body or "weight" of a wine; is it full-bodied, medium-bodied or light-bodied?

- **Sweetness** is readily apparent in any wine that has residual sugar.
- The very slight amount of natural **salts** that might be present in a wine are rarely, if ever, detectable.
- If you taste **bitterness**, it usually means there is a higher degree of tannin in the wine. Tannin, which comes from grape skins and is an important part of red wine, has an astringent, tart quality when the wine is young. As the wine matures, the tannin lessens and the wine develops a smoother, fuller taste.
- **Acidity** is an important part of all wine and especially of white wine. Too much acidity makes a wine taste tart and unpleasant. Too little makes a wine taste flabby.

### **Finish:**

Finish describes the taste remaining in your mouth after drinking wine. A big, heavy wine will be rich and full-bodied. The taste will stay with you for sometime after swallowing. This is called a long finish. Conversely, a young, light wine such as a Mosel may have a delicate flavor that fades readily.

## How to read a wine label

### **Type of wine:**

- The wine may be varietal; e.g. Zinfandel, Chenin Blanc, etc., in which case it must contain at least 75% of the named grape, with the remainder unrestricted.
- The wine may be generic; e.g., Chablis, Burgundy, etc., which has no restrictions on the grapes used.
- The wine may be regional, which designates the region in which the wine was produced; e.g., Burgundy, Bordeaux, Champagne.
- The wine may be identified by a trademarked proprietary name; e.g. Chateau LaSalle, Emerald Dry, etc., which has no restriction on the grape content.

### **Vintage Date:**

The vintage date indicates the year in which the grapes were harvested. In the United States, 95% of the wine in the bottle must be from the stated vintage.

### **Winery Name and Location:**

The winery name and location is the business name and business address of the firm that bottled the wine. Many wineries have more than one business name, and some have offices somewhere other than the winery. The firm that bottled the wine is not always the one that made it.

- **Grown, Produced and Bottled by** means the winery actually grew 100% of the grapes and fermented at least 75% of the wine in the bottle. This is in essence Estate Bottled.
- **Made by and Produced by** means that the winery fermented at least 75% of the wine in the bottle
- **Vinted by, Cellared by, Blended by, Prepared by and Vinted by** require none of the wine be fermented by the named winery; rather these terms are indicative of cellaring treatment.
- Please visit the following website for more information,  
[http://www.ttb.gov/publications/alctob\\_pub/bevalmanual/chapter6.pdf](http://www.ttb.gov/publications/alctob_pub/bevalmanual/chapter6.pdf).

## **Geographic Designation:**

The geographic designation (or appellation) tells where the grapes come from.

- **State and County Designation** If the label indicates a state of origin, at least 75% of the wine in the bottle must originate from grapes grown in that state or county
- **Approved Viticultural Area** If the label states an Approved American Viticultural Area, at least 85% of the grapes must originate from the stated AVA. Please visit the following link for a complete list of AVAs.  
[http://www.ttb.gov/appellation/us\\_by\\_state.pdf](http://www.ttb.gov/appellation/us_by_state.pdf)

## **Alcohol content:**

For wines up to 13.9%, the alcohol content can vary 1.5% either way from the figure on the label. For wines of 14% and higher, the content can vary 1% either way.

## How to sell wine

As you become more familiar with wine and its relationship to our menus, you will become more confident selling wine to our guests.

In Europe, both wine and food are routinely ordered together. Here food is ordered, but wine must generally be sold.

The key to selling wine is knowledge. You should be thoroughly familiar with every wine on the wine list, what size they come in (half or full bottles, by the glass), their varietal characteristics and what food they complement. Wine drinking is appropriate before and through the course of a meal. Before meals, white, rosé, sparkling wine and light dry Sherry make excellent aperitifs. They set the tone for the rest of the meal and prepare the way for future orders. Dry white wine can accompany appetizers or a first course. A hearty red wine can complement the entree, and might be followed by a sweet dessert wine or a sparkling wine. Port, Sherry or Madeira can be suggested at the same time the coffee orders are taken. Champagne is always proper throughout a meal.

Remember that a bottle of wine (.750 l or 25.4 oz) contains approximately four (6oz) glasses of wine. Generally, each person will drink two (2) glasses.

### **The following are some hints that will help you sell more wine:**

- You should always anticipate and meet the needs of the guest, but remember there is a fine line between being helpful and being aggressive.
- Always take food and price into consideration, and make your suggestion accordingly.
- When you recommend a wine, let the guest lead you if possible. He/she may have a preference and there is no rule in the world that says he/she should not have a white wine with meat or red wine with fish. Too often, wine is not consumed because people are afraid of making a mistake.
- When two people are dining together one has meat and the other has fish, let them guide you in their choice.
- Good selling language gets the idea across that the guest will want to order wine, or will at least want to consider it: e.g. after a dinner order is taken you may say: "May I suggest a bottle of Chardonnay with your lobster?" or, "Have you decided on a wine to accompany your dinner?"
- If a guest seems hesitant (or open to suggestion) you should make an impartial suggestion in a way that is not intimidating; e.g. "May I suggest a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon with your steak?"

**There are five basic selling points:**

- Mention wine specials to every potential wine drinker.
- Be positive and confident that you are helping to make their visit special.
- Make them feel that it's your pleasure to talk with them about our wines.
- When asked for a suggestion, let them know your favorite, always recommend a selection with which you are comfortable.
- The more you know about wine and food, the more confident you will be at selling wine.

## Serving and Presentation of Wine

### **Temperature:**

Wine is at its best when it is served at the right temperature. Bear in mind room temperature refers to a room's temperature prior to artificial environment. Lighter red wines are best served at 58-62° F while fuller reds are better at 62-65°F. White wines contain very little tannin and have a higher acidity than red wines. Chilling white wines brings out the fruity flavor of the wine, and makes the acidity more pronounced and the wines more enjoyable and refreshing. Be careful not to over chill, 46-48° F for Champagne and sparkling wines, 47-52° F for lighter whites, and 52-55° F for fuller whites. Always remember to ask the guest how they like the wine, as they are the final arbiter of proper service temperature.

### **Timing:**

Generally wine should be brought to the table as soon as possible. This is especially important when serving red wines in order to allow them to breathe. If a decanter is not available, offer to pour the wine into the glass so it may breathe in the glass. Remember, simply removing the cork has no real impact on the wine in the short term.

## Presentation:

1. Always present the bottle on the right of the person (the host) who ordered the wine. The bottle should be intact; i.e. no cork or capsule removed.
2. Present the bottle with the label facing the host and repeat the year, the winery, and the type of wine to verify that the bottle is the one the guest requested. **This is extremely important.** Await approval from the host before opening the bottle.
3. Open the bottle using the correct procedure.
4. Pour approximately 1-2 oz of wine into the glass of the host.
5. Await approval, again facing the label to the host.
6. If the host approved, continue with the service.
7. If the host disapproves or considers the wine undrinkable, remove the glass and the bottle and bring the bottle to the manager's attention, who probably will authorize another bottle be presented.
8. If the wine is red, ask the host if pouring is desired at this time to allow the wine to breathe.

**Note:** If a cold wine or sparkling wine is being presented, place a napkin under the bottle to avoid dripping condensation. This will also prevent the bottle from slipping

**Note:** If the wine is served chilled, ask the host if a wine bucket is desired; if so place the bottle in the wine bucket next to the host. Place a clean towel over the neck of the bottle to use when serving seconds.

9. Pour even amounts of wine into each person's glass, moving clockwise around the table. Always pour ladies first then gentlemen. Pour the wine for the host last. Remember there are 25 ounces in a bottle of wine. You should know what a 4-ounce, 5-ounce and 6 ounce pour looks like in your outlets glassware. Further, you should know what a 4-ounce, 5-ounce and 6 ounce pour feels like as you pour it. Never pour more than 6 ounces in glass regardless of the volume of the glass.
10. Give the bottle a slight twist of the wrist, counter clockwise when finishing each pour to prevent dripping. You should always have a serviette in your non-pouring hand to wipe the bottle of drips after each pour.
11. Always pour the wine with the glass on the table and try to avoid contact between bottle and glass.
12. After all guests have been served, place the bottle to the right of the host with the label facing the host.
13. Keep an eye on the table and replenish glasses as needed.



## Glossary of Wine Terms

### **Acidity:**

Term used to indicate quality of tartness, sourness, or sharpness to the taste, due to the presence of agreeable fruit acids. Acid is perceived on the sides of the tongue and most intently on the salivary glands. White wines often have a citrus or green apple flavor to acidity while red wine are more redolent of sour berries.

### **Aftertaste:**

The taste sensation remaining in the mouth for a short period of time immediately after wine is swallowed. Both the character and length of the aftertaste may collectively be described as “finish”. Wine can have textural, flavorful or both elements on the finish.

### **Aperitif:**

French word meaning “to open” which refers to wine and other drinks taken before meals to stimulate the appetite.

### **Appearance:**

This refers to clarity not color. Wines should be free of cloudiness and suspended particles.

### **Aroma:**

This refers to the fruity scent in a young wine, not to be confused with “bouquet” which is a more complex scent in mature wines.

### **Astringency:**

The degree of astringency of a wine depends primarily upon the amount of tannin it has absorbed from the skins and seeds of the grapes. Moderate astringency is a desirable quality in many red wines. Though dryness refers to a lack of perceivable residual sugar in the wine, guests will often describe a tannic wine as very dry.

### **Balance:**

Balance indicates harmony among the principle constituents of wine.

### **Body:**

The degree of concentration and intensity in a wine is referred to as the body of the wine. Light bodied wines tend to be low in alcohol, tannin, and extract. Big, heavy bodied wines tend to be higher in alcohol and flavor profile. Sweet wines are often very rich and unctuous in texture as a result of moderate alcohol and high levels of residual sugar.

### **Bouquet:**

Scent of mature wine, to be distinguished from “aroma”, which is given off by young wines. The scent originates from the fermentation and aging of wine and is best noticed when swirling the wine in the glass.

**Brut:**

French term applied to Champagne with little perceivable residual sugar. Brut is drier than Extra-dry. Ultra Brut, Brut Nature, Brut Zero all refer to Champagnes with no perceivable residual sugar.

**Color:**

Each wine has its own “right” color. A wine should be judged against the color that is correct for each wine type.

**Crust:**

Deposit of sediment by wine while aging in the bottle. The deposit adheres to the inside of the bottle as a crust.

**Decant:**

To pour wine gently from a large container or from the bottle in which crust or sediment has deposited, for the purpose of obtaining clear wine for serving.

**Demi-Sec / Semi-Dry:**

Used to describe a fairly sweet sparkling wine.

**Dry:**

Opposite of sweet, free of sugar. A wine becomes dry when all sugar has been consumed by fermentation.

**Fruity:**

Having the fragrance and flavor of the grape, sometimes used to designate tartness.

**Generic Wine:**

Wine type names (such as Burgundy, Chablis, Chianti, Champagne) to denote that the wine is best described by general type rather than by the major grape variety used in its production. Generic wines are normally blends of several grape varieties in which neither percentage nor the character of any one variety dominates.

**Magnum:**

A large wine bottle with capacity of two ordinary bottles

**Nose:**

The name given to perceived odor of wine. It is composed of aroma, bouquet and fermentation volatiles.

**Nutty:**

Term denotes the characteristic flavor of Sherry.

**Racking**

Decanting from one large vessel to another, be it a 225 liter oak barrel or a 10K liter stainless steel tank. This process allows the wine to breathe and it also clarifies the wine from the sediment.

**Sec**

French word for “dry”

**Sour:**

Disagreeable acid from vinegar acid. A sour wine is spoiled wine. Not to be confused with dry, astringent, or tart.

**Table wine:**

Wine with an alcoholic content below 14%, suitable for serving with meals at the table.

**Tart:**

Possessing agreeable acidity; in wine, tartness reflects the content of agreeable fruit acids.

**Varietal:**

A wine that is named for the principal grape variety from which it is made. In California, the law requires that any varietally labeled wine must contain at least 75% of the grape of which it is named.

**Vintage wine:**

Wine made from grapes that were harvested in one given year. Regulations specify that a vintage wine must contain at least 95% of its volume from grapes of the year specified.