

EL CENTRO COLLEGE
Food and Hospitality Services Institute

RSTO Enology and Viticulture

CLASS NOTES: Tasting Wines (5)

- Tasting wine is identifying what is perceived by the senses and applying objective, and familiar terms to subjective impressions. At best wine tasting is an in exact “science” – it is based largely on personal preference.
- There are three basic steps in tasting wine:
I- Appearance/Color/Look II- Smell III- Taste
- **In the glass:** This is our opportunity to look at the wine within the glass, we can start to make deductions about its origin, age, and possible flavor.
- **On the nose:** By smelling the wine in the glass, we can begin to unravel the layers of flavor in the wine.
- **On the tongue/in the mouth:** In the last stage, we taste wine, and roll it around our mouth and all over the tongue, to get a feel of the wine.
- **I-Appearance** – we may use terms such as “red”, “white” or “rose” or “pale yellow”, or “brilliant red.” In any case color is the first indicator when we evaluate wine.
- To determine a wine’s true color, hold the tasting glass by the stem, against a white background-table cloth, a white piece of paper, and tilt the glass to about 45 degree angle.
- **“Legs” or “tears”** may be seen running down the inside of the glass’s sides after the glass is swirled. These rivulets are caused by higher alcohol content in the wine and gives us hints of the wines possible power.

Thick, slow legs can indicate fuller body, fast running legs suggest lighter body. But they are not indications of “good” or “bad” wine. So, don’t worry about “good legs” – when tasting wines.

- As white wines age, they gain color. Red wines, on the other hand, lose color as they age.
- The range of colors that you may see depends, on whether you are tasting a white or a red wine. Below is a list –by no means complete-of both red and white wines. It starts with the color of young wines and progresses to older wines:

White wines

Pale yellow-reflects youth
 Straw yellow-majority of dry whites
 Yellow gold-sweeter whites
 Gold-sweet wines
 Yellow brown-too old
 Maderized-apparent off age
 Brown-usually too old

Red wines

Purple-young wines
 Ruby-some age in wines
 Red-transition from young to old
 Brick red-mature wines
 Red brown-more mature wines
 Mahogany-considerably mature
 Brown-too old or prematurely Aged.

- There are some sprits wines – such as the Vinho Verde from Portugal Which are intentionally produced this way to provide a cleansing effect on the mouth. In sparkling wines-smaller bubbles, and many continuous small bubbles is a sign of a quality sparkling wine- this is know a pelage-a French term.
- Our sense of smell is used to anticipate any faults in the wine. If a wine is hazy, it is usually suffering from some sort of malady and will not taste very good. If a wine is much browner than you expect it to be, then it is probably oxidized-too much interaction with air.
- If the color of the wine seems to be homogeneous – if it dos not to vary much between the center of the glass and the rim – then it is probably a particularly ordinary wine. The older the wine is, the greater the difference will be between the color of the center and on the rim.

- With red wines, color is a prime indicator of their state of maturity. The more subtle gradations of color there are in the rim, the older the wine. Most whites fall into the range band of color between pale straw and pale gold – although they tend to deepen with age. The color of whites changes much less dramatically than that of reds.
- If you see through a red wine, generally it is ready to drink
- Color tells us a lot about the wine. Here are three reasons why a white wine may have more color:
 - (1) It is older
 - (2) The wine was aged in wood
 - (3) Different grape varieties give different colors (Chardonnay grapes give off a deeper color than Riesling grapes).
- **II- Smell**, this sense enables us to identify hundreds of different odors. Smelling of wine is a skill that requires practice with the kind of smells that are frequently evident in wine.
- To improve your sensitivity to smells go to the spice rack in your home kitchen or the restaurant kitchen, and sniff the cinnamon, clove, and mint, separately. Take a walk in the woods and compare the scents of dead brown leaves with the live green leaves on branches. Go to a flower shop and try to distinguish the unique smells of different flowers such as roses from violets, from magnolias, other flowers. At the beach or river bed pick up a wet rock and place it under your nose, so that the minerals of the wet rock will be easier to recognize in wine. The human sense of smell has no limits – there are literal millions of smells each one of us can detect.
- Smells indicate certain grape types, wine regions, wine making techniques and of course the presence/absence of defects. Some individuals have the inability to smell particular odors. We all have some degree of smell limitations to our “taste memory”.
NOTE: When a person has a cold-congested nasal passage-the cold will block the passages to the brain and make both smelling and tasting difficult.

- **Aroma** is the term used if the scent of the wine is fruity or flowery, it will give you some important clues about the grape and the wine making method used to produce it. It is the primary smell of the wine. The secondary smell of the wine is the smell of wine after the fermentation process is complete.
- **Bouquet** is the scent of more complex and mature wines. It is the tertiary smell of wine. It is the product of the ageing process of alcohol in wine. A wine's bouquet reflects the changes that have slowly taken place inside the barrel and the bottle. Bouquet may include aromas, but aroma does not include bouquet.
- Smells of Bad Wines
A hydrogen sulfide smell is similar to the smell of rotten eggs and is caused by yeast cells decomposing and interacting with excess sulfur dioxide in the wine. When rotten grapes are used we get an iodine smell in the wine. The smell of "corked" wines is strong – a smell of wet cardboard and is the result when chemicals were used in the process of preparing the cork.
- Here is a list of ten aromas (flavors) we associate with wine:

1-Fruits	6-Grass
2-Flowers	7-Tobacco
3-Herbs	8-Toast
4-Vegetables	9-Smoke
5-Earth	10-Coffee, mocha, chocolate
- Here are ten odors we do not associate with wine:

1-Paint	6-Cannabis
2-Vinyl	7-Magic marker
3-Fax paper	8-Elephant manure
4-Glue	9-Channel No. 5
5-Gargonzola cheese	10-Fabric softener.
- **"Fruitiness"**. Beginning wine tasters describe wine as "sweet" because they confuse fruitiness with sweetness. A wine is fruity when it has the distinct aromas and flavors of fruit. You smell this fruitiness with your nose; in your mouth you "smell" it through the retro nasal passage. **Sweetness** on the other

hand, is perceived on the tongue. When in doubt, try holding your nose while you taste the wine; if the wine is really sweet, you will be able to taste the sweetness despite the fact that you cannot smell the fruitiness.

- Some experts feel that we misuse the word *fruity* when we really mean *sweet*. To them “*fruity*”, can also mean “*soft*”. All quality wines should have the character of the grapes from which they were made. The fruit character will vary from grape to grape. Different grapes, like other fruits, offer a range of flavors. We can develop a spectrum from lean to luscious as follows:
LEAN? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? LUSCIOUS
Lemon---Grapefruit---Apple---Pear---Peach---Pineapple---Mango

We can arrange the flavors of grapes and styles across a similar spectrum.

- **Swirl.** Some experts say that if you put your palm over the glass while you swirl, you get a better bouquet and aroma. We swirl to allow oxygen to get into the wine. Swirling releases wine components to mix with oxygen and to yield the bouquet of the wine. In other words, swirling aerates the wine and gives us a better smell. It does not make any difference if you swirl with the left hand or the right hand. When you swirl, cover the glass with a paper napkin, a small plate or even the palm of your hand. It is best to practice swirling while the glass is firmly placed on a firm surface such as a table top or the top of the bar or counter. After swirling the wine, smell it at least three times. The third smelling will give more information about the wine than you can get from the first smelling.
- “**Nose**” is a word that we use like to use to describe the bouquet and aroma of the wine.
- **The** best way to learn what your own preferences are for styles of wine is to “memorize” the smell of individual grape varieties. For whites try to memorize the major grape varieties: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling. Keep smelling them and smelling them until your nose can identify the differences, one from the other. For reds it is a little more difficult. Yet we suggest that you can take the three major grape varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Merlot. Try to memorize their smell without flowering words.

- **III-Taste:** There are four and possible five tastes:
Salt? ? Sour? ? Sweet? ? Bitter and possibly unami(the taste of food with high MSG)
 Beware that the most important sensations of taste and whether they occur on the tongue or in the mouth.
- **Palate** in wine terms is just another fancy word for “sense of taste” with emphasis on sense.
- Taste messages are sent to the brain from the **taste buds** – which are located on the surface of the tongue.
 1. The taste buds most sensitive to bitterness are concentrated in the back of the tongue
 2. The taste buds most sensitive to sweetness are located on the tip of the tongue.
 3. Acidity(sour) is detected by taste buds found on the sides/back of the tongue
 4. Salt is detected by buds found on the sides/front of the tongue
- Saliva in the mouth is affected when you taste wine
 Wines with high acid increase your saliva flow
 Wines which are tannic leave your mouth feeling dried out.
- View the tasting of any wine as a three step process:
 - (1) First is the **ATTACK**=the first two seconds – the initial impression of the wine and here you perceive sweetness
 - (2) Second is the **EVOLUTION/MIDDLE PALATE**=the three seconds after the **ATTACK**, it continues the variations of the initial impression, acidity and saltiness perceived.
 - (3) Finally, is the **FINISH/AFTERTASTE**=the final impression after swallowing. This is the confirmation of both the **ATTACK** and the **EVOLUTION**. Here bitterness is perceived.
- A wine is **Hot** on the tongue if it has a high alcohol level, and may be out of balance with the rest of the wine.

- A wine is **flabby** when it lacks in sufficient acidity to balance the other elements such as fruitiness, sweetness etc.
- **Finish/Aftertaste:** a judgment based on how long the flavors stay on the palate after spitting/swallowing, and whether the lingering flavors are pleasant or not.

White wines are expected to have a finish underscored by acidity

Red wines can be expected to have high tannins.

- (1) A wine that lasts only three seconds is said to have a short finish
- (2) A finish of seven to ten seconds is considered medium
- (3) And a wine with more than fifteen second finish is considered to have long finish

Length of finish is the full measure of a great wine. But consider a short, refreshing tart finish of a young wine, or the long complex finish in an aged red – both are desirable characteristics of the respective wines.

- **Savor:** After you have had a chance to taste the wine, sit back for a few moments and savor it. Think about what you just experienced, and ask yourself some questions, such as:
 - **Is the wine light, medium or full bodied?**
 - **For a white wine: how was the acidity, little, too much or just right?**
 - **For a red wine: is the tannin in the wine too strong? Is it pleasant? or is it missing all together?**
 - **Finally, what is the strongest component of the wine? Residual sugar, fruit, acid, tannin.**
- **Dry** is a wine term which means without residual (leftover) sugar. Wine makers refer to sugar in wine (which makes the wine taste sweet) as a “residual” sugar because, in the winemaking process, fermentation usually turns all the sugars found in the grape into alcohol.
- The word “**dry**” has been used/abused in several ways, which tends to confuse us. Consider the following definitions/uses of the word:
 - (1) Dry wine=completely without sweetness, but not without fruitiness.
 - (2) Dry beer=slightly higher in alcohol and smoother
 - (3) Dry Champagne(“sec” in French) which means slightly sweet Champagne.

- **Balance** is the way the four basic taste components relate to each other . Balance is the dynamic of the structure of wine, the way components relate to each other . We attempt counter balance -- the sweetness plus alcohol with the harshness of tannin plus acid, thus creating the impression of harmony of taste. To a degree that this occurs in a given wine – we say that the wine is balanced.

Lets review:

- Recall that **tartness** gives us a sharp, acid taste like green fruit – this gives life to the wine. **Softness** is the opposite of tartness. We also use this term for overage wines when all the tannins are gone.
- Another term is the taste of **astringency** which makes our mouths pucker. This comes from the tannins derived from the grape skins and it decreases as the wine matures, and mellows. **Mellowness** is the opposite of astringency, which makes wine softer with age.
- Body is a measure of how much alcohol a wine has. It is perceived as the “weight” of the wine in the mouth. A full-bodied wine will have at least 13% alcohol. A light wine will have no more than 10% alcohol. \ Think of milk: if a 1% milk is light, regular milk at 3.25% is medium, and heavy whipping cream is full.

The Components of a Wine Tasting

- **Alcohol:** The alcohol should be in balance with the other components, because too much make the wine taste “hot.”
- **Residual Sugar:** How much residual sugar is there?
- **Oak:** Not all wines are fermented in oak barrels. May variables here.
- **Tannins:** Tannins come from the barrel in white wines and from the grape skins, seeds, stems and barrels in reds. Astringency is a term we associate with tannins.
- **Acidity:** We have tartaric acid in wines, malic acid in green apples, and citric acid in citrus fruits. Gluconic acid occurs mostly when rotten grapes are included in making wine. Lactic acid we find in dairy products.

- **Carbon dioxide:** Look for the size of bubbles, tiny is better, and the number of cordons/stream-more is better. The feel of bubbles in the mouth is pleasant at cool temperatures and unpleasant when the wine gets warmer.
- **Umami:** Found in the taste associated with fresh-picked produce or line-caught fresh fish. It is not generally used to describe wine.
- **Varietal Character:** Any specific taste of grape type apparent.
- **Off flavor:** Are there any unpleasant flavors present in wine?
- **Aromas in the mouth:** How powerful are the wine's aromas?
- **Body:** It is the perceived "weight" of the wine. Here texture is also a valid term. "Satin" or "velvety" is compared to harsh alcohol or tannin sensations.

Finding pleasure in wine depends on the wine's many components being in harmony=BALANCE. But the notion of balance can vary according to an individual's preference.

TASTING TIPS

If you want to get the most out of your tasting experience and extend your knowledge of wine, bear in mind the following factors:

- Make sure that the wine is at the right temperature. If the wine is too warm or too cold, your perception of its flavor(s) may be altered
- Make sure that you use uncut, clear glass – so you can see the wine clearly.
- Swirl your glass to release the aromas of the wine before you smell it.
- Taste the wine before you consume any food, to get an untainted perception of its flavors.
- Sip the wine slowly, so that it coats your whole mouth, and think about what flavors you taste. Memorize, Memorize, memorize!!!! the tastes of major wines. Not all reds taste alike...a Pinot Noir differs from a Cabernet Sauv.
- Start a tasting diary of wines you have enjoyed.
- Extend your perception of smells by taking note of the smells around you.

TYPES OF WINE TASTINGS

- **General Tasting.** In a general tasting, wines of different styles, vintages, regions are tasted.
- **Vertical Tasting.** In vertical tastings, the same wine or similar wines are tasted through a series of vintages.
- **Horizontal Tasting.** In this type of tasting the quality of a specific vintage is assessed.
- **Blind Tasting.** The taster attempts to discern what the wine is, by using information and experience obtained from years of studying major grape types, regions...the taster does not see the label.
- **Semi-blind Tasting.** Here a limited amount of information is given to the taster. The country of origin or grape type are give; without vintage, produc or product.
- **Comparative Tasting.** Similar types of wine are tasted together and compare to each other.
- **Walk-around Tasting.** Found in wine festivals and trade shows. Participant walk around and taste a wine or two from each table or booth.

Handling Wine Left Overs

- **RECORK**

At minimum close the bottle with the original cork, tightly.

To extend freshness, purchase a vacuum sealer – available in kitchenware and wine shops. Seal the bottle with the rubber stopper and pump the air out with the accompanied plastic vacuum pump.

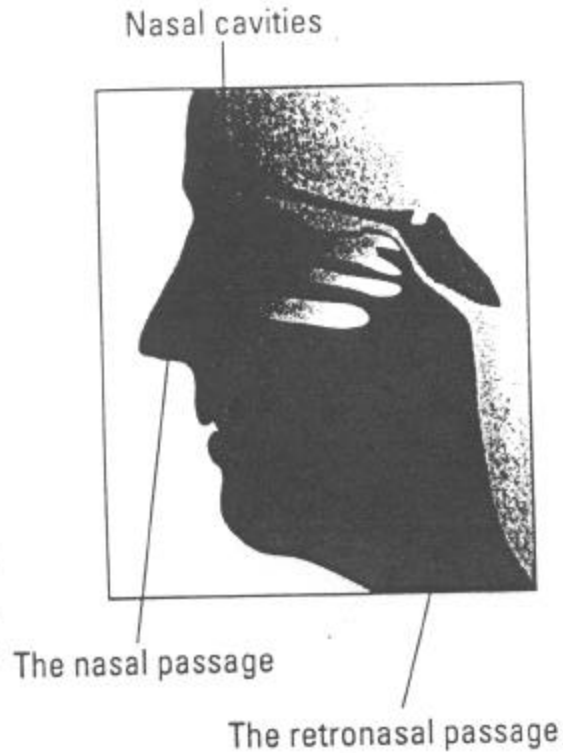
- **REFRIGERATE**

After you go through the recorking process as stated above, refrigerate all wine – white, rose, red. This retards spoilage. Red wine once poured into a glass, comes to room temperature in quick time. If you take out the red wine from the refrigerator as you begin the meal preparation, the wine will come to room temperature in quick time.

- **INERT GAS**

You can [reserve partial bottles with inert gas. Right now we know of two brands in the market: **Wine Life** and **Private Preserve**. These two come in cans. The cans feel light when empty. Insert the can's nozzle into the partially empty bottle, for one second, the inert gas displaces the air inside the bottle, then quickly cork the bottle. Be sure you have a tight fit. This method gives wines a week of additional life.

Figure 2-1:
Most wine
flavors are
actually
aromas that
are
vaporized in
the mouth
and
perceived
through the
rear nasal
passage.



After you go through all this rigamarole, it's time to reach a conclusion: Do you like what you tasted? The possible answers are yes, no, an indifferent shrug of the shoulders, or "I'm not sure, let me take another taste," which means that you have serious wine-nerd potential.

OLFACTORY EXERCISE

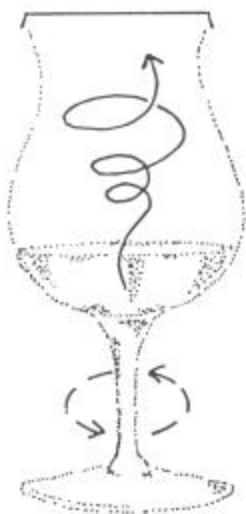
1. Pour normal evaluation amount, say two ounces, of wine into each of three glasses.
2. Cover each glass with petri dish (or take-out cup lid).
3. Remove lid and smell glass one. Replace lid. Record your impressions of both aroma and bouquet on a score sheet.
4. Revolve glass two in a circular movement, swirling the wine up the glass. This movement coats all sides of the glass and 'opens up' the wine. (Until you learn the idea of this movement, it is best practised on a flat surface, eg table, counter.) Remove lid from glass after it has been placed under nose. You will notice a much increased volume of odor than was available from glass one.
5. With the lid firmly held on glass three (if no lid available; cup your hand over top of glass) and shake the glass vigorously. Before removing lid or hand place glass under nose. In addition to a much increased volume of odor, it is more than likely that some previously unavailable odors will become evident. This is a good method to use if a wine appears to have no obvious olfactory odors (dumb), or if you are in search of particular odors such as SO_2 or yeast.

SMELL

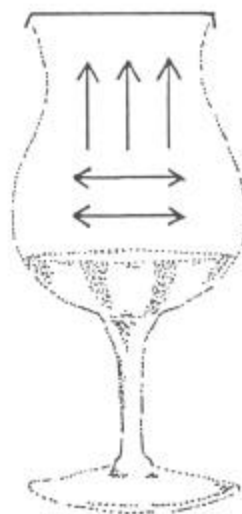
Try
this
exercise



GLASS 1



GLASS 2



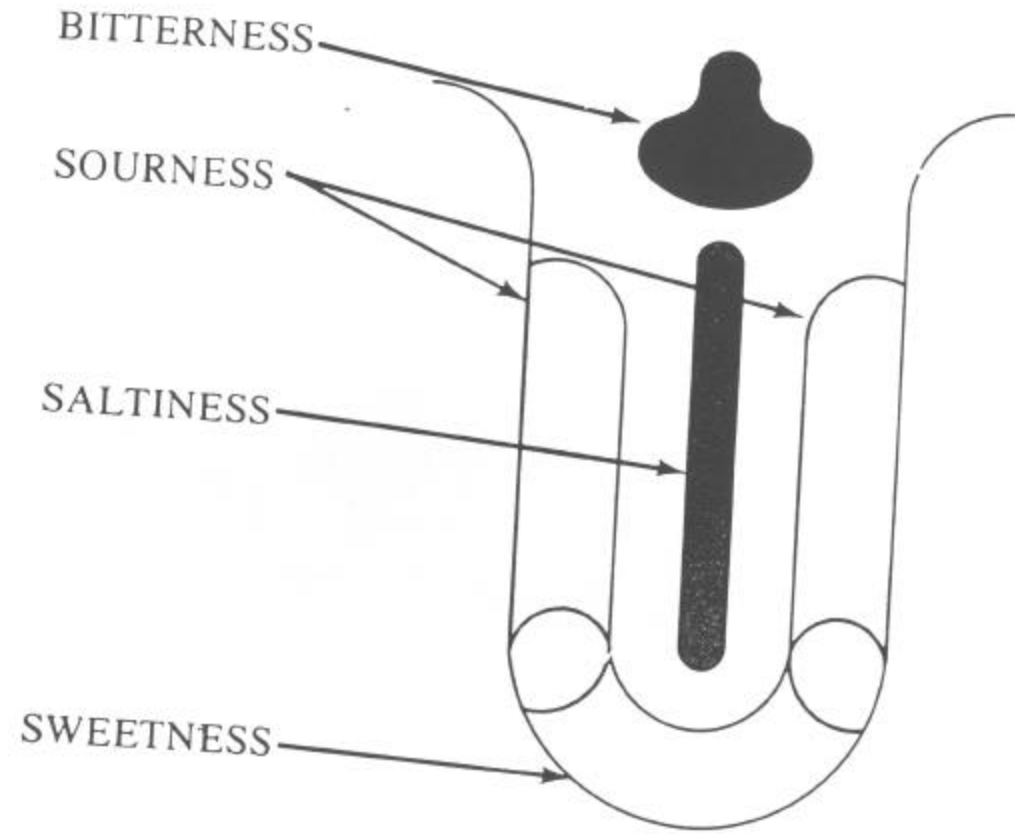
GLASS 3

SIGHT

Taste
in
color



Paul Rigby's graphic description of how our taste sensations are excited.



The Tongue