

HIP TASTES

taste like a pro

Just three things - seeing, smelling and tasting – are the activities from which all wine tasting spring. But before we delve into them, I'd like to take a moment to review a few more items that will help you get the most from your tasting:

- **Lighting:** Make sure you're in a well-lit room. Natural lighting is best.
- **Surface:** A clean and uncluttered white surface will enable you to see the colors in the wine.
- **Stemware:** A traditional wine glass with stem and bowl work best. Grasping the glass by the stem, you'll be able to see the wine better and avoid unnecessarily warming the wine with your fingers.
- **Quantity:** a two ounce pour is the ideal amount for tasting. This is roughly the height of the top half of your thumb between the knuckle and tip.
- **Materials:** You may wish to have a pen and paper handy to jot down notes on what you observe.

Now, let's get tasting:

see: 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.

Tilt your glass and hold it against the white background. Look for differences between the color in the middle of the glass (the core) and that at the edge (the rim). Besides color, check out the wine's viscosity – or thickness. Does it run down the glass in heavy "legs" once you tilt it back upright, or is it more watery? Viscosity is a measure of alcohol content: the more viscous your vino, the more power it's packing.

smell: Now, swirl the wine in the glass – this will stir up its aromas and allow you to get a good whiff. Stick your nose in the glass and inhale deeply. What do you smell? The human nose can detect as many as 10,000 different scents, and wine is chock full of interesting aromas. For example, scents of vanilla and cream can often be attributed to oak used in the wine's maturation process, while fruit flavors such as berry fruits and tropical fruits can be attributed to the grape variety (e.g. Pinot Noir, Chardonnay).

I've included at the bottom of this tutorial a list of common aromas and flavors associated with various grape varieties. Try cross reference the list with what you find in your own glass. This is totally subjective, so there's no wrong answer.

taste: Now, the good part. Take a sip of the wine and swish it around in your mouth, pausing for a moment before swallowing. This will allow the wine to coat all the surfaces of your mouth.

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What do you taste? Some things to look for are fruit flavors (reds tend to have red fruits like strawberry and cherry, while whites have citrus fruit flavors like lemon and tropical fruit flavors such as banana). You might also taste spice, coffee, leather, or herbs, depending on what's in your glass.

The best wines are what's called "balanced", meaning that their building blocks, comprised of tannin (the component in red wines that makes your mouth feel chalky and can leave a dark stain on your teeth), acidity, aromas, flavors and alcohol level are in synch, with no one thing overwhelming the others. Does your wine seem integrated and harmonious, or is it bitingly acidic or overly tannic?

conclusions: Finally, take a minute to decide what you think about the wine. Did you like it? Would you have it again? Did you think there were lots of flavors and scents, or was it fairly one-dimensional?

The more you taste wine, the more you'll begin to notice these things. So, next time you open a bottle take a few minutes to see, smell and taste the wine slowly – you may very well find things in there you'd never noticed before.

HIP TASTES AROMA & TASTE GUIDE: whites

Grape Variety	Common Aromas	Common Flavors
Sauvignon Blanc	Citrus fruits: grapefruit, lemon, lime Greenness: freshly cut grass, honeysuckle, rainforest *FRESH* Minerality: slate, wet pavement	Citrus fruits: grapefruit, lemon, lime Greenness: tomato, herbs Also: mineral, smoke (if oaked), sometimes melon and passion fruit
Riesling	Citrus fruits: candied lemon Stone fruits: apricot, peach Tropical fruits: banana, pineapple Also: mineral, slate, petrol, melon	Citrus fruits: candied lemon Stone fruits: apricot, peach Tropical fruits: banana, pineapple Also: mineral, melon, honey
Chardonnay	Pome fruits: apple (green or red) Tropical fruits: banana, pineapple Also: vanilla, butter, cream, baking spices, lemon or lime, toast, oak	Pome fruits: apple (green or red) Tropical fruits: banana, pineapple Also: vanilla, butter, cream, baking spices, citrus fruit, toast
Gewurztraminer	Pome fruits: quince, pear Stone fruits: apricot, peach Also: rose water, lychee, spice, rose, flowers, melon, lemon rind	Pome fruits: quince, pear Stone fruits: apricot, peach Also: lychee, spice, honey, baking spices, melon
Viognier	Stone fruits: white peach, apricot Also: flower blossoms, baking spices, caramel, cream, toast	Stone fruits: white peach, apricot Also: baking spices, caramel, cream, toast

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HIP TASTES AROMA & TASTE GUIDE: reds

Grape Variety	Common Aromas	Common Flavors
Pinot Noir	Red fruits: cherry, strawberry Also: vanilla, caramel, smoke, earth, leather, game, spice, tobacco	Red fruits: cherry, strawberry Also: vanilla, caramel, smoke, earth, game, spice, pomegranate
Merlot	Red fruits: plum, cherry, strawberry Also: chocolate, vanilla, cream, coffee, herbs, tea leaves	Red fruits: plum, cherry, strawberry Also: chocolate, vanilla, cream, coffee, herbs
Cabernet Sauvignon	Red/dark fruits: raspberry, cranberry, cherry, blackcurrants Also: spearmint, pencil shavings, cedar, oak, coffee, tobacco, dust	Red/dark fruits: raspberry, cranberry, cherry, blackcurrants Also: spearmint, coffee, licorice, bell pepper, tobacco
Syrah/Shiraz	Red fruits: stewed plum Also: pepper, licorice, spice, earth, jam, deli meats, tar, smoke	Red fruits: stewed plum Also: pepper, licorice, spice, jam, deli meats
Nebbiolo (Barolo & Barbaresco)	Red fruits: strawberry, jam Also: tobacco, smoke, tea leaves, coffee, tar, eucalyptus, anise, floral	Red fruits: strawberry, jam Also: tobacco, smoke, coffee, anise, mint
Zinfandel	Red/dark fruits: jammy blackberry and raspberry, cherry, plum Also: tar, pepper, spice, herbs, licorice, cinnamon	Red/dark fruits: jammy blackberry and raspberry, cherry, plum Also: pepper, spice, herbs, licorice, cinnamon