

VINENCO
S E L E C T I O N

VINENCO GUIDE

INTRODUCTION TO WINE TASTING

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Introduction to Wine Tasting

Introduction

Wine tasting can be a fun and exciting hobby, but like any hobby it requires knowledge, skill and experience. Sensory training as well as an introduction to the vocabulary and background knowledge of wines can help you to develop the skill you need to successfully enjoy wine tasting as a serious hobby.

Learning more about wine tasting will not only help you to develop a deeper appreciation for the many different types of wines that are produced around the world, but can also set the stage for incredible social experiences as well. Experienced and novice wine connoisseurs often enjoy traveling to various regions to attend wine tastings, tour vineyards and learn more about wine making. Others choose to host formal and informal wine tastings in their homes to share their love of this hobby with others.

Wine tasting is a centuries old art form that makes it possible for you to develop a deeper appreciation of the color, taste and scent of various types of wines. Considering the varieties of wine that are produced around the world today, this is a hobby that is easy to become passionate about.

While there is always something new to learn about wine tasting, even if you have no previous experience, you can quickly and easily learn to study and appreciate the color, taste and aroma of wine and the art of wine tasting. In this guide you will learn to develop an appreciation for the different attributes of wine, study the vocabulary of wine tasting and look at different ways you can take your appreciation for wine tasting even further, including themed events and wine tasting parties.

Are you ready to learn more about wine and the fabulous art of wine tasting?

If so, grab a bottle of your favorite wine, a corkscrew and a glass and get ready to jump into the exciting world of wine tasting!

Let's get started and good luck on your first wine tasting!

Your VINENCO Team

Chapter 1

Understanding the Different Types of Wine

Before beginning an in-depth look at the art of wine tasting, it can be helpful to develop a basic understanding of the different types of wines. This can be particularly beneficial if you are completely new to the world of wine. There are actually many different varieties and types of wine that are produced around the world. Although many people understand the difference between basic red and white wines, there are still many other styles of wine that can sometimes be confusing.

Types of Wines

Dry Wines

Dry wines are also often referred to as table wines. These wines are among the most common style of wine that you will find in many of the regions around the world. Common examples include:

- Rose wine
- Dry white wine
- Dry red wine

Dry White Wines

Dry white wines are produced from white grapes without any residual sugar. All of the sugar has been completely converted to alcohol, as is the case with all dry wines. The majority of the basic white table wines are either dry or at least close to dry. Examples include Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Viognier and others. There are also some dry white wines that can be somewhat off-dry. This means they do have a small amount of residual sugar remaining but it is not enough for them to be classified as a dessert or sweet wine. Such examples typically come from regions including Alsace, the Loire Valley, Austria and Germany. Muscat, Riesling and Chenin Blanc grape varieties are commonly used for these wines.

Although the fact that there is a little sugar left remaining might imply a sweet taste, most dry white wines can vary quite a bit in terms of flavor and style. This is usually dependent upon the type of grape used, the wine region and the technique involved. Some types of dry white wines might have a slightly sweeter taste due to extremely ripe fruit, a vanilla oak flavor and low acidity. Many people find California Chardonnays to have a slightly sweet taste. Wines with less ripe flavors often have a drier taste, such as with a French Sauvignon Blanc.

As is the case with any type of wine, a white wine can vary from being light bodied to rich and full-bodied. Wines that are light and fruity make excellent aperitifs and go wonderfully with light seafood dishes. Richer, drier white wines can be paired beautifully with cheeses and fish and poultry dishes.

Rose Wines

Rose wines are often commonly referred to as blush wines. In terms of color they vary somewhat between a red and a white wine. The actual hue can vary from pink to salmon and even to a light red wine. Rose wines are typically fresh and tasty and not too heavy. They can be somewhat dry but they can also have some residual sugar that is used for enhancing the fruitiness of the wine.

Most people think of the White Zinfandel or a White Merlot when they think of rose wines. True wine experts; however, often find these wines to have very little flavor. There are many other classic varieties, including those that are produced in Provence in France and also some from various parts of Spain and Italy.

Rose wines are typically produced using a blend of white and red grapes or sometimes just red grapes. The color of the wine comes from the skin of the grape rather than the juice. The wine is actually only left in contact with the red grapes for the length of time needed to pick up a bit of color.

Blush wines can vary quite a bit in terms of flavor as well as color. The actual flavor can depend on the types of grapes used as well as the region where the wine was produced and the style of the producer. Most such wines are served slightly chilled and feature fruity flavors and aromas

that are quite lively. They do well as an aperitif and can be paired very nicely with a variety of foods; especially salty snack foods such as olives, tapenade spreads, certain cheeses and bruschetta.

Dry Red Wines

Dry red wines are typically produced from red grape varieties that have been fermented to dryness. This means there is very little to no residual sugar left remaining. Red wines are commonly dry with the small exception of some dessert wines such as Madeira or Port. Common examples of red table wines include Zinfandel, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Syrah. They are produced from grapes such as Burgundy and Bordeaux.

Sparkling Wines

Champagne is, without a doubt, the most famous example of a sparkling wine. There are many regions around the world that produce a variety of different sparkling wines. Most sparkling wines are white, but there are some that pink and even others that are red. Examples of sparkling wines include:

- Champagne
- Prosecco
- Rose champagne
- Sparkling red wine

Champagne

Champagne is actually a region situated northeast of Paris in France. This is the region where the sparkling wine of the same name hails from. As you learn more about wines you will discover that most wines from France are actually named for the region where they are produced rather than the types of grapes used. Sparkling wines can actually be produced from any region in the world, but only those that come from the specific region in France can be referred to as Champagne.

Sparkling wines date back for centuries. These wines are bubbly due to the carbon dioxide that is dissolved in it, providing the famous fizzy effervescence appearance and texture. Sparkling wines are first produced from a still wine. That wine is then aged and bottled. Sugar and yeast are added to the bottle, providing the secondary fermentation process necessary to produce the carbon dioxide. The yeast sediment is then removed and the bottles are corked and ready for sale.

These types of wines can be produced from practically any variety of grape. In most instances, Champagne is only produced from three types of grapes. Two are dark red grapes; Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir. The other is a white grape, Chardonnay. In fact, many wines are actually blends of different amounts of all three types of grapes.

There are many different styles of sparkling wines that are produced, but generally speaking most are either a vintage or a non-vintage Champagne. A non-vintage or NV is typically a blend of wines from at least two vintages. A vintage wine is one that hails exclusively from one vintage and the year is noted on the label.

All sparkling wines are bubbly, but they can vary quite a bit. They are generally intense, bright and flavorful and feature a lively sparkle and acidity. Some sparkling wines; however, may be crisp and light, while others might be more lush and rounder. There are some sparkling wines that are extremely dry with a small amount of sugar added, such as Extra Brut or Brut Nature. Others are very sweet, such as Demi-Sec.

While sparkling wines are commonly used for celebrations and toasts, there are also some that are used for entertaining. They do well as aperitifs and can also be served with many different foods, including shellfish such as oysters on the half shell, poultry and baked fish.

Rose Champagne

Rose Champagne is a pink champagne that is slightly red in hue. While most typical Champagnes and sparkling wines are white, rose champagnes are made with a slight amount of color from red grapes. The hue can vary from a light blush to a salmon and even a dark red. Rose champagnes can vary significantly based on the types of grapes used as well as the style and

production method. They tend to have a red fruity aroma and more flavor than a typical champagne. You might detect such fresh aromas as raspberries and strawberries. Rose champagnes can be served with many different types of foods. Surprisingly, they are excellent with spicy Indian foods.

Prosecco

Prosecco refers to a white grape and sparkling wine from a region in Italy. These wines are usually light and fresh and are frequently served with light foods. They are often lighter in body and have less bubbly than many other sparkling wines, such as Champagne. Instead, they have more of a fizzy nature. Some wine producers prefer to make them at a higher pressure, in which case they are labeled as Spumante.

Sweet Wines or Dessert Wines

Some types of wine are produced with a small amount of sugar left in the finished product. This provides a sweet taste. Such wines can vary from those that are somewhat off-dry to wines that are extremely sweet. The sweetest wines are typically considered to be dessert wines as they are typically served at the conclusion of a meal. Common types of sweet wines include:

- Sweet white wine
- Sweet red wine
- Fortified wines, such as Madeira, sherry or port

There are actually many different types of sweet wines that are produced around the world. The term sweet simply refers to the fact that there is at least some residual sugar left in the wine. This can vary from being somewhat off-dry, which means only slightly sweet, to an extreme, sticky sweetness. Or, it can be anything in between.

Sweet wines can be produced using a variety of different methods. A late harvest wine is made from grapes that are picked late in the season after they have developed more sugar. Once the alcoholic fermentation process has ended, there is some residual sugar left remaining, resulting in a sweet wine.

Fortified wines refer to those in which the fermentation process is stopped through the addition of alcohol. If the fermentation process is stopped early enough, these wines will still have quite a lot of unfermented sugar present. Examples include Port as well as sweet Madeira wines and Sherry.

In some cases a sweet white wine style may be produced by allowing the grapes to freeze. The grapes are pressed and the ice crystals filtered out. The resulting wine is therefore concentrated in sugar and flavor, producing a wine that is intense and vibrant. These wines are known as ice wines.

Perhaps some of the sweetest and most concentrated white wines are produced from grapes that have been affected by a fungus known as botrytis. It is sometimes referred to as 'noble rot'. The fungus dehydrates the grapes while they are growing. The result is a rich and concentrated sweet wine.

Fortified Wines

Port

Port wines are a type of fortified wines that are produced through the addition of a neutral grape spirit, such as brandy, while the wine is fermenting. That addition stops the fermentation process, resulting in a sweet, rich wine. True Port is produced in Portugal in the Douro Valley, but there are also many other similar styles that are produced throughout the world. Port is commonly served as a dessert wine due to its sweetness. It can also be served late in the evening and is sometimes paired with dried fruits and nuts and cheeses. A common pairing is Port wine and Stilton cheese. Some of the more famous producers of Port wines include:

- Fonseca
- Taylor's
- Dow's
- Graham's
- Quinta de Vesuvio

- Kopke
- Croft
- Warre's
- Quinta do Noval
- Cockburn's
- Offley Forrester
- Sandeman
- Smith Woodhouse
- Delaforce
- Ferreira

Types of Port

There are many different types of port of which you should be aware.

Vintage Port

Vintage port is considered to be the crème de la crème of all ports. Every Port house has a Vintage Port that is their shining star. That vintage is commonly used for judging the entire producer. Vintage Port is produced from the most exceptional vintages and is then bottled as a single vintage. It is also not aged in wood, but in large vats before bottling. Young Ports often have intense dark flavors. Vintage port is really meant to be aged in the bottle and will improve over a period of decades. The best Vintage Ports are often at least 30 years old before they reach their peak.

Single Quinta Vintage Port

There are some vintages that are good, but they are not good enough in order to be declared as a Vintage Port. In this case they will be bottled separately. They typically do not need as much time for maturing as a Vintage Port.

Late Bottled Vintage

Late Bottled Vintage or LBV Ports are a single vintage Port wine that has been left to age in the cask before being bottled. This usually involves several years. Colheita and Tawny Ports must be aged at least 7 years before they are bottled.

Ruby Port

A Ruby Port is a young Port that is made from young wines that have been blended together with several younger vintages. They are often less dense and intense. As a result, they are also often less expensive.

Tawny Port

Tawny Ports take their name from their color. They are aged for a long time in oak barrels, lending the lighter, tawny color. These wines are often mellow and provide a flavor that is nuttier and less fruity. Many Tawny Ports are actually a blend of several different vintages. The price for Tawny Ports is typically dependent on the age.

Colheita

Colheita Port wines are a blend between a Vintage Port and a Tawny. They are produced from a single vintage, but rather than being bottled while young like a true Vintage Port, they are aged in wood for a long period of time; much like a Tawny. They are not produced by all port houses. Some of the best known examples include Calem, Rocha and Quinta de Noval.

Madeira

Madeira wine is a type of fortified wine that is produced on the Madeira Islands, an archipelago of Portugal located in the northern Atlantic Ocean. This is a rich wine that can range from dry to sweet. It is often noted for its somewhat complex and smoky aroma and flavor.

This wine is produced in a similar manner as Port wine and Sherry in that the fermentation process is stopped at some point through the addition of a neutral grape spirit. What is unique about Madeira is the way it is barrel aged before being bottled. While Port wine is either aged in the barrels in a cool cellar for a long time or bottled early, Madeira wine is typically aged in

wood for a long period of time in a warm environment. This allows it to oxidize. This enhances the smoky, roasted aroma and flavor.

Types of Madeira

The style of Madeira can depend on how long it is aged as well as whether it comes from a blend of vintages or a single vintage. The grapes that are used can also provide an impact. There are four types of grapes which are used exclusively for the best Madeira wines.

Sercial

These wines are typically very dry and have very little residual sugar. They are usually fermented dry and have bright, nutty flavors with a crisp acidity.

Verdelho

These wines are somewhat sweeter but are still slightly dry.

Bual

Bual is richer and sweeter and has a darker color.

Malmsey

These are the richest, darkest and sweetest wines. They often feature caramel or roasted coffee aromas.

Sherry

Sherry is a type of fortified wine that is produced in the southern region of Andalusia in Spain. They are made exclusively from a variety of white grapes. Sherry is produced through the addition of a neutral grape spirit, alcohol, during the fermentation process. The alcohol level is raised, stopping the fermentation process. In this way it is similar to Madeira and Port. Most Sherries are somewhat dry. After the fermentation process is stopped, the wine is then aged in oak barrels. What makes Sherry unique is that in some cases the wine may be allowed to slowly evaporate and come into contact with oxygen in the barrels. A specific type of yeast known as

flor will then develop on the wine's surface over time. This helps to protect the wine as it ages. The slow and gentle oxidation process results in rather complex flavors and aromas.

Another process known as the solera technique may also be used. In this case, the producer retains older selections in the barrel for many years. Younger wines are then blended in slowly with the older selections.

Styles of Sherry

Fino

This is the lightest and youngest style of Sherry. It has a pale yellow or straw color. These wines are aged under flor for a long period of time. They tend to be fresh and aromatic. Many times they are served chilled and may also be served as an aperitif or with salty snacks such as almonds and olives.

Manzanilla

This style is similar to Finos, but is produced exclusively in a region along the coast. They are often served in a similar manner to Finos, although they have a somewhat lighter body.

Amontillado

This style of Sherry begins much like a Fino but has additional aging to develop a nuttier, more caramelized aroma. They can be served alone but are also paired well with smoky foods, including French onion soup and roast poultry.

Oloroso

These wines are darker than Amontillado. They have a deep, rich and dark aroma and flavor. As a result, they are often better served after dinner; either alone or with pungent cheeses and nuts.

Cream

This is an Oloroso that is sweet and is often served as a dessert wine.

Pedro Ximenez

This style of Sherry is produced exclusively from a grape known as Pedro Ximenez.

Traditionally, the grapes are allowed to dry on mats in the sun and ultimately become raisins; making them powerful and concentrated. The final wine is intense, rich and sweet.

Moscatel

This is another sweet style of Sherry that is made from the Moscatel grape. It often has fruity or floral aromas and flavors. Can be served alone following a meal or with dried fruits and nuts or a salty blue cheese.

Chapter 2

The Basics of Wine Tasting

Wine tasting is often viewed as being complex and complicated, but in reality it isn't. The basic idea behind wine tasting is really simple. All you have to do is just simply relax and take some time to think about the wine you are drinking and use all of your senses to enjoy it.

There are several steps involved in properly tasting wine. By following those steps you will be able to gain a better appreciation for the wine and learn more about the different wines that are produced from around the world.

The first step is to visually examine the wine in your glass. Look at the color. Is it light in color or a bold, deep color? Is it clear or hazy? Is it opaque or transparent?

Before taking the next step, you should swirl the wine in the glass. This will help to liberate the various aromas and also assists the wine in developing necessary exposure to oxygen.

The next step is to smell your wine. What aromas do you notice? Does it smell like flowers or does it have a fruity aroma? Are you able to identify the various scents?

Now you need to go ahead and take a drink of the wine. Swirl it around in your mouth so that you are able to sense the taste as well as the texture and the weight of the wine. How does the wine taste? What flavors are you able to detect?

Swallow the wine and make sure you pay careful attention to the way the wine finishes or the aftertaste. Do the flavors disappear quickly or do they linger on the palate?

The next step is to put together everything you have learned about the wine and consider where it came from. Take another sip and enjoy it.

Aromas

One of the most important aspects of wine tasting is the aroma or scent of the wine. Many grapes actually have their own distinctive aromas. For instance, Zinfandel grapes often evoke aromas of berries. Pinot Noir has hints of spice and violets. Syrah often evokes the aroma of freshly ground

black pepper. Among the white wines, Chardonnay is known for its crisp, ripe apple aroma, but it may also have additional notes of coconut, butter, figs and other types of tropical fruits. This can be particularly true if the wine is aged in oak.

Riesling, which is often used in German whites, can also evoke the scents of apples along with citrus fruits, pine and cantaloupe. Sauvignon Blanc is often reminiscent of a grassy scent and may sometimes recall the scent of grapefruit. Chenin Blanc often brings to mind the scent of melons or in some cases, orange blossoms. Gewurztraminer and Muscat can evoke the scent of peaches.

The aroma of Cabernet Sauvignon is often reminiscent of cedar wood and pine needles. There could also be slight hints of what some wine tasters refer to as vegetal; referring to green peppers, green olives, grass or tobacco leaves.

When wine is aged in oak, additional touches of cinnamon, vanilla, almonds and cloves may be noticed as well. Longer periods of aging in the bottle can also lend wine a toasty quality. Earthy scents can also be imparted, including old leather, mushrooms and wildflowers.

Taste

Taste is actually a bit more complex than you might originally think. Although there are only four basic flavors, the sense of taste that you experience when sampling wine is much more involved. You need to concentrate not just on whether it tastes sweet, bitter, sour or salty, but you also need to consider how the wine feels in your mouth. Is it light or does it have some weight to it?

One of the most often misunderstood and challenging aspects of sampling involves the undertones that are often present in many wines. Some wines are often described as having hints of grass, moss, leaves, pine, oak, cedar and sometimes even old leather. Judged completely separately it would not seem as though these scents and tastes would be at all appealing. It is crucial to understand; however, that such tastes and scents typically do not dominate the overall wine. They simply add to it in a slight and subtle manner. They are but a nuance of the whole.

The scents that are present in wine can come from a variety of different sources. The fruity smell that is often associated with young wines usually stems directly from the grapes. The organic aromas associated with aged wine often come from the oak of the barrels in which it is aged. Fine, aged wines are often the most complex when it comes to scents. They have what is often referred to as a bouquet. This occurs as a result of the gradual chemical reactions that take place in the wine over time.

Due to the variety of different scents and tastes that can be associated with wine, especially aged wine, an extensive vocabulary has been developed by wine tasters over the years to describe these elements. Some of the more frequently occurring scents you might notice include:

- Apple
- Green olives
- Green peppers
- Nuts
- Vinegar
- Scents of game, such as beef and venison
- Balsamic odors
- Yeasts
- Spicy odors such as cloves, ginger, etc.
- Smoky or toasty
- Leather and coffee
- Floral
- Fruity
- Scents of herbs or tea

Wine Descriptions

Numerous different terms can be used for describing wines. Experienced wine tasters often use a variety of terms to describe what they smell, taste and feel when tasting wine. To develop a solid

understanding of wine tasting, below you will find a guide to some of the more common definitions that are often used when describing wines.

Austere

The term austere refers to being strict or severe. For the purposes of describing a wine, the term is used to describe a wine which is tight. It may have an abundant amount of tannin or acid. This is fairly common in young wines that are meant to age. Over the course of time, the wine will likely open up and be more lush.

Bouquet

The term bouquet refers to a wine's perfume. Bouquet is usually only used to describe a wine that is complex and has a variety of aromas.

Cassis

This is a fairly common wine description. It is a type of syrupy liqueur that is made from black currants and is frequently used for describing wines that have a sweet aroma reminiscent of black currants. It would be frequently used when describing wines made from rich dark grapes, such as a Cabernet Sauvignon.

Complex

A wine that is complex often features an abundance of flavors and aromas. They generally harmonize together beautifully. The best wines from around the world are usually quite complex as they mature.

Concentrated

A wine that is concentrated is often richly flavored and is quite opposite a wine that would be considered bland.

Corpulent

The term corpulent means fat. When used in describing a wine, it refers to a wine that produces a round and full feeling in the mouth. The wine is full-bodied and rich.

Creosote

Creosote is a type of dark brown oil that is distilled from coal tar. This term can be used to describe a smoky or tarry aroma that is sometimes present in rich red wines. The scent often comes from the oak barrels that are used for aging the wine, particularly if they were charred before being used.

Density

The term density refers to the level of concentration of flavors in a wine. Therefore, a wine that has a tremendous amount of density might also be described as being concentrated.

Depth

Depth describes the size of the concentration of a wine. A wine with a lot of depth is one which has numerous layers of flavors.

Elegant

The trademark of a truly great wine is the way the texture feels in your mouth. Excellent wines have a feel that is put together well. There are no hard edges.

Ethereal

The term ethereal refers to something that is light and delicate. This term is commonly used to describe wines that glide through the mouth with a silky and soft texture.

Forward

Wines that are easy to understand as well as appreciate are described as being forward. This is the opposite of a tight or austere wine. The flavors are not shy or hidden.

Grip

Some of the best wines in the world have a tight grip on the palate. There is a sense of texture that grabs the attention and also provides balance to any other flavors that might be present.

Jammy

This is a wine that is made from extremely ripe fruit. Wines that are described as being jammy are usually those that have a sticky sweet flavor.

Laser Like

Wines that are vibrant and have a bright acidity may be described in this way. This description is commonly used for those that are pristine and intense, including German and Austrian Rieslings.

Layered

This description can be somewhat subjective and refer to a wine that has numerous layers of flavors. The opposite of a simple wine.

Lush

This is a wine that is not austere, it is luxuriant and opulent and will frequently have a lot of flavors.

Intense

This description is often used when describing a wine that has flavors that boldly announce themselves. The flavors are often bright and bold.

Minerality

Refers to a characteristic in some wines that is mineral-like. The vines that produce the grapes from which wine is made do sometimes absorb various elements from the vineyard, including minerals, and that can influence the various flavors in the wine. The mineral like aromas and flavors that can be present in a variety of wines include a chalk like taste, pencil lead, granite, stones, slate, oyster shell, petrol, gunflint, salt, gravel, etc.

Mocha

Mocha is essentially coffee that is flavored with chocolate. Several rich red wines, especially those that have had a lot of oak aging, can take on this type of description. The flavors are commonly produced from the grapes and sometimes from the oak aging. This is common in Bordeaux wines.

Monolithic

This is a big wine that doesn't have a lot of complexity in the flavor. It may be full-bodied, but simply lacks complexity.

Opulent

This is a wine that is lavish, luxuriant and rich. It is often used to describe a wine that is round, lush and fat with numerous layers of flavor.

Pain Grille

The aroma of grilled toast or bread can be found in numerous wines. This term is commonly used to describe a wine that features a toasted bread or smoky aroma.

Quince

Quince is a type of fruit that is in the apple and pear family.

Refined

Refined wines are those that are pure and elegant. There are no blemishes or imperfections.

Reglisse

This is a French term that refers to black licorice. This aroma is sometimes present in red wines.

Rich

A wine that is rich is concentrated and dense with a lot of flavor.

Silky

This term is used to describe the texture of a wine.

Smoke

Many wines can take on a variety of smoky aromas. This can be the result of oak aging but there are also many wines that simply have a smoky aroma all their own, including some Syrah wines.

Stone

It is actually not that unusual for a wine to have a taste or smell similar to stones. This is common in wines with mineral like flavors. Some wine tasters may even describe the type of stone, such as flint, chalk, slate or granite.

Torrefaction

This term refers to the process of roasting coffee beans. The resulting scent is commonly associated with chocolate like or roasted coffee smells. Wines that have a lot of roasted qualities may be described as presenting torrefaction.

Unctuous

A wine that is unctuous might have a soapy or greasy feel. These wines often have a creamy or rich texture that coats the palate.

Vanillin

This term refers to the fragrant compound that principally comprises vanilla. It is commonly used to describe an aroma in a wine that comes from another source besides the wine itself. For instance, French oak barrels commonly impart this aroma and flavor to wines.

Velvety

This refers to the way a wine feels in your mouth.

Chapter 3

Welcome to the World of Wine Tastings

What is a Wine Tasting?

One of the best ways to learn about wine and to sample a variety of different wines is to attend or host a wine tasting. A wine tasting is basically an organized party or event in which there are numerous participants who sample a variety of different wines. The number of wines present as well as the participants can vary based on the type and venue of the event. The general idea; however, is for participants to assess the various wines.

The wines that are presented at the tasting often have something in common. For instance, the tasting might include only wines from a certain region and from a particular year. Of course, the event could be less specific and include a specific type of wine from around the world. In a larger event there might be many different types of wine without a common theme present.

Types of Tastings

Below is a guide to some of the more common types of tastings you might encounter.

Home Wine Tasting Party

Hosting or attending a home wine tasting party is a wonderful way to enjoy a variety of wines with people who share similar interests. Conversation and event the tasting of the wine can be fun and relaxed because the event is more personal and smaller in nature. This presents an excellent opportunity to learn more about the wines present at the event.

Wine Retailer Tasting Event

Many wine stores host tastings from time to time. The event might be a drop-in event that takes place at the store during regular business hours or it might a themed and arranged event after hours. These events are typically based on a specific theme. For instance, all of the wines at the event might be from a specific producer or they might be all German or Australian wines. Often there is a flat fee to attend the tasting, which allows you to sample all of the wines that are

offered. The price of the event can vary based on the number of wines presented and the types of wines that will be tasted. The fee can often range from \$5 to \$50. There are some stores that will even offer a type of self-serve wine tasting bar.

Organized Tasting Dinner

Some restaurants as well as wine shops and wine organizations will host special dinners in which wine is featured. The event may be centered around a specific wine producing region or producer. Wine producers often participate in these events to provide educational seminars about their wines.

Wine Country Wine Tastings

Perhaps one of the most exciting and fun ways to attend a tasting is to travel to a region where the wine is actually produced. This can be a fun and educational experience. A wine country tour allows you to see the vineyards and tour the winemaking facilities as well as taste the wines.

Wine Trade Tastings

If you can manage to get an invitation to a wine trade tasting, it can be a wonderful experience. In this type of event literally dozens of different importers or wineries present their wines. As a result, you gain the opportunity to taste hundreds of different wines all in one day. The atmosphere can be somewhat hectic and crowded, so you likely won't be able to fully appreciate each wine but it is a quick way to sample many different wines.

Attending Wine Tasting Parties

As previously mentioned, one of the most comfortable and best ways to taste wine and learn more about wine is to attend a wine tasting party. This is typically a private event that is held in someone's home. A number of wines will be presented and tasted. There may also be snacks or sometimes even a full meal. Because it is not a formal event, the atmosphere can be casual and relaxed, presenting an excellent opportunity to enjoy and learn more about fine wine.

One aspect that makes a wine tasting party so much fun is that you also have the chance to discuss the wines presented with others, rate them and compare your own impressions of the

wines with those of others. It can be a very educational and fun experience. For beginners it can also be an unthreatening and gradual way to ease into the world of wine tasting.

The best way to find a wine tasting you would be comfortable attending is to host one on your own or with several friends who also have an interest in wine. Beyond that, you might try asking around at local wine retailers and inquire as to whether they know of any local tasting groups. You can also join a wine related online message group. This can be an excellent way to find a lot of people in your local area that are interested in organizing offline get-togethers and events.

Hosting your Own Tasting Party

Although you might feel intimidated at the thought of hosting your own wine tasting party if you are new to the hobby, keep in mind that you do not need a lot of experience. All you need is a group of likeminded people, some wine glasses and a variety of wines. Remember that you are only able to learn so much from reading books; in order to truly savor the experience of wine tasting you need to simply jump right in and begin tasting wines and discussing them with others who are just as eager to learn. Basically, anyone is capable of hosting a wine tasting party. With the right attitude, a wine tasting party can be educational and fun.

Remember that even the most experienced wine tasters had to begin somewhere. No one on the face of the planet was born with an inherent knowledge of wine. All you need to get started are a few tips to help you plan a lovely and educational event. You might be surprised to find that even experienced wine tasters would be glad to attend your event.

There is often a perception that wine tasting can be an elite and even snobby event. Nothing could be further from the truth. Wine tasting does not have to be intimidating or pretentious. When you gather a group of people together who are all interested in sampling some good wine and learning more about it, the atmosphere can be casual and fun. At the same time it can also be rewarding, satisfying and even elegant.

One of the most common questions that many people have about wine tasting is how they can expect to host a wine tasting event if they do not have any prior experience. It can be helpful if

you have attended one or two wine tasting events before you attempt to host your own, but that is certainly not a requirement or prerequisite. Below we are going to explore several tips that can help you to get started. If you do choose to host an event without any prior experience, keep in mind that it is important to be honest with your guests and let them be aware that you are just getting started with wine tasting and are interested in hosting an event that will be fun for everyone and present an opportunity to gain more experience.

The best course of action is try to keep things simple for your first wine tasting event. Try not to overdo it. The wine should be the focus of the event. As you gain more experience, you can then try to make your events more formal or fancy as you desire.

Planning your Wine Hosting Party

Even if it is to be a somewhat informal event, it is important to take at least a little time to plan ahead and decide what you want your event to be like. For instance, decide if there will be a theme and how you will serve your wine. This is quite important. If you choose to serve a variety of different wines at the same time you will need to have several glasses on hand per guest. Will you only taste a single wine at a time? Do you plan to serve food?

Choosing your Wines

You should decide in advance the type of wine you would like to feature at your event and how you will obtain it. You might choose to supply all of the wine for the event or you might have guests contribute money to cover the expense. You could also ask guests to bring bottles on their own and have a type of wine potluck. If you do choose to have guests bring their own wine be sure to let them know if you are going to have a theme so they will be able to select an appropriate wine. Although many events focus on wines with a theme, it is possible to have a tasting with a variety of unrelated wines. You could also focus on wines from a particular variety of grape, country or region or vintage.

Wine Tasting Glasses

You will need to have a sufficient number of glasses on hand, but it does not have to be difficult or expensive to have appropriate glasses for your event. You just need to make sure you have

enough. If you do not want to buy glasses, consider renting them from a party rental supplier. You can also ask your guests to bring their own glasses.

Choosing appropriate wine tasting glasses for your tasting or wine dinner is almost as important as picking good wines! A poor wine glass can destroy your chance of evaluating a fine wine as much as great glass can highlight its qualities. While choosing wine glasses for your own wine appreciation at home gives you the flexibility to buy several types of wine glasses specific to each style of wine, at a wine tasting you can rarely realistically have enough specialized wine glasses for all your guests. Here we will give suggestions about types of wine tasting glasses to focus on and some tips on how to make sure you have adequate stemware for your next tasting party.

Choosing Wine Tasting Glasses

Traditional style wine tasting glasses usually have a bowl that is large enough for a sufficient pour and only takes up about a quarter of the glass. The purpose behind this is to leave sufficient space for air and to swirl the wine. These wine glasses are often tulip shaped and will taper toward the top to assist the aroma in making its way toward the nose. It also makes swirling easier. A good tasting glass will be clear and will not have an etching or pattern to ensure t you are able to see the color of the wine with no difficulty. The edge should be relatively smooth and not be excessively rolled. Glasses that taper outward or have coloring or etching are usually not appropriate for wine tasting as the aroma tends to get lost in the glass and swirling is made difficult.

Some companies specialize in making glasses specifically for wine tasting, including Riedel. There are many different styles and tapes for various types of wines. There are also different lines that vary in terms of quality and price. You will find that entry-level classes do not have to cost a lot and can be sufficient for basic tasting. Top of the line glasses are typically hand-blown. If you really want to capture the essence of a wine and cost is not a problem, these glasses are exceptional.

Although there are different types of glasses produced for tasting various types of wines it is usually not feasible to have a different style of glass for every wine presented at a tasting. This is why it is often best to simply go with smaller glasses that can be effectively used for a variety of different types of wines. Just make sure you stick with glasses that are all contoured in the same manner, to make it easier to swirl and sip the wine.

The number of glasses you need will ultimately depend on the number of guests you plan to invite to your event as well as the number of wines that will be served and the way in which you will organize the tasting. Most tasting events are conducted in a manner referred to as flights. In this manner, several wines are served at the same time so that guests have the opportunity to make head to head comparisons. They can also go back and forth. A single flight might consist of two to six or even more wines. Once that flight is conducted, you can then move on to the next flight. If you only have a few glasses available you may need to plan smaller flights for your event. Remember that wines are often paired together based on something they have in common, such as wines from the same producer or the same vintage. Therefore, you could pair wines together in the same flight that are related.

There is certainly nothing wrong with asking your guests to bring their own glasses, especially if you are hosting a casual and informal event. It is usually understood that most people do not have dozens of wine glasses for such an event, so it is acceptable to have guests bring their own glasses. Of course, each guest is likely to have a different type of glass, but that is fine.

Your other option would be to rent glasses from a wine shop or party rental supply company if you do not have enough good wine glasses. Many rental companies will rent wine glasses in racks or trays. Be sure to ask about the types that are available ahead of time.

Food

You are not required to serve anything when you host a wine tasting party, but it is nice to have some crackers or bread available for guests to snack on at a minimum. The purpose is two-fold. Not only are snacks filling but they also help in cleansing the palate between wines. You can easily make some simple additions that usually pair well with wines such as dried nuts, a cheese

platter, cured olives, etc. You can also choose to have a full wine dinner party that features a full dinner for accompanying the wines.

Wine Openers

It is also important to make sure you have openers on hand for opening the bottles of wine at your event. You will find there are many different options available.

Wine Tasting Invitations

Invitations to your event are not strictly necessary, but if you want to increase the excitement level they can add to the overall atmosphere.

Note Taking Sheets

It can often be helpful to take notes while you are tasting a wine. This can help in focusing your attention and also training your palate for putting the experience into words. For a casual event you can supply paper and pens for your guests, but you might also print up wine note sheets with a template to help guests in knowing what they should focus on. This can be tremendously helpful for beginners.

Spit Bucket

Making sure you have a spit bucket at your event is convenient for your guests. One of the most common reasons for providing a bucket is that some guests may need to drive afterward and do not wish to drink too much. There may be other guests who do not want to finish all of a glass of wine and need a place to dump leftovers before the next flight is poured. Dumping or spitting wine is completely acceptable and is actually a standard practice at most wine tasting events. It is even common at dinner parties.

Be sure to make it known to your guests ahead of time that a receptacle is available and where it is located. You might find that you need to have more than one receptacle if you have a large event. Any large and opaque wide-mouthed container will be fine, including champagne buckets.

Chapter 4

Themes for your Wine Tasting

A wine tasting party can certainly make the experience of tasting and sampling wines more fun and enjoyable. No matter what type of event you are hosting, there are many different ways you can help to break the ice, lighten the mood and get everyone attending involved in the fun. If you do not have a plan in place ahead of time you may find that your guests simply sit there and sip there wine. This can be a particular problem if you have a lot of beginners present. Below are some ideas that can help you to plan a theme for your wine tasting event that will assist in getting everyone involved and ensure you have a great time.

Types of Themes

Blind Tasting

One of the more common themes for a wine tasting event is the blind tasting. The idea behind this theme is that each bottle is covered so that guests will not know what they are drinking. You can either provide all of the wines and blind them or ask guests to bring wines that have already been blinded. At some point during the event the wines will be revealed. This is an excellent way to remove preconceptions about wines so that you are able to judge the wines on their own merits rather than the label, region or producer. It can also be a lot of fun to attend a blind tasting and see what ideas others come up with.

Dinner Party Theme

Wine is always much better when it is accompanied by foods that compliment it. A dinner party theme pairs together great wine and food. You can choose to host a party that is centered around a particular type of food and then choose wines that compliment that food.

Vertical Wine Tasting Party

A vertical wine tasting party pairs together several of the same types of wine from the same vineyard or producer. The only difference is that the wines come from a variety of vintages. By tasting the same varietal of wines from the same vineyard or producer and having only the year

of production as the variable makes it possible to discern the subtle and dramatic differences that can occur in a wine from year to year. Also, it makes it possible for you to achieve a better feel for the varietal style of a winery. For instance, you can discern how different weather patterns can affect a wine from one year to the next. When you host this type of wine tasting it can often be helpful to provide the wine's literature from the producer so that you can view notes from the winemaker. A variety of factors can impact a wine's vintage and this information can serve as excellent material for conversation throughout the event.

Horizontal Wine Tasting Party

A horizontal wine tasting party is an event in which several wines from the same vintage are paired together. The purpose is to obtain a feel for the various characteristics of wines from that vintage within a particular region. This type of tasting is conducted by using a wine varietal from a single year, although different producers are used. For instance, you might choose a 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon as the varietal and then compare between four and six of those varietals from different winemakers. There are many different variables that can be considered with this type of tasting, including whether you even like all of the wines that are from the same region.

Grape Varietal Tasting

In this type of tasting, you compare wines from different producers but all from the same grape varietal. For instance, you might host a Cabernet wine tasting and focus on wines that hail from around the world; all of which are made from the Cabernet Sauvignon grape.

Wine Region Tasting

Another option would be to host a tasting based on a particular wine region. For the most part, the classic wine regions of the world all produce a similar style of wine using similar grape varietals. A tasting that is conducted through a variety of wines from a specific region can prove to be very educational and teach a lot about that region's style. For instance, you might host a tasting based on Provence, France and build the entire theme of the evening around that region. Or you could do Napa Valley or the Rhone. There are certainly many different options to choose from.

The Big Eight

The term 'Big Eight' in wine tasting refers to the eight most popular and influential wine varieties in the world. The purpose of this type of tasting is to provide guests with the opportunity to work their way through these varietals and experience the various nuances. This type of tasting can offer the chance to develop a new appreciation for all kinds of varietals.

Wine and Cheese Tasting

Wine and cheese naturally compliment one another. Therefore, hosting a tasting based on various wine and cheese combinations can set the stage for a fun, delicious and educational event. The best way to host this type of event is to have guests sample a wine from a particular flight and then introduce an appropriate cheese pairing. Next have them take another sip of wine and then once again assess the qualities of the wine and the subtle flavor changes that often take place.

Examples of wine and cheese pairings include:

- Gewurztraminer and Swiss
- Riesling and Gouda
- Chardonnay and Baked Brie

Wine and Chocolate Tasting

There are few things more delicious than a good wine paired with a gourmet quality chocolate. The key is to make sure that you pair the right wine with the right chocolate. To make the appropriate selections, first you need to remember that the wine should be at least as sweet, if not slightly sweeter than the chocolate you will serve it with. If you fail to follow this rule the taste can rapidly become sour.

When you pair wines with chocolate, the best option is to match a lighter and more elegant chocolate with a lighter-bodied wine. Stronger chocolates should be paired with more full-bodied wines.

White Chocolate and Wine Pairing Ideas

White chocolate is often more buttery and mellow, meaning it is ideal for Sherry or an Orange Muscat. The Sherry will usually pick up the creaminess that is present in the chocolate while the Orange Muscat will pick up fruit tones that are present.

Milk Chocolate and Wine Pairing Ideas

When serving milk chocolate you might consider pairing it with a Pinot Noir or a lighter-bodied merlot. These wines will complement the milk chocolate either in a bar or dessert form. Muscats, Rieslings and dessert wines are also good selections to pair with mild milk chocolates. A sparkling wine or even a Champagne can also be paired well with milk chocolate, especially chocolate dipped strawberries. Ruby Port is also a good option that pairs well with milk chocolate.

Dark Chocolate Wine Pairing Ideas

Bittersweet or dark chocolate requires a wine that has a somewhat robust, roasted flavor. Even better is a wine that has its own chocolate notes. Consider Zinfandels and Cabs for the perfect match. A Merlot or Pinot Noir can also handle a dark chocolate in many cases as can a Vintage Port or Tawny Port.

Ringer Tasting

Inserting a ringer into the event involves substituting one wine for another wine that was expected. In this case, all of the wines would have some type of theme or connection, with the exception of one, that would stand out from the rest. This is commonly done in a blind tasting. It can be a lot of fun to see whether the guests are able to detect the ringer or whether some guests are able to be fooled. Practically any type of wine can serve as a ringer. The only requirement is that it should have some characteristic that is similar to the other wines. You could insert another variety of grape from the same region or another wine that comes from the same grape varietal but from a different country or region.

Scoring Party Wine Tasting

Another great way to liven up a party is to print scoring sheets in advance and provide them to your guests so they are able to score each wine they taste. You could base it on a numerical score, such as a 100 point scale. You could also have the guests to rank their wines in terms of favorite to least favorite. At the end of the event everyone can compare their notes and scores. You might actually be surprised at what you discover. Sometimes guests can develop extremely divergent opinions on a single wine with some hating it and others loving it.

Wine Tasting Pairing Ideas

As previously discussed a wine tasting party can be general or focused on a particular theme. Below is a list of wines you could choose for a general wine tasting party:

White Wines

Table Wines-White Wine (dry)

- Sauvignon Blanc
- Chardonnay
- Chablis
- Gewurztraminer
- Rhine

Table Wines-White Wine (medium dry)

- Pinot Blanc
- Pinot Grigio
- Chenin Blanc
- Riesling
- White Bordeaux

Table Wines-White Wine (medium sweet)

- Sauterne

Table Wines-White Wine (sweet)

- Asti Spumante
- Haut Sauternes

Red Wines

Table Wines-Red Wine (dry)

- Merlot
- Shiraz
- Bordeaux
- Burgundy
- Cabernet Sauvignon
- Chianti
- Claret
- Pinot Noir

Table Wines-Red Wine (medium dry)

- Cabernet Franc
- Sangiovese
- Zinfandel

Rose Wines

Rose Wines (dry)

- Rose D'Angou

Rose Wines (medium dry)

- Chablis

Kosher Wines

Rose Wines (dry)

- Rose D'Anjou

Playing Games

There are also many fun games you can play at a wine tasting event that can help to liven the mood and ensure everyone has a good time.

Guess the Varietal

In this type of event you hold a blind wine tasting and have each of the guests try to guess the grape varietal of the wines that are presented.

Guess the Country or Region

In a similar manner you could also host an event where all of the wines come from a single region or country and then ask the guests to guess what that region or country is.

Prizes

You might also choose to plan an event in which guests will be awarded with prizes. If you choose to do this make sure you explain the contest to your guests at the beginning. The winner might be the guest who brought the wine that received the highest score or you might base the winner on the guest that was able to correctly identify the most wines, etc. Prizes can be anything, including a bottle of wine or a wine accessory.

Sample Wine Tasting Score Card

Taster's Name: _____

Event: _____

Date: _____

Wine A: _____ pts

Wine B: _____ pts

Wine C: _____ pts

Wine D: _____ pts

Wine E: _____ pts

Wine F: _____ pts

Rating System

I love this wine-5 pts

I really like this wine-4 pts

This wine is good-3 pts

This wine isn't the best-2 pts

I really don't like this wine-1 pt

Sample Wine Tasting Note Card

Notes:

Country: _____

Classification/Region: _____

Sub-Region: _____

Type: Red, White, Rose, Fortified, Dessert, Sparkling

Grape(s): _____

Vintage: _____

Vineyard: _____

Wine Name or Designation: _____

Date of Purchase or Consumption: _____

Enclosure Type: _____

Amount: Bottle/Glass/Sample \$ _____

Where it was purchased/consumed: _____

Color: Lemon, Straw, Gold, Purple, Ruby, Garnet, Tawny

Intensity of Aroma: (scale of 1-5)_____

Fruit: _____

Fruit Characteristics: (scale of 1-5)_____

Earthiness: (mineral, stone, chalk, grass, limestone, slate, tobacco, mushroom, botrytis, etc.)_____

Wood (smoke, caramel, toast, butter, vanilla): _____

Non-Fruit (floral, cooking spices, herbs, coffee, almond) : _____

Overall Taste (scale of 1-10): _____

Sweetness/Body: _____

Tanin/Acidity: _____

Finish Length: _____

Complexity: (1-5)_____ Balance (1-5)_____

Conclusion

Entering the world of wine tasting can be a fun, educational and rewarding experience. Although wine tasting is often associated with some level of sophistication, you need not have any experience to get started tasting wines and developing an appreciation for them. All you really need is desire to learn more about wines from around the world and enjoy getting together with others who also have an appreciation for wines.

As we have learned, there are many different opportunities available for you to attend as well as host wine tastings. Perhaps the best way to learn more about wine and the proper way to taste it is to take the background knowledge you have obtained and then begin to actually experience a wine tasting. As you gain more experience you will grow in your knowledge of wines as well as the proper way to taste and appreciate them.

Good luck on your first wine tasting!

Your VINENCO Team