

Tim Syrad wines

Holding a Wine Tasting at Home



We have written this short guide to help you get the best out of Tim's online tastings, which accompany the online tasting mixed cases and extra bottles he supplies.

The guide is being written as we slowly emerge from lock-down, so we assume you may be able to host up to six people for a tasting outside, or indeed inside if you have that many people in your support bubble or are meeting up with another household. We are not making specific recommendations regarding how to maintain social distancing with people not in your household or support bubble, but suggest you keep glassware and any food portions separate. Pouring wine is probably the biggest challenge and some cleaning wipes or hand sanitizer would be a good idea if you are going to pass the bottle between people so they can self pour.

We know that many people have been enjoying our online tastings together via Zoom or Facetime (other online meeting options are available!).

How to decide how many bottles to serve

It all depends on how many 'sessions' you want to spread your tasting over. Tim's videos are structured so that he will cover each wine individually, with a break between them. He may recommend you taste two wines together in order to compare them – this will be advised in advance.

It's really up to you whether you taste one or two wines a night, or more, you just need to bear in mind the following:

Tasting quantities

The ideal tasting quantity is around 50-60ml, ie 6-7 servings from a half bottle, 12-15 from a full bottle. Note that an ideal tasting quantity is a lot less than a standard small wine glass (125ml). This is because you need to be able to swirl the wine around the glass to release aromas (without spilling any), and take just a few mouthfuls which you should savour – some people even spit out so they can keep their senses sharp (see tasting technique below). Some people might want a second 'pour' to check on what they think, or revisit a wine they particularly enjoy!

Storing opened wine

Assuming there will be some wine left over after the tasting, there should be no problem coming back to it over the following days. Note, oxygen is the enemy of keeping wine fresh, so removing as much air as possible from contact with the wine adds time.

White wines will keep in the fridge for a couple of days if the cork is put back in the bottle. If the remaining wine is decanted into a smaller bottle so it is nearly full, it should keep for a further couple of days in the fridge.

Red wines will keep for three or four days (longer in a nearly full smaller bottle).

Unfortunately there's no magic way of keeping the bubbles in sparkling wine once it's open. In our experience using a specific closure (available at any wine shop or supermarket) will give you about a day before the fizz starts to go flat. Definitely don't try decanting sparkling wine!

Half bottles or full bottles

Half bottles are a good way to allow people to taste more wines in one session – a group of six could taste six wines in an evening – though there wouldn't be much left to enjoy with food after the tasting, or over the next day or so.

One or two people might open a couple of full bottles on one night, and drink them up over the next evenings, doing the next couple later in the week and so on. We provide guidance on the best wines to taste together for each tasting.

Other equipment

What kind of wine glass?

Ideally each guest should have two wine glasses (if more than one wine is being tasted) and a water tumbler.

At Richmond and Teddington Wine Societies we use ISO wine tasting glasses, which are recognised internationally as the ideal for wine tasting. These are made of clear glass, so the wine's colour and clarity can be examined. The rounded bowl and narrow sides allow the wine to be swirled, which releases aromas while the rim, which is narrower than the bowl, helps contain all the aromas, making 'nosing' (or sniffing) the wine easier. Their size discourages pouring too much, so people focus on sipping smaller quantities and keeping them in the mouth for longer so all the flavours can be tasted.

However, any glasses of a similar shape should be fine – avoid the lead crystal, and be careful about how much wine you pour into larger glasses (see tasting quantities above).



Any other equipment?

We provide tasting sheets to download from the website. If you want to use them you'll need a pen or pencil!

A spittoon if you are that way inclined.

A corkscrew may be needed.

A table cloth or banqueting roll makes clearing up afterwards easier – a few drops spilt here or there are inevitable.

Occasionally we suggest you taste a wine 'blind' (see next page) - silver foil is perfect to cover the relevant bottles.

Water – please drink plenty of water during the tasting, both to clear your palates and to balance the alcohol consumption!

Something to tip dregs into (sometimes called the husband).

Water biscuits if you want to nibble on something.

Cheese! – Tim always suggests cheeses that would pair well with the wines we are tasting, but this is optional.

We recommend you don't serve too many other nibbles during the tasting. Spicy tastes or messy fingers will distract from wine appreciation!

How to use the online tasting

Some people like to watch the relevant part of Tim's video and then taste the wines, others like to 'taste along' with him. Either should be fine, but please take your time and don't be rushed.

Think about what you are seeing, smelling and tasting – there are no 'right' answers, though Tim will say what he perceives and share any conclusions he has about the wine. Wine appreciation is a very individual experience, and different people will identify different aromas in the same wine, and will prefer the tastes of different wines.

If you are doing the cheese pairing, taste the wine without cheese first and then with the cheese.

And that's it! If you have never been to one of Tim's tastings we hope this will give you a good idea of how to get the most out of an online event. And we really look forward to raising a glass with you in person in the near future.

Wine tasting technique

There are four stages to appreciating a wine, which you should go through before you conclude on whether you think it is well made, good value – and whether you like it!

Appearance

Is it bright and clear? Describe its colour (see Describing wine below). If it's sparkling are the bubbles big or small? Are there lots of them or not many?

The best way to look at appearance is against a white background under north facing light, but we rarely find ourselves in such an environment. The back of a tasting or quiz sheet is fine.

'Nose', ie aroma or smell.

Best appreciated by swirling the wine gently in the glass, and sticking your nose into the glass immediately so you can inhale the aromas as they are released. The wine should smell clean, but after that there is a huge range of potential aromas – for some of the main ones, see Common aroma/flavour descriptors below.

Taste

Amazingly most of what we taste in the wine is appreciated through our nose – any flavours you identify when tasting are really the aroma reaching your nose through your throat.

The sensations you identify in your mouth are alcohol, acidity, sweetness and tannin, plus what we call 'mouthfeel' – the extent to which the wine seems to fill all parts of the mouth with pleasant flavours and textures. See Describing wine for some more information.

Finish

Do the flavours of the wine linger in your mouth for a long time (up to a minute) after you have swallowed it? Is that a nice sensation?

Here's an example of how you might write up your thoughts:

Wine	Nose	Palate	Conclusion
Sancerre 2018 Domaine Sautereau AOC Sancerre, Loire Valley	Crisp citrusy fruit, gooseberry, herbaceous notes, ripe and intense but elegant	Bone dry, tingly acidity, lovely citrus fruit, limestone notes, refreshing, fills mouth with lovely weight and texture, long persistent finish.	2018 was a great year, and this is proof. Flavours and weight would marry really well with gazpacho. Goes beautifully with Crottins di Chavignol, especially the older crumblier ones.

Blind Tastings

For fun (for some), you can taste a wine 'blind'. Not by moving your face mask over your eyes, but by disguising the bottle (or getting a friend to do so) with a bag or some silver foil, and then proceeding with the tasting as usual. So you will know as soon as it is poured whether the wine is white, rosé, red or sparkling – step one sorted. Blind tasting is a really good way to get rid of preconceptions and identify what you really think about a wine, but only if it is approached in a relaxed way – there are no prizes for 'naming' the wine (other than in Tim's annual blind wine tasting at Richmond Wine Society, which is usually won by the best guesser!). If Tim suggests you taste a wine blind during an online tasting he will do it with you on the video (blind tasting is his least favourite aspect of wine appreciation!).

Describing wine

It sometimes seems that there is a weird vocabulary used by wine connoisseurs. In reality, it is much more simple, and most wines can readily be described by in the following way.

Appearance

Hold the glass up in front of you to look at the glass in profile, and then gaze down on it tilted so you can see the surface of the wine. Ideally have a white surface of piece of paper behind the glass as you examine it.

Any wine in good condition should be clear and 'bright', not cloudy or dull.

White wines can range in colour from the palest lemon to almost russet. The darker the colour, the more likely it is that the wine is older.

Red wines can range in intensity of red, russet and purple colours. Generally more intense colour denotes greater youth. As a wine evolves, it starts to fade towards the rim.

Aroma

The most important thing to remember about aromas is that people's perception of them are subjective, their noses are different and the words they use to describe what they are smelling will be different. So there is NO RIGHT ANSWER. We give some simple examples below, intended to start people off on their exploration – it's not an exhaustive list by any means, and imagination should be encouraged!

Swirling the wine in the glass releases aromas, and cupping the glass in your hand will help to warm up a very cold wine, which will encourage more aromas to emerge.

Look for words that describe what you are smelling. Some common ones are set out overleaf. Because people's noses and vocabularies are so different it's very unlikely that everyone will agree on what a wine smells of, and this really doesn't matter. What matters is that people find what they smell to be appealing – and then it's interesting whether they get the same sensations when they taste the wine.

Taste

As mentioned earlier, most of the 'flavours' tasted in a wine are actually the wine's aromas being experienced in your nose.

You will get more taste from the wine by giving it a good 'sluicing' around your mouth. Don't just sip it straight down, leave your inhibitions behind and pretend you are using a mouth wash. But keep your mouth closed!

The specific sensations experienced in the mouth are:

Alcohol – a balanced wine won't taste alcoholic, but higher alcohol wines will have a greater sense of warmth

Acidity – a mouthwatering sensation – the more acidic the wine, the more saliva your mouth will produce (to check for it have a sip of weak lemon juice or vinegar).

Sweetness – felt on the sides of the tongue (this can be masked by alcohol).

Tannins – a drying sensation felt on the insides of your cheeks (reds, and a very few rosés only). Very young tannic red wines can be almost chewy, but luckily tannins soften and recede over time and add a great ‘structure’ to a good red wine.

Mouthfeel – an overall sensation (hopefully pleasant) of richness and viscosity.

Finish – how long the taste of the wine lingers on your palate after you have taken the last sip.

Common aroma/flavour descriptors

Fruit / Floral	Herbaceous / Vegetal	Spice / Earthy / Mineral
<p>Gooseberry, apple, citrus, apricot, peach, melon, pineapple, lychee for white wines</p> <p>Blackcurrant, blackberry, strawberry, raspberry, cherry, plum for red and rosé wines.</p> <p>Elderflower, jasmine, honeysuckle for whites, violets and roses for reds.</p>	<p>Freshly mown grass, fresh herbs like sage or thyme for white wines and the infamous ‘cat’s pee’ for New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc</p> <p>Reds and whites can have herbal aromas such as ‘garrigue’ (Mediterranean) and Eucalyptus (many New World wines)</p> <p>Green pepper is a famous characteristic of slightly under-ripe Cabernet Sauvignon.</p>	<p>Cloves, cardamons, pepper (white or black)</p> <p>Leather, mushroom, wet leaves</p> <p>Flinty, steely, salty</p> <p>Oak</p> <p>A result of the wine coming into contact with oak during winemaking – a whole range of aromas including coconut, toast, coffee and smoke can be identified.</p>
<p>Dairy/Yeast</p> <p>Creamy/ buttery/ yogurty aromas can result from a variety of wine making techniques.</p> <p>Brioche/ digestive biscuits are a characteristic aroma of sparkling wine made by the Traditional Method – a result of a long period of time in contact with the dead yeast cells (not unpleasant!)</p>	<p>Farmyardy aromas (a nice way of saying manure) are a particular characteristic of good Pinot Noirs!</p>	<p>Evolution</p> <p>Dried fruits (prunes, apricots, raisins), cooked fruit/composites, marmalade are all signs of a wine having spent a few years in barrel or bottle. Reserva Rioja is a great example of this.</p> <p>Other wine aromas associated with development include petrol, honey, caramel and nuts.</p>

Enjoy your tasting!

