

## DIY tastings

Throw fabulous wine parties on your own with this *petit guide* to hip tastings. Here's where you'll get the low down on everything from stemware and supplies to decorations to food pairing suggestions. Read on for details on throwing the following fab parties:

- ◆ wine 101
- ◆ think pink
- ◆ pinot or bust!

But before we get into the nitty gritty, I've compiled some helpful tips on getting set up for any tastings, and other important details applicable to every situation, such as lighting and environment, serving temperatures, and supplies and gadgetry. Specific tasting details follow. Bottoms up, hipster!

## lighting and environment

Wine comes in many shades besides your everyday red and white. In addition to these two common descriptors, wine may be characterized as nearly translucent, straw-colored, green-yellow, golden, amber, garnet, ruby, purple, inky black and, you guessed it, everything in between. That's why evaluating wine against a white background and with adequate lighting is so important. If you plan on discerning the subtleties between a pale straw-colored wine and a medium straw-colored wine—a difference that can actually contain vital clues to the wines' identity in blind tasting scenarios—you'll need these basic environmental conditions. And although you probably don't plan on attempting blind tasting just yet, observing the subtle nuances of a wine's color profile will only enhance your overall tasting experience.

A white napkin or plate will do the trick for the white background, and natural lighting is best for observing a wine's appearance, although an artificially well-lit room will do just fine as well. Besides good lighting and a white background, noise control is also critical for focused evaluation. Now, I know that more often than not wine is consumed in a social environment. It's imperative to note, however, that in order to truly evaluate a wine in all of its aesthetic complexity, you require, well, peace and quiet. And while you're watching the noise, go easy on colognes and perfumes and try to keep other scents in your tasting environment to a minimum. Just as poor lighting will mask a wine's true color profile, excessive scents will get in the way of a wine's natural aromas.

## serving temps

Wine, when served at its correct temperature, will reveal its complex aromas and flavors to the observant taster. When served at anything other than at its ideal temperature, however, wine will necessarily lose some of its awesome aesthetic

## HIP TASTES

---

transmission power. The reason for this is simply that wine is a finicky beverage. In fact, you might say that wine is as finicky as it is complex. As a result, I recommend trying to serve wine at as close to its optimal temperature as sanely possible. For those of you with state-of-the-art dual temperature-controlled wine refrigerators, this will be easy. For the rest of us, just do as best you can to serve wine according to the following guidelines:

Champagne & Sparkling Wines: 450F

Still Whites: 500F to 550F

Dessert Wines: 580F to 620F

Still Reds: 600F to 650F

Dry Sherry: 550F

Port & Other Sherry: 620F to 650F

Practical tip: If you wish to keep all of your wines at a single temperature, opt for the lowest temperature required and allow those best served at higher temperatures to warm up a bit in the glass before drinking. Most home refrigerators are kept at 400F or below, making your fridge an adequate storage place for your wine. You can easily warm a wine by setting it out before serving, or cupping your hands around the bowl of your glass for a few minutes.

### **stemware, corkscrew & other gadgetry**

Possessing the proper stemware and wine tasting accessories will enhance your wine experience, but are certainly not mission critical. At minimum, I suggest you use traditional wine glasses, comprised of a base, stem and bowl, and clear in color. You should hold the wine glass by its stem, as holding it by the bowl will inadvertently warm the wine, distancing it from its ideal service temperature. Some connoisseurs hold the glass by its base, but I find this difficult to pull off and a bit stuffy-looking. As you become more invested in wine evaluation, you may wish to purchase some thin crystal-based glasses such as those made by celebrated wine glass producer Riedel.

Ideally, you would use a new glass for each wine that you evaluate, a practice that would in all likelihood lead you to amass a ridiculously large amount of glasses to wash following the exercise. To avoid this, simply have a supply of water nearby during wine evaluations with which to rinse out your glass between wines. You should also have a spittoon, or “spit bucket”, on-hand for collecting whatever you don’t drink or choose to expiate (read: spit out). Any run-of-the-mill corkscrew will do for most bottles you’ll be consuming, although for difficult-to-open, mostly older bottles you may wish to invest in a two-pronged corkscrew commonly referred to as the Ah-So corkscrew. See Chapter 7 for purchase information.

Other tools worth mentioning:

Foil cutter

Bottle coaster  
Vacu-vin wine preservers  
Champagne preservers  
Sleeves and other cooling devices

### **order of tasting**

Different wines, when consumed together, should be consumed in the order that best shows each wine's attributes. This is usually in order of body, or weight, of the wines: as a rule of thumb, those lightest in body should be consumed before those heavier in body. More often than not, white wines are lighter in body than reds, and table wines are lighter in body than fortified wines like port and sherry. Champagne and other sparkling wines are usually the lightest in body and accordingly served first. Body is principally determined by alcohol strength, and is treated in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this book. This strategy ensures that lighter-bodied wines' subtle flavors and aromas are not overpowered by those of bigger-bodied wines, whose more pronounced qualities, had they been evaluated prior, would necessarily overshadow those of their lighter-bodied counterparts.

An exception to the body rule is that of age. When a particularly old wine, such as 40-year-old Bordeaux from a good producer, is being served, it should be consumed before most young wines, regardless of color or weight. This is because a good quality wine's aromas and flavors become not only more complex but also more delicate as the wine ages, and as a result are at risk of being overpowered by younger wines' less subtle qualities. You might compare the phenomenon to that of the evolution of color in a well-preserved painting: the colors in a 100-year-old Monet are certainly less pronounced, although almost unequivocally more interesting, than those in a contemporary painting by an average artist. An exception to the age rule would be for particularly light-bodied wines: it's still ok to serve a light-bodied, young white wine before a fine aged red, so long as the first wine is sufficiently subtle in character.

### **food and water**

Most foods cover the palate with a filmy coating that interferes with your ability to perceive wine's flavors, and as such consuming food immediately before and during tastings should be avoided. Furthermore, most foods give off some sort of aroma, which can wreak havoc on your ability to correctly identify a wine's aroma profile. In certain cases, however, some foods can aid your palate in returning to a neutral condition following the ingestion of a particularly potent wine. Examples of such foods include plain water crackers and most simple breads. Indeed, consuming some food during a wine tasting can help ensure that you balance your alcohol intake with that of food, a good idea when you are tasting several wines at once or drinking over a prolonged period.

## HIP TASTES

---

Water is a benevolent addition to every wine evaluation exercise. Because alcohol is a diuretic agent, meaning that it interferes with the body's natural ability to stay hydrated, water should be consumed before, during and after drinking wine in order to maintain your body's ideal fluid level.

### Tastings\*

*\*these instructions assume a party of eight to twelve tasters*

tasting	supplies	details
Wine 101	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Five bottles of wine: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon (see buying guide for purchase details)</li> <li>* Wine glass for each taster</li> <li>* Bread/crackers and water</li> </ul>	<p>This tasting is best conducted with each participant in possession of five glasses – so that all five wines can be presented at once. This allows tasters to see the difference in color as the flight progresses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Pour each taster a one-ounce pour of each wine (about the height of your thumb between knuckle and tip). A bottle has about 25 ounces, so you should have around a half a bottle left if you have 8 to 12 tasters.</li> <li>2) Walk through each wine, discussing its color, aromas, and flavors. See our Taste Like a Pro! tutorial on the hiptastes site for detailed information on what to expect from each of the varietals in this tasting.</li> <li>3) Conclude by asking what everyone thought of the wines. Were they easily distinguishable, once you paid more close attention to their qualities in a tasting setting? Most people will say yes, and this is the beginning of many great tastings!</li> </ol>
Think Pink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Five bottles of wine: Blanc de Noirs sparkling wine, Tavel Rosé, Beaujolais Villages, Pinot Noir, Bracchetto d'Acqui (see buying guide for purchase details)</li> <li>* Wine glass for each taster</li> <li>* Bread/crackers and water</li> </ul>	<p>This tasting <b>MUST</b> be conducted with each participant in possession of five glasses – so that all five wines can be presented at once. This allows tasters to see the difference in color as the flight progresses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Pour each taster a one-ounce pour of each wine (about the height of your thumb between knuckle and tip). A bottle has about 25 ounces, so you should have around a half a bottle left if you have 8 to 12 tasters.</li> <li>2) Walk through each wine, discussing its color, aromas, and flavors. See our Taste Like a Pro! tutorial on the hiptastes site for detailed information on what to expect from wines in terms of aroma and taste. Some</li> </ol>

## HIP TASTES

---

		<p>of these are not featured on that list, so don't be afraid to go with your gut!</p> <p>3) Conclude by asking what everyone thought of the wines.</p> <p>Extra: This is a great tasting for daytime parties and Valentine's Day! Don't hold back with other decorations: think pink macarons, pink jelly beans, strawberries in pink whipped cream, and pink crepe paper. It's absolutely gorgeous!</p>
<p>Pinot or Bust!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Five bottles of wine: Sonoma Pinot, Santa Barbara Pinot, Oregon Pinot, French Pinot, New Zealand Pinot (see buying guide for purchase details)</li> <li>* Wine glass for each taster</li> <li>* Bread/crackers and water</li> </ul>	<p>For this tasting it's less critical that all tasters have five glasses. There will be subtle differences in each wine's coloring, but nothing as dramatic as will be observed in the first two tastings. Feel free to relax a little here and just pour each new wine into the same glass. No need to rinse, either, between pours – it's all pretty much similar.</p> <p>1) Pour each taster a one-ounce pour of each wine (about the height of your thumb between knuckle and tip). A bottle has about 25 ounces, so you should have around a half a bottle left if you have 8 to 12 tasters.</p> <p>2) Walk through each wine, discussing its color, aromas, and flavors. See our Taste Like a Pro! tutorial on the hiptastes site for detailed information on what to expect from each of the varietals in this tasting. This is where you'll want to pay special attention to aroma and taste – these are all made from the same grape – Pinot Noir – but each will be unique in some way. Get ready for some serious <i>terroir</i> discussions!</p> <p>3) Conclude by asking what everyone thought of the wines. Were they easily distinguishable, or fairly similar? Pinot Noir has lots to offer and tends to express its particular place of origin well, so hopefully this tasting will give you a window into what five new spots taste like. Santé!</p>