



WINE ONLINE



TASTING GUIDANCE: FOUR-STEP TASTING

Step 1: SEE

The key to wine tasting is to do everything slowly, to savour and analyse all aspects of the wine. The first thing you see is its colour. The colour will give clues to the wine's vintage (the harvest date), alcohol content and grape variety. Reds lighten with age, whites darken, and whites tend to like ageing, unlike reds.

Step 2: SWIRL

Take a sniff before swirling for clues to the grape and signs of oak. After the swirl, look for wine legs or tears, which are the droplets that form on the inside of the glass. Legs usually indicate sweeter and higher alcohol wines. Now, one last big swirl for a good dose of oxygen to release the deep aromas and it's time to let loose your greatest asset when it comes to wine tasting: your nose.

Step 3: SNIFF

Using your nose, inhale from the glass. What can you smell? Close your eyes and try to analyse big smells first: think fruity, floral, earthy, spicy. Then get into the details: roses or lychees, cinnamon or anise, hot baked earth or cool hills? The key is to identify an aroma, then move on. What else is there? Almonds, vanilla, oaky tobacco hints from barrels perhaps?

Step 4: SIP

Take a small sip and use your tongue to move the wine around your mouth. Where does the flavour burst? The tongue detects sweet at its tip and acid at its sides. The back senses bitter, and your lips and cheeks will pucker with tannin. Then swallow to judge the alcohol content, at the back of the throat. And what is the finish? Long, complex, multi-layered, different to the first taste? The key to wine is good balance between these elements.





TASTING GUIDANCE: TASTING TERMS

Sweetness

Sweetness is tasted at the tip of your tongue and is purely **residual sugar** from ripe grapes after fermentation has converted sugars to alcohol. In wine, you can have **bone dry, dry, off-dry and sweet** (dessert wine). In Champagne, sweetness runs from *brut* (very dry) and *sec* (dry) to *doux* (sweet). Dry indicates an absence of sugar, not an absence of flavour. You can have a **full, fruity wine that is also dry**.

Acidity

Acidity is a natural aspect of grapes and is key to transforming alcoholic grape juice into a **deliciously crisp** glass of wine. Acidity is tasted at the sides of your tongue and, as with tannin, **balance** is crucial to the flavour of your wine. A balanced level of acidity gives a **racy, fresh and mouth-watering** wine. Too little, and you get a flabby wine; too much, and the wine becomes unpleasantly sharp.

Tannin

Tannin is crucial for **preserving** wine and is therefore more prevalent in reds. White wines aged in barrels will have some tannin, but it is more a **characteristic of red wine**. Tannin comes from the skins, stems and pips of grapes, as well as from wooden barrels, and must be **balanced** for a full flavour. You will feel the bitter, drying sensation of a hearty red on your cheeks, lips and gums.

Alcohol

That **lovely warming sensation** at the back of the throat is alcohol, which indicates the **sugar content** of the grape at **fermentation** (sugar is not added as a rule). Alcohol usually gives a clue to hotter climes too. The higher the alcohol, the **bolder and richer** the wine will taste. Most wines have an alcohol content between 11 and 16% ABV, but dessert wines and fortified wines go up to 20%. A wine is called **hot** if it has high alcohol content.