



Speaking
of **Wine**

CHAPTER 3

TASTING WINE

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



After looking and learning about the vineyard and how it is cared for and the winery and how the wines are made, it's now time to move on to the best part of this course... Wine tasting!

Wine tasting is sometimes seen as snobbish – many people think it's only for a few elite subjects that really understand wine, BUT IT IS NOT!

Wine tasting is for everyone! Anyone can drink wine and anyone can taste wine – our job is to understand it and teach it for those who don't know how to interpret it.

*One not only drinks wine, one smells it, observes it, tastes it,
sips it and one talks about it.*

King Edward VII

PLANNING A WINE TASTING

- When preparing for a wine tasting we have to consider various factors:
- Who is it for?
- What are they expecting?
- Where is it taking place?
- What do we want them to learn?

Having a clear idea of what it is exactly that we want people to learn from the tasting can help in planning.

Do you just want to showcase the wines the vineyard makes? Do you want to showcase the terroir of a region? A particular grape variety? Or the excellent work of the winemaker?

Plan ahead and only present wines to your customers that meet the objective of the tasting.

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



WHAT YOU NEED FOR A WINE TASTING

WINE GLASSES

Make sure they are clean and have no odors or marks that could interfere with the perception of the wine.

CORKSCREW

Also known as a "waiter's friend". Be sure to always have one on hand. If you work on the go or in several different places, have a favourite one and keep it with you at all times!

SPITOON

Depending on the group of tasters you have as customers, a spittoon is a good idea. Not everyone will want to drink their wine and they will need somewhere to spit safely and carefully.

There are many different types of spittoons available: metal, glass, plastic; large ones to share amongst a group of people or smaller ones for individual use.

GOOD LIGHTING

Having a decent amount of light in the room for the tasting is ideal. You'll need good lighting to be able to see the colour of the wine correctly. Alternatively you could use a white backdrop to contrast the colour against.

NO STRONG SMELLS

In the same way the wine glasses need to be free of odor, the room needs to be neutral, with no strong smells. This also means that the person hosting the tasting shouldn't be wearing strong perfume!

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



EXPLAINING THE BASIC STEPS OF WINE TASTING

As mentioned before, a lot of people think that wine tasting is difficult and only for expert winelovers. But if you explain the basic steps of tasting and how to do each one properly, even the most non-expert will be able to enjoy it!



COLOUR



AROMAS



SWIRL



FLAVOURS

When I host a wine tasting, I like to follow the same pattern every time. I always start by explaining the vineyard and its most differential characteristics. Next the grape varieties that are in that particular wine followed by how the wine is made.

After this technical explanation comes the sensorial part of the wine tasting and where people can get a bit lost sometimes.

COLOUR

The colour in wine can tell us many things from grape varieties to the age of the wine. Tilting the glass on its side and looking through the wine will give an indication to the colour and its intensity, the hue and viscosity of the wine.

The description of the colour is subjective, each taster may name it a different way but there are some guidelines to help novice tasters navigate the scary world of wine colours!

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



In **white wines**, the colour scale looks like this:

lemon-green - lemon - gold - amber - brown



In **rosé wines**, the colour scale looks like this:

pink - salmon - orange



In **red wines**, the colour scale looks like this:

purple - ruby - garnet - tawny - brown

AROMAS

How many times have you heard someone say "I can't name any of the aromas in wine" or "I don't know how to describe it" or "I don't know how to taste wine"? I'm willing to bet anything on this!

If we try and explain to people HOW the aromas are created (without expecting them to understand chemistry and winemaking), we can help them break down the aromas into different bite-sized categories. Remember that there are thousands of aromas compounds to find in wine and that even the best trained sommeliers won't be able to identify them all!

Start with **PRIMARY AROMAS**: those that are from the grapes themselves or from the alcoholic fermentation.

In this category, you can find floral aromas, fruity aromas like citrus, tropical, stone, red, black, dried or cooked fruit; herbal aromas (or balsamic aromas); herbaceous aromas; spicy aromas and other like minerality.

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



Next, move on to **SECONDARY AROMAS**. These aromas are produced during the post-fermentation techniques the winemaker chooses.

For example, malolactic fermentation, yeast contact or oak contact.

And finally, the **TERTIARY AROMAS**. The last category is caused by the ageing process the wines undergo over time, either for long periods in oak or in the bottle (non-oxidative or oxidative development).

These aromas are separated into different sections: deliberate oxidation (aged in oaks for example); fruit development (the descriptors are going to be different for white and red wines); and bottle ageing (again, different descriptors for white and red wines).

Before you start tasting, think about the wine you have in front of you. If it is a young, youthful white wine then the aroma profile is likely to be all primary aromas and flavours. But if the wine is some years old and has been aged in oak (imagine a Chardonnay fermented in oak vats) then you would expect to find some fruity aromas, but more of the secondary aromas (from the oak ageing) and some tertiary aromas (from time in the bottle) starting to come through.

Explaining this to a non-expert taster can help them to understand the logic of aromas and help them to start building up their own "aroma memory bank" for the future.

TASTE

Remember that everyone's taste buds are completely different!

Fun fact: the average adult has around 2000 - 4000 working taste buds that will regenerate themselves every 10 - 12 days more or less. As a person gets older, those taste buds don't get replaced.

Taste buds are not only located on the tongue. They are all around the mouth and even in our throat! That is why it's so important to allow the wine to move around the mouth, covering all of it to get the best impact of taste.

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



In this part of the tasting, we should be looking for 7 things:

- Sweetness
- Acidity
- Tannin
- Alcohol
- Body
- Flavour intensity
- Flavour characteristics

After the tasting, there is a method used in the WSET training that I find helps people to make an objective conclusion about the wine. It's called the BLIC method (balance, length, intensity and complexity).

IDENTIFYING THE AROMAS AND FLAVOUR PROFILE IN WINE

This is where wine tasting gets really fun! You can describe an aroma and taste profile **HOWEVER YOU WANT** but remember that not everyone knows how the strawberry jam that your grandmother makes really tastes!

My advice is to stick to basics. There is obviously going to be a time when in a particular wine a certain set of aromas and flavours really stand out to you - use them, that's fine. But if the aromas and flavours you are describing are too complicated for a taster to resonate with you're just going to confuse them.

Take a look at the tasting wheel (in a separate document) and look at all the categories there are.

Do you ever use all of them?

Are some of the descriptors too hard for people to understand?

Do you know when to use them?

Identify your customers first, then explain the wine. Read that again. Identify your customers first and then explain the wine - not everyone is an expert taster and your language needs to be adapted depending on the customer in front of you.

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



HOW TO DETECT FAULTS IN WINE

Wine is a living product and is not without its faults. Sometimes, these occur naturally, others the winemaker is at fault.

This is a list of the most common wine faults and the aromas that are generally associated to them:

TCA (Trichloroanisole) - gives the wine aromas like damp cardboard. The fruity flavours in the wine are muted and normally hard to find. Referred to as cork taint (the wine is corked).

Reduction - rotten eggs, boiled cabbage, blocked drains or boiled onions. Sometimes these unpleasant aromas disappear after the bottle is left open for a while or if the wine is decanted.

Sulphur dioxide - this compound is added to almost every type of wine with higher levels in sweet wines. If the levels are too high, the aromas are like extinguished matches.

Oxidation - this is the opposite of reduction. Typically, it is caused by the closure allowing oxygen into the wine. The wine will lack freshness and fruitiness and have aromas of toffee, caramel, honey or coffee.

Out of condition - these wines will have lost their freshness and may taste dull and stale. This happens because the wines have been aged for too long or have been stored in bad conditions.

Volatile acidity (VA) - note that all wines have some VA and low levels help make the wine seem more fragrant and complex. On the other end of the scale, if the VA is too high, the wines will present with aromas of nail polish or vinegar.

Brettanomyces (Brett) - there are some people that enjoy the aromas of Brett in their wines, but others don't like the aromas this particular yeast gives to the wine: plastic or animal aromas like plasters, hot vinyl, smoked meat, leather or sweaty horses.

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



TIPS FOR WRITING TASTING NOTES

On many occasions you may have to write your tasting notes in English – whether you are writing them for your own wines, a customer or a wine menu. It's important to get it right and not use literal translations to talk and write about wine.

Here are a few examples of tasting notes and some useful words you can use for describing wines.

EXAMPLE 1

The wine is clear, there is no sediment and the colour is pale yellow.

On the nose the aromas are clean and there is a pronounced aroma of green fruit like pear and a hint of citrus fruit such as lime juice. There is a floral backnote of white flowers and hints of grass.

In the mouth the wine is dry with medium + acidity and medium alcohol and a medium body. Medium + flavours of lemon and lime in the mouth with a pleasant, long and floral finish.

EXAMPLE 2

The colour is pale gold.

The wine presents aromas of overripe pineapple and yellow grapefruit. There are some interesting tertiary aromas of hay and mushroom due to the bottle ageing.

On the palate, it's creamy and has flavours of grass and honey. The finish is long and pleasant, leaving the mouth feeling refreshed.

CHAPTER 3

Tasting Wine



EXAMPLE 3

The wine is clear. The colour is medium ruby.

The aromas are clean with secondary aromas of smoke, cloves and nutmeg. There are some tertiary aromas of leather, wet leaves and forest floor as well as a hint of dried cranberries.

In the mouth there is a flavour profile of dried red fruits, red liquorice and vanilla husk. The finish is medium in length.

EXAMPLE 4

The colour is deep ruby.

The aromas are of sweet, sticky blackberry jam, prunes and figs. There are hints of tobacco, spicy cloves and toast as well as subtle notes of caramel and leather.

In the mouth the wine is smoky, with hints of chocolate and sweet spices with a long, velvety finish.

EXAMPLE 5

The wine is deep ruby in colour.

The aromas are focused on red fruit marmalade on a backnote of lavender and eucalyptus. The oak gives it hints of cedar box and cigar and the ageing in the bottle presents as toffee and tobacco.

On the palate, the wine is smoky and has a spicy flavour that reminds us of cloves on a fruity, red currant backnote. The finish is long and refreshing.

What do your tasting notes look like?



Speaking of Wine

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