

KZN SCHOOL OF WINE



Level 1

Your Complete Guide to Wine

Sources: Wine and Spirit Education Trust 2012©

‘Confidence for front line staff’, WSET Level 1 Award in Wines

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Introduction

Welcome to WSET® Level 1 Award in Wines

The qualification aims to provide a basic introduction to the main styles of wine, the principle grape varieties and insight into the correct service and storage of wine.

The Assessment

The assessment will test your knowledge and understanding of wines, and will consist of 30 multiple choice questions. You will need to answer at least 21 questions correctly to pass and obtain the WSET® Level 1 Award in Wines.

What is Wine?

Simply put, Wine is a drink made from fermented grape juice. The grapes are crushed to release sweet grape juice with high levels of sugar. Fermentation changes this into alcohol.

Fermentation is the key factor here. In order for fermentation to take place, yeast needs to be present. Fermentation is a natural process whereby yeast feeds on sugar and converts it into alcohol and carbon dioxide. The alcohol is measure by Alcohol by Volume (abv).

Yeast can be found naturally on grapes in the vineyard, although most wineries choose to add commercial yeasts in order to provide more stability and quality assurance.

Grape Skins:

Colour

Tannin

Grape Pulp: (clear juice)

Acid

Water

Sugar

Back to Basics:

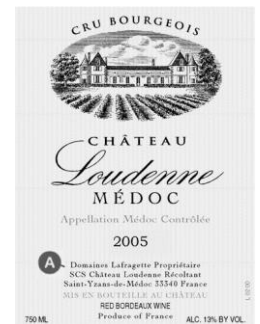
What are three *types* of wine?

- Light wines
- Sparkling Wines
- Fortified Wines

Types of Wine

Still Wines:

These are generally what you would think of when someone says 'wine' and are the most common types of wine. They are still, as in not sparkling, and are between 8-15% abv, with the majority falling between 11.5 – 14%. Many still wines are named after the region they are produced in such as Burgundy, Sancerre and Bordeaux. Wines from the new world such as Australia and South Africa are often labelled according to the grape variety such as Shiraz or Chardonnay.



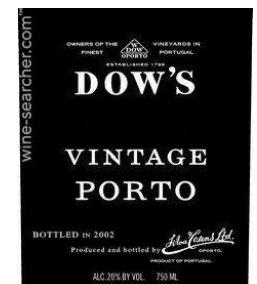
Sparkling Wines:

These are wines that are bubbly or fizzy. Often seen as a wine for celebration, this term is used to describe wines where bubbles of carbon dioxide have been trapped in the wine. The carbon dioxide (CO₂) is produced during fermentation. The best known example of this is of course, Champagne from France. Other examples include Cava from Spain, Crémant from France and MCC from South Africa.



Fortified Wines:

These are wines which have had extra alcohol added to them and therefore have an ABV of between 15 – 22%. Examples of fortified wines include Sherry from Spain and Port from Portugal.



Styles of Wine

Colour

The colour of the wine is influenced by the type of grape variety used and the way the wine has been made:

White:

White wine is predominantly made from the juice of white grapes, although it is possible to make a white wine from the pulp of black grapes if the skins are removed before fermentation. Eg. Chablis

Red:

The colour in red wines is from the black grape skins. Red wines are therefore made using black grapes only and the juice is fermented together with the grape skins. Eg. Rioja or Cabernet Sauvignon

Rosé/ Blanc de Noir:

These wines are made from black grapes where the wine has had less time on the skins. Only a small amount of colour is taken from the skins before the juice is drained off. Eg. White Zinfandel

Sweetness

Sweetness is caused by the presence of sugar in the wine. Grape juice is naturally sweet, but as yeast feeds on the sugars during fermentation, the juice becomes less sweet as the sugar is turned into alcohol.

Dry:

The majority of wine is dry. Therefore, the yeast would have converted all of the sugars into alcohol. Examples of dry white wines are Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and Chablis from France. Dry red wines include Cotes-du-Rhone from France and Chianti from Italy.

Medium:

Medium sweet wines will most often be white or rosé. To make a medium wine the winemaker either removes the yeast from the juice before all of the sugars have been converted or adds unfermented sweet grape juice to a dry wine. Many German wines made from Riesling are made in this style, as are many Rosé wines such as White Zinfandel from California.

Sweet:

Sweet wines often feel richer and syrupy due to the amount of sugar. These wines can be made from grapes so ripe and high in sugar that the yeast dies before all the sugar can be consumed or the winemaker can choose to kill the yeast by the addition of alcohol. Examples of sweet wines are Sauternes from France, or sweet fortified wines such as port from Portugal.

Acidity

Acid is found in the grape juice and gives wine its refreshing qualities. You can detect acidity by a mouth watering sensation usually down the side of the mouth. Too much acidity can make a wine seem tart and austere while too little can make a wine seem flabby and loses its freshness. Acidity can also help a wine to mature and can be used to balance sweet wines to make them seem less sickly.

Body

This is the overall feel of the wine and fullness in your mouth. Body helps to explain how mouth filling the wine is and how much weight it has in your mouth. Light bodied wines are delicate and light. Full bodied wines feel creamy in texture and heavy on the palate.

Light Bodied

Wines that are light in body are refreshing and easy to drink such as Pinot Grigio from Italy and Beaujolais red wine from France.

Medium Bodied

These wines feel richer and more substantial due to a number of factors such as the grape variety used or the use of oak. Examples of medium bodied wines are Cote du Rhone from France.

Full Bodied

Full bodied wines are more powerful, concentrated and heavy in the mouth. Examples of full bodied wines are Sauternes dessert wine from France or Shiraz from Australia.

Tannin

Tannin is a substance found in grape skins and can be felt on the teeth and gums when tasting the wine. It is found on red wines and can differ according to the grape variety and how the wine was made. Tannin can make a wine seem bitter but they are mainly a structural element to wine rather than taste. Tannin makes your mouth feel dry and helps a wine to age.

Red Bordeaux wines have high tannin while Pinot Noir and Beaujolais from France have low tannins.

Aromas & Flavours of wine

Aromas and flavours in wine come from a number of sources. They can come from the grapes themselves or from the winemaking processes and maturation. Recognising the aromas and flavours of wine does not come naturally and can be very difficult at first. It is a skill that comes with practice. Aromas are what you can smell, flavours are what you can taste.

Fruit

Most wines have aromas and flavours of fruit. The types of fruit will depend on the grape variety as well as how ripe the grapes are or where they are grown. For example, a chardonnay from a cool climate will show citrus and green fruit such as apple. A chardonnay grown in a warm climate will show riper fruit such as peach and mango.

Oak

Wine that has been fermented or matured in oak will gain flavours such as vanilla, cloves, toast, coconut and spice. They will also gain tannin and body from contact with the wood.

Other

Each wine is different and the multiple flavours are what makes each wine so interesting. Other flavours and aromas include flowers, herbs, vegetables and some flavours such as mushrooms, meat, leather and earth can develop in an aged wine.

Growing Grapes

Grapes are fruit produced by grape vines. Grape vines can live for a very long time and produce one crop per year.

Every year, the grape vines flower in the spring and these flowers become grapes. The grapes ripen over the summer and are picked at the end of summer.

The flowers are formed as a cluster that looks very similar to a grape bunch. Each flower will become a grape.

All grapes start off green, very small and very hard.

As the grapes ripen, they start to swell with water. The sugar levels start to rise and the acid levels start to drop, making them sweeter over time.

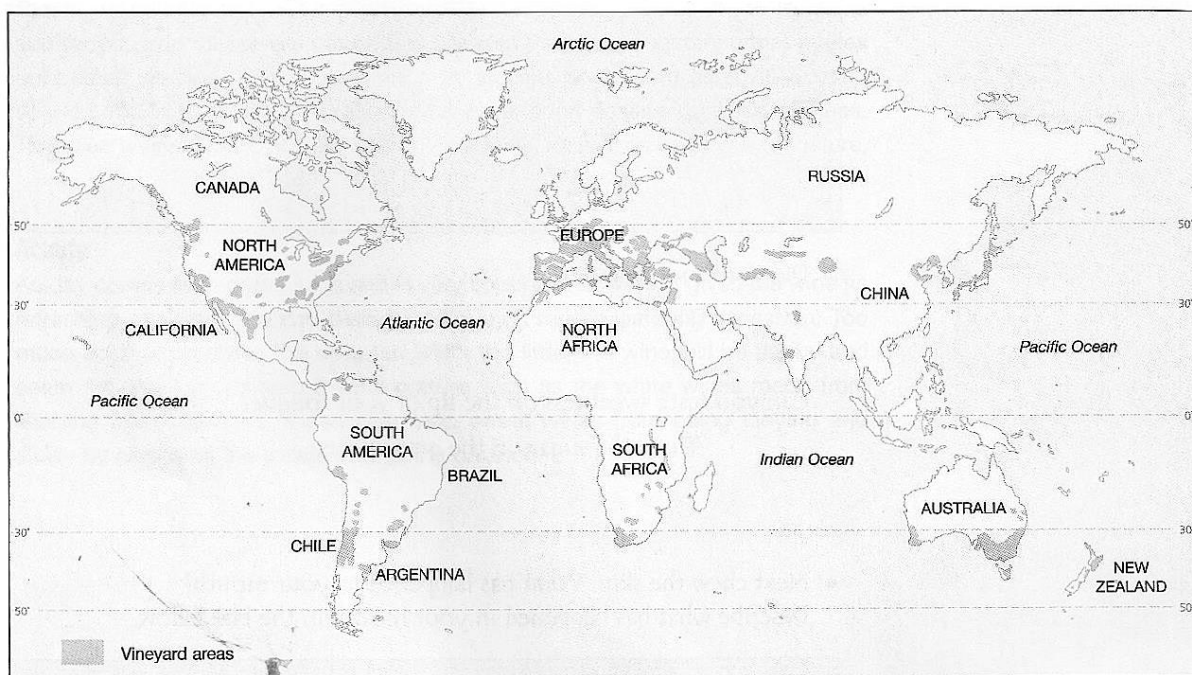
White grapes start to change colour from green to golden.

Black grapes will change from green to purple.

What Makes Wines Different?

Where grapes grow

It is important that grapes have enough sunlight and heat to ripen. With enough heat and sunlight, the grapes will ripen properly, the level of acid will drop and the sugar will increase. Grapes grow best where the winter is cold and the vines can 'go to sleep' over the winter.



Cool Climate

Areas with a cool climate are closer to the poles (more North or South). Examples include regions such as Champagne, Germany and Canada. Cool climate regions give wines that are:

- Predominantly white
- High in Acidity
- Lower in Alcohol
- Refreshing

Hot Climates

Hot climates are often closer to the equator. Examples include California, Central Spain and Australia. Hot climate regions give wines that are:

- Predominantly Red, because black grapes need more heat to ripen
- High in Alcohol
- Riper flavours

The winemaking process

Grapes are harvested either mechanically or by hand.

White Wine

Crush – The grapes are first crushed to release the juice. To ‘Crush’ is to break the skins.

Press – The crushed grapes are then pressed to release the rest of the juice. Only the juice is used. The skins are thrown away.

Ferment – Yeast is added and the fermentation starts either in stainless steel tanks or in oak barrels.

Maturation – After the fermentation is finished, the wines can be stored in steel tanks or barrels.

Bottle – The wine is then bottled for release.

Red Wine

Crush – The grapes are first crushed to release the juice. To ‘Crush’ is to break the skins.

Ferment – Both the skins and the juice are put into the fermentation vessel. Yeast is added and the skins and juice are mixed throughout the fermentation to extract colour and tannin.

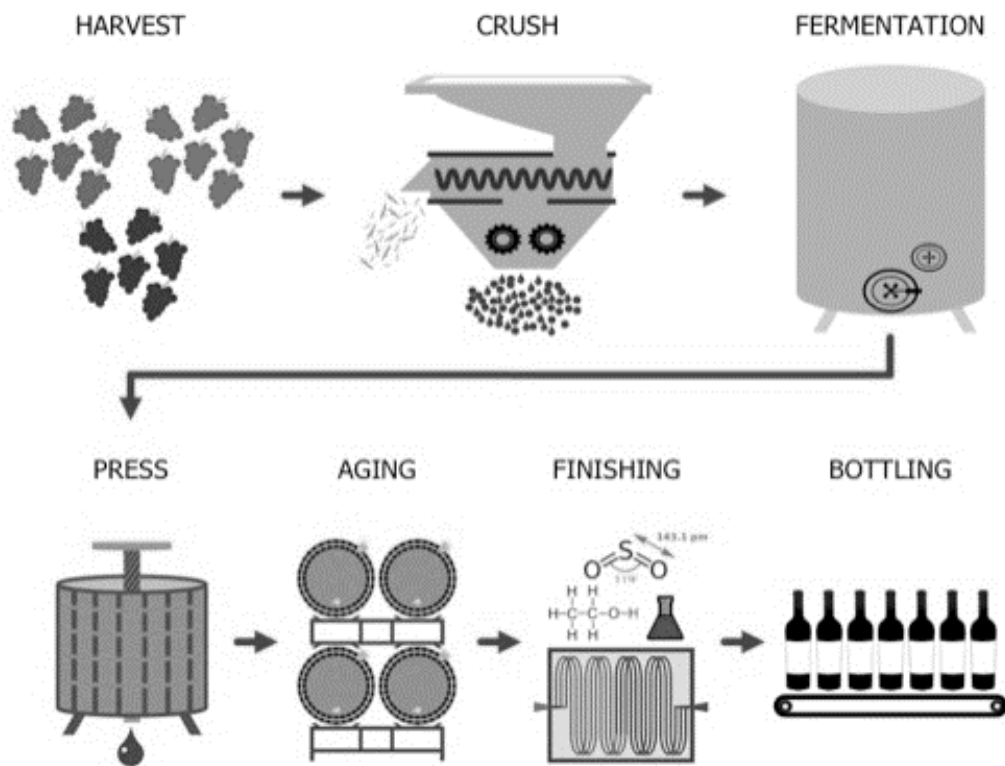
Draining – After the fermentation, the red wine is drained off the skins

Press – The grapes are then pressed to release the rest of the wine.

Maturation – After the fermentation is finished, the wines can be stored in steel tanks or barrels.

Bottle – The wine is then bottled for release. Some wines are ready to drink straight away while others will need time to soften in the bottle.

For **Rosé** wines, the process is the same as red wine but the time spent in contact with the skins is shorter (only a few hours) in order to produce a lighter colour.



Principal Grape Varieties

The variety, or blend of varieties, used is the biggest influence on the style of wine produced. There are thousands of grape varieties suitable for winemaking but only a small number of varieties have established a reputation worldwide for making outstanding wines. Each variety has distinctive characteristics that make it distinguishable all over the world.

White Grapes

- Chardonnay
- Sauvignon Blanc
- Riesling
- Pinot Grigio

Black Grapes

- Cabernet Sauvignon
- Merlot
- Pinot Noir
- Syrah/Shiraz

Chardonnay

- Shar-don-nay

One of the most well-known grapes in the world. Chardonnay is planted in many wine regions and produces dry wines of great diversity. In cool regions, it can develop flavours of green fruits (apple), Citrus notes (lemon) and high acidity. Classic examples include Chablis and Champagne.

In warmer regions, the wines can develop flavours of stone fruit (peach) and tropical fruits (pineapple) and tend to be fuller bodied. Examples of warmer climate chardonnay is Australia and California.

Chardonnay is the grape used for white wines in Burgundy, France. These wines tend to be medium to full bodied with a rich creamy texture. This is largely due to its affinity for oak and these wines will show notes of vanilla and sweet spice.

Sauvignon Blanc

- Sew-vin-yon-blank

Sauvignon Blanc produces dry wines that are light to medium bodied with refreshingly high acidity and distinctive flavours. They can have intense aromas of green fruit (apple, pear), citrus (grapefruit, lemon) and herbaceous notes of green pepper, cut grass and asparagus. They are often fermented in stainless steel tanks rather than oak. New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and Sancerre from France are notable examples.

Pinot Grigio

-Pee-no-gri-jee-oh

Pinot grigio produces wines with high acid, light body and simple flavours such as apple, pear and lemon. They are typically dry, fermented in stainless steel to retain freshness and is mostly produced in Italy.

Riesling

- Rees-ling

The Riesling grape produces wines that can range from dry to sweet, and from light to full bodied. Above all, they stand out for their high acidity. Flavours range from stone fruits (peach, apricot) to citrus (lime) and floral notes. They are fermented in stainless steel and are not matured in oak. They can age well and develop aromas of petrol. Riesling is the classic grape of Germany as well as being popular in Alsace and Australia.

Black Grapes

The black grapes covered in this section all have the ability to age. This helps to soften the tannins and allow the wines to gain complexity. Tertiary aromas of leaves, mushroom and tobacco can develop.

Cabernet Sauvignon

- Ca-bur-nay-sew-vin-yon

Cabernet Sauvignon is widely planted around the world and produces deeply coloured wines with high tannin and high acidity. It can range from medium to full-bodied and has typical intense flavours and aromas of black fruits (Blackcurrant, black cherry) and herbaceous notes (bell pepper, eucalyptus). Oak is frequently used and will add flavours of spice, cedar and vanilla. Cabernet Sauvignon is often blended with other varieties such as Merlot in Bordeaux, which acts to soften the tannin. It is grown widely in California and Australia where it is sometimes blended with Shiraz which adds richness and spice to the wine.

Merlot

- Mer-low

Merlot is a popular softer alternative to Cabernet Sauvignon. Its wines are generally medium to full bodied with medium acid and tannins. Merlot has fruit flavours ranging from red fruits (Strawberry, plum), to black fruits (Mulberry, blackberry, black cherry). It is often matured in oak. In the new world, Chile and California makes good value, fruity examples of Merlot. Merlot is commonly blended with Cabernet Sauvignon which adds tannin, acidity and aromatic fruit to the blend. The most famous example of this is the red wines of Bordeaux.

Pinot Noir

- Pee-no N-wa

The red grape of Burgundy. Pinot Noir is lighter in colour and body than other black varieties. Pinot noir has low tannins and high acidity. It produces wines with flavours of red fruit (strawberry, raspberry, red cherry) and often has a meaty quality which is accentuated with age. In the new world, New Zealand and Oregon make notable examples. It is also the partner to Chardonnay in the making of Champagne.

Syrah or Shiraz

-Si-rah, Shi-razz

Syrah and Shiraz are one and the same grape grown in different parts of the world. In the Old World and cooler climates such as France, it is known as Syrah, whereas in the New World and warmer climates it is typically called Shiraz. It produces deeply coloured wines with rich powerful spice and flavours. The wines are usually medium to full bodied with high tannins and flavours of black fruits (cherry, blackberry) with spice (black and white pepper, liquorice, cloves) that comes from the grape as well as oak.

The Northern Rhône in France can produce wines that are medium bodied with high tannins and black fruit aromas. In comparison, Australia can produce full-bodied wines with jammy ripe fruit, sweet spice and softer tannins.

Named Wines made from Principal Grape Varieties

In Europe, many wines are named after the region they are produced in. Famous examples are:

- **Chablis** is a light bodied, dry white wine made from France using the Chardonnay grape. It is unoaked with high acidity, green fruit (apple) and citrus aromas.
- **Champagne** is a French sparkling wine with high acidity that can be made from a blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. It must be made in the traditional Champagne method. Champagne has flavours of citrus, apple and bread, biscuit.
- **Sancerre** is a dry, medium bodied French white wine made from the Sauvignon Blanc grape. It has high acidity, with flavours of green fruit (apple) and herbaceous (grass) notes. It is unoaked.
- **Red Bordeaux** – These wines come from the Bordeaux region of France. The wines are dry, medium to full bodied and high acid and high tannin. They are typically a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. It is often made to age and matured in Oak.
- **Burgundy** – These wines come from the Burgundy/Bourgogne area of France. They can be white (Chardonnay) or red (Pinot Noir).

Other

- **Prosecco** is a light bodied sparkling wine from Italy. It has green fruit (pear, apple) and floral aromas and can be dry or medium in sweetness.
- **Cava** is a dry, Spanish sparkling wine made in the same traditional method as Champagne.
- **White Zinfandel** is a rosé wine from California. It is unoaked with low alcohol and medium sweet. It has red fruit flavours (strawberry, raspberry).
- **Sauternes** is a sweet wine made in Bordeaux. It is full bodied with stone fruit (apricot) and honeyed flavours yet balanced with good acidity.
- **Beaujolais** is a dry red wine from France that is usually unoaked, light bodied with fresh and fruity flavours of red fruit and low tannin.
- **Cotes du Rhone** – This is a dry medium bodied red wine from France with red fruits and peppery spice. It can be unoaked or oaked.

- **Châteauneuf-du-Pape** from France is a full bodied red wine with high alcohol, red fruits and spicy flavours. It is matured in oak.
- **Rioja** from Spain is a medium to full bodied red wine that often has red fruit and spicy, sweet oak flavours of vanilla.
- **Chianti** from Italy is a medium bodied red wine with high tannin and acidity. It has red fruit flavours and is matured in oak.
- **Sherry** – is a fortified wine from Spain. It is made in a range of styles from dry to sweet.
- **Port** – is a fortified wine from Portugal. It is sweet and high in alcohol, full bodied with high tannins and intense black fruit.

Activity

Answer the questions below by completing the word search.

What type of wine has extra alcohol added to it?

The name of a famous sparkling wine?

As the grape ripens, what increases in the grape?

What can make your mouth water when tasting wine?

Name a red wine from Spain?

A substance found in the skins of the grape?

Another name for the black grape Syrah?

A well-known white German grape variety?

The material used to make barrels for maturing wine?

C	H	A	M	P	A	G	N	E	K
O	T	R	D	D	R	W	O	V	K
P	R	I	E	S	L	I	N	G	O
S	H	I	R	A	Z	M	B	T	A
A	O	D	G	D	M	T	O	R	C
F	E	A	K	L	O	A	O	I	I
G	E	M	K	M	T	N	P	O	D
O	A	W	R	O	C	N	N	J	I
P	R	E	D	I	V	I	T	A	T
Z	U	X	L	Y	A	N	I	O	Y
O	U	Y	S	U	G	A	R	P	P
Z	F	O	R	T	I	F	I	E	D

Wine Tasting

How to Taste like the Professionals

Wines are often described in terms of various characteristics of taste. We will be now be looking at the techniques behind describing wines like the professionals.



Tasting Technique

Look

First look at the wine in your glass over a piece of white paper such as your tasting sheet.

Classify your wine as either a Red, White or Rosé. You may want to describe this further such as pale lemon in colour or deep purple. Your educator will help you recognise some of the colours.

Smell

Sniff the wine and then swirl the wine around the glass to release the aromas. Sniff again.

The smell of the wine should be clean, you do not want to drink faulty wines. The aromas will give you an idea of the wines character and variety.

Faulty aromas are easy to spot. If you detect a musty smell (like damp cardboard), or the wine has a vinegary or nail varnish smell, the wine will more than likely have a fault and not be recommended to drink.

Taste

Take a sip of wine and swirl the wine and some air over your taste buds. This helps to release flavour and aromas.

By tasting the wine you can detect the:

- **Sweetness** Dry, medium or sweet
- **Flavour characteristics** Fruits, flowers, spices, vegetables, oak

- **Fruits and Flowers** – These flavours often help distinguish certain grape varieties. For example, Cabernet Sauvignon typically has a lot of blackcurrant and some Rieslings can have very floral aromas with strong lime flavours.
- **Spices and Oak** – Sweet spices, such as vanilla can indicate the use of oak. Although some grape varieties such as Shiraz give natural pepper spice aromas.
- **Vegetables** – The most important of these are the herbaceous flavours such as green pepper and asparagus. These are aromas of fresh young wines such as Sauvignon Blanc although vegetal aromas such as mushroom can also develop with age.

- **Other flavours** – Some wines that have been matured for a long time can develop unique flavours such as wet leaves, black toffee and tobacco.

Element 2: The Storage and Service of wine

The Storage of Wine

If a wine is incorrectly stored it can affect the flavour of the wine and in severe cases, the wine will become faulty.

The following general points should be followed when storing wine:

- For long term storage, wines should be kept at a cool and constant temperature of around 12-15 °C. Extreme temperatures of cold and heat can damage wines.
- Store wine on its side to ensure the cork remains in contact with the wine preventing it from drying out. If a cork dries out it can let air in resulting in the wine tasting stale and old.
- Keep wines away from strong sunshine and bright artificial light. These can heat the wine and make it become stale and old before its time.

Preparation of Wines that need chilling.

White, Rosé and sparkling wines need to be chilled before serving. Enough wine for the occasion should be placed in the refrigerator well in advance. Stock rotation is important – move the old stock to the front so that the wine that has been chilled the longest is always served first.

Over chilling can mask the flavours of white wines.

Style of Wine	Example of Style of Wine	Service Temperature
Sweet Wines	Sauternes	Well Chilled 6-8°C (43-45°F)
Sparkling Wines	Champagne, Cava	Well Chilled 6-10°C (43-50°F)
Light/Medium bodied White/Rosé	Pinot Grigio	Chilled 7-10°C (45-50°F)
Medium/Full bodied oaked White	Oaked Chardonnay	Lightly Chilled 10-13°C (50-55°F)

Preparation of Red Wines

Red wines should also be prepared and available at the correct temperature. This could mean bringing supplies out of a cool cellar to let them warm up slightly, making sure the wines are slightly chilled before service or decanting a wine.

Style of Wine	Example of Style of Wine	Service Temperature
Light bodied Red	Beaujolais	Lightly Chilled 13°C (55°F)
Medium/Full bodied Red	Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon Châteauneuf-du-Pape	Room Temperature 15-18°C (59-64°F)

Be aware that the average room temperature changes according to location, heating or air conditioning. Be careful that red wines don't get too warm or too cold.

Glassware

An enormous range of glass shapes and sizes are used for the service of wine, each designed to emphasise a particular wine's characteristics. The use of the correct glass enhances the drinking experience. It is important to know which glass to use.

Red Wine

Red wines are best served in larger sized glasses. This will allow air to come into contact with the wine and develop the aromas and flavours – Remember when you tasted the wine earlier, how the aromas and flavours came alive when swirled.

White and Rosé Wine

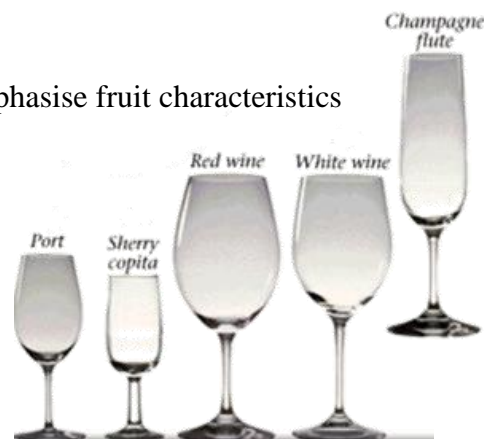
White and Rosé wines require medium sized glasses so that the fresh fruit characteristics are gathered and directed towards the top of the glass.

Sparkling wine

Sparkling wines are served in flute glasses. The shape enhances the effect of the bubbles (and thus the wine's aroma) allowing them to travel through a larger area of wine before bursting at the top of the glass. For this reason, shallow glasses are inappropriate as the bubbles are lost too quickly.

Fortified Wine

Fortified wines should be served in small glasses in order to emphasise fruit characteristics rather than alcohol.



Preparing Glasses

Clean glassware is important as even the slightest taint can ruin the flavour of the wine. This can also apply to 'clean glasses' from a glass washing machine. It is worth checking the glasses to make sure no detergent residue remains in the glass as they can give strange flavours to the wine. In the case of sparkling wine, it will make it lose its fizz more quickly.

The best way to prepare glasses is to polish them before each use. This will make sure the glasses are clean and free of finger marks and dust.

Ice buckets

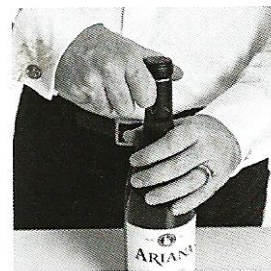
When serving a bottle of sparkling or white wine at the table you can use an ice bucket to keep the wine chilled. There are different forms of ice buckets available. Some require ice to be placed inside

the bucket, some have a built in chilled sleeve and others have thick insulating walls to keep the wine chilled.

Opening a bottle of Light Wine

Remove the top of the capsule only by cutting below the lip of the bottle. This can be done either with a capsule remover or knife.

- Clean the neck of the bottle with a clean cloth
- Draw the cork as gently and cleanly as possible by inserting the cork screw all the way into the cork
- Give the neck of the bottle a final clean inside and out.



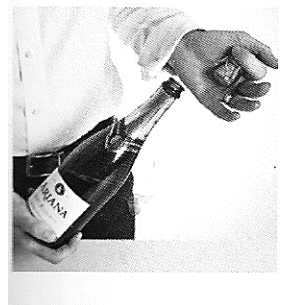
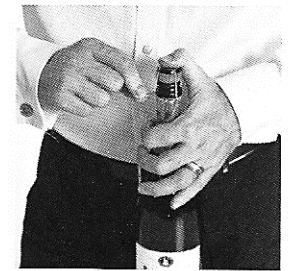
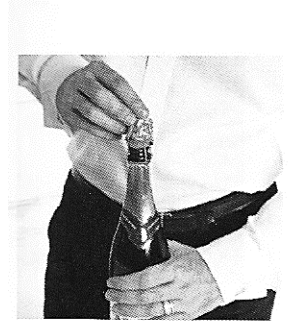
Pouring a Glass of Light Wine

- First, use a clean cloth napkin to wipe the mouth of the opened bottle, cleaning it of any cork dust or debris.
- Cradle the bottle in one hand, and display the label to your fellow drinkers or guests. If you are a waiter, display the bottle and label directly to the person who ordered it.
- Bring the mouth of the bottle just above the rim of the glass, and pour. Only fill the glass about a third of the way up.
- As you finish your pour, twist the bottle away from the glass to prevent dripping and wipe the top of the bottle with the clean cloth napkin.
- Place unfinished white wine bottles in a wine bucket with ice to keep them cool.

Opening a Bottle of Sparkling Wine

Warning – It is important to remember that there is a considerable amount of pressure in a bottle of sparkling wine. Chilling to the correct temperature helps to reduce the pressure. Even when a wine is chilled, it is possible for the cork to spring violently from the bottle. It is important, therefore, that the cork is pointed away from both yourself and surrounding guests.

- Remove the foil and loosen the wire cage. Do not remove the wire cage.
- The cork must be kept securely in place from the moment the wire cage is loosened.
- Tilt the bottle at an angle of about 30 degrees, gripping the cork, and use the other hand to grip the base of the bottle
- Turn the bottle, not the cork.
- Hold the cork and wire cage steady, resisting its tendency to fly out, and ease it slowly out of the bottle.
- The gas pressure should be released with a quiet “phut”, not an explosion or a flying cork.



Serving Wine by the Glass

What to look for:

- Wine should be bright. Any dullness in the colour could mean that the wine is spoiled.
- There should not be any debris floating in the wine
- It should smell fresh. When a wine comes into contact with air it starts to lose its freshness and flavours. A wine that has been kept open for too long can be dull and lack flavour.
- Check the nose of the wine. It should not smell unpleasant.

When serving wine by the glass it is important that you use the correct measure.

It is useful to know how many measures you can get from a standard 750 ml bottle.

6 x 125 mL glasses



4 x 175 mL glasses



3 x 250 mL glasses



Methods used to Preserve Wines

Once you have served a glass of wine it is important that you store the wine correctly as it prolongs the wine's life and prevents wastage.

In many cases, wines used for serving by the glass are kept in the fridge with nothing more for protection than the original cork. A wine kept this way will only stay fresh for a short period of time. In this case, stock rotation is very important, as is keeping a record of when the wine was opened. There are some methods that can be used to help preserve wines over a period of time.

Vacuum Systems – These are systems where the oxygen is removed from the bottle and the bottle is sealed.

Blanket Systems – These systems work on the principle of blanketing a wine with a gas that is heavier than oxygen to form a protective layer between the wine and the air.

Element 3: An introduction to Food and Wine Pairing

Food that is consumed with wine has an effect on the way that it tastes. Likewise wine can also have an effect on the taste of food. The purpose of food and wine pairing is to take advantage of these effects so that ideally both the food and wine provide more pleasure than either would have done if consumed separately. Knowledge of these effects will also help to avoid negative interactions.

It is important to remember that people have different sensitivities to various flavour and aroma components, meaning that the same level of bitterness can effect one person much more strongly than another. Pairings should therefore take into account the preferences of the individual as well as the basic interactions between food and wine.

Primary Food and Wine Taste Interactions

When tasting multiple foods, your taste buds can be influenced by the previous food tasted. An example of this is when orange juice becomes unpleasantly acidic when consumed immediately after brushing your teeth. In addition to this, some foods such as chocolate or creamy dishes can have a mouthcoating effect which impairs the sense of taste.

Sweetness in Food

- Increases the perception of bitterness, acidity and the burning effect of the alcohol in the wine
- Decreases the perception of body, sweetness, and fruitiness in the wine

Sweetness in a dish can make a dry wine seem to lose its fruit and be unpleasantly acidic. With any dishes containing sugar, a good general rule is to select a wine that has a higher level of sweetness.

Umami in Food

- Increases the perception of bitterness, acidity and the burning effect of the alcohol in the wine
- Decreases the perception of body, sweetness, and fruitiness in the wine

Umami is a distinct savoury taste. Whereas sweetness can be illustrated in isolation with sugar, salt with sodium chloride, and acidity with a number of acids, umami tends to be present with other tastes and can be difficult to isolate. For example, saltiness in MSG or with other flavours such as cooked or dried mushrooms and marmite. One of the simplest ways to experience umami is to

compare the taste of a raw button mushroom with one which has been microwaved for 30 seconds. The umami taste of the mushroom is increased by the cooking.

Many foods that are considered difficult to pair contain high levels of umami without the salt needed to counteract the hardening effects on wine. These include asparagus, eggs, mushrooms and ripe soft cheeses. Foods that are high in umami but also high in salt include cured or smoked seafoods or meats and hard cheeses (parmesan).

Acidity in Food

- Increases the perception of body, sweetness and fruitiness
- Decreases the perception of acidity

Acidity in food is generally a good thing as it can balance a highly acidic wine and enhance the fruitiness. However, if the level of acidity in the wine is low, acidic foods can make wines seem flat, flabby and lacking focus.

Salt in Food

- Increases the perception of body in the wine
- Decreases the perception of bitterness and acidity in the wine

Salt is a wine friendly component of food which can help soften some of the harder elements.

Bitterness in Food

- Increases bitterness in wine

Sensitivity to bitter taste varies greatly from person to person. Bitter elements in food and wine are cumulative and together they can combine to reach an unpleasant level of bitterness.

Chilli Heat in Food

- Increases the perception of bitterness, acidity and alcohol burn in wine
- Decreases the perception of body, richness, sweetness and fruitiness

In the same way that alcohol has a burning effect on the back of your throat, chilli reacts in a way that increases the level of alcohol burn. This is a sensation, rather than one of taste, and can vary greatly from person to person depending on their level of sensitivity to spice.

Other Considerations

Flavour intensity: It is usually desirable for the flavour intensity of food and wine to be matched so that one does not overpower the other. However, in some circumstances, an intensely flavoured food (such as a curry) can be successfully partnered with a lightly flavoured wine – such as a simple, unoaked, light white wine. Equally, some lightly flavoured desserts can be successfully partnered with intensely flavoured sweet wines.

Acid and Fat: Most people find the combination of acidic wines with fatty or oily foods to be very satisfying. The pairing provides a pleasant sensation of the acidic wine “cutting through” the richness of the food, and cleaning up the palate. This is a subjective effect.

Sweet and Salty: Also subjective is the pleasure of combining sweet and salty flavours, but this is a combination many people enjoy, and leads to some very successful food and wine pairings, such as sweet wine and blue cheese.

WSET level 1 Systematic Approach to Tasting

Colour	Red – rosé – white
Condition	Clean – unclean
Sweetness	Dry – medium – sweet
Body	Light – medium – full
Flavour Characteristics	e.g. fruits, flowers, spices, vegetables, oak , other
Other	Acidity, Tannin

Tasting Notes

Wine	Price	
Colour		
Condition		
Sweetness		
Body		
Flavour Characteristics		
Other		

Wine	Price	
Colour		
Condition		
Sweetness		
Body		
Flavour Characteristics		
Other		

Wine	Price	
Colour		
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Flavour Characteristics		
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Wine	Price	
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Wine	Price	
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