

Wine Guide



How to Aerate Wine

Some wines need to be aerated — exposed to oxygen to break down tannins and sulfur compounds, softening the flavor of the wine.

This is especially true of young, strong wines such as Malbec, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Bordeaux and Burgundy.

Simply opening the bottle and letting it sit won't do the trick. It's important to expose as much surface area as possible to oxygen. You can aerate in two ways — decanting or using an aerating tool.

DECANTING: AN OLD STANDARD

Wine has been decanted for thousands of years, dating back to Ancient Rome. The original purpose was to separate liquid from sediment in the container in which the wine was made. Decanting also serves to aerate wine.

Though several exotic decanter designs have come on the market in the past several years, a classic, simple glass wine decanter will do.

Wine Spectator offers the following steps for properly decanting a wine:

1. Set the bottle upright for 24 hours or more before drinking, so the sediment can slide to the bottom of the bottle.

2. Remove the capsule and cork; wipe the bottle neck clean.



3. Hold a light under the neck of the bottle; a candle or flashlight works well.

4. Pour the wine into the decanter slowly and steadily, without stopping; when you get to the bottom half of the bottle, pour even more slowly.

5. Stop as soon as you see the sediment reach the neck of the bottle. Sediment isn't always chunky and obvious; stop if the wine's color

becomes cloudy or if you see what looks like specks of dust in the neck.

6. Serve the wine and discard the remaining ounce or two of sediment-filled liquid in the bottle.

AERATING TOOLS

A variety of aerating tools are available. Prices range from \$15 for a simple handheld aerator to \$99 for a bat-

tery-operated aerator that pumps wine from the bottle and serves it through a tap, and up to \$449 for an app-controlled smart wine aerator that uses a scan of a bottle's label to decant it just right in seconds while you pour. While a simple handheld aerator will do, the aficionado who enjoys a glass of wine frequently might opt for more high-end gadgets.

DIY

If you need to aerate a bottle of wine quickly without an aerator, there are a couple of do-it-yourself methods that will work in a pinch. Cook's Illustrated reports great results from pouring wine between two pitchers 15 times. It also reported that putting the wine in a blender on high provided a better taste than skipping the decanting altogether.

Wine Trends

Trends in wine this year are reshaping ideas about classic wines and growing regions.

This year on the shelves of your local wine shop, you'll see rose — from conventional to complex, flat to sparkling — as well as Portuguese wines that vary from light whites to bold reds, and a variety of flavored wine seltzers.

ROSE

Rose is all the rage. According to WinePair.com, the sweet pink wine saw 19% increase in reader interest between 2019 and 2020.

While you may associate rose with a cool sip on a hot day, it's more than just a light summer wine. In fact, VinePair.com says the 2019 Adelaida Rose drinks like a red wine. Roses with more complex, intense flavors are better suited for colder weather and should not be chilled but served at a temperature of 50-55 degrees Fahrenheit.

Sparkling roses — also increasing in popularity — should be chilled.

In late 2020, Italy's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry approved the production of Prosecco Rose, made from Glera and Pinot Noir grapes, and it was expected to hit wine store shelves in early 2021.

PORTUGUESE WINE

Known worldwide for its port wine, Portugal is enjoying a moment in the spotlight of wine trends. Wine Enthusiast recommends Portuguese wines for their easy drinkability and great value.

The Douro Valley region, known for turning out port, is on the wine lover's map this year for its unfortified dry reds, as well. Meanwhile, the northern Vinho Verde and Minho regions are



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known for crisp, light white wines. In addition to native grape varieties, the area also grows Chardonnay and Riesling.

WINE SELTZERS

WineIntelligence.com predicts that the hard seltzer trend will give way to the wine seltzer trend. With lower alcohol content and more sweeteners than a typical wine spritzer, wine seltzer has

a “lighter and crisper” taste, according to MintLounge.com.

Winemakers Barefoot and Del Mar introduced wine seltzers in 2020 and more producers are expected to follow. Barefoot's flavors include rose, Sangria and Moscato, and while most flavors are canned, some are available in bottles. Del Mar's canned flavors include blackberry, grapefruit, watermelon and white peach.



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Pandemic's Effect on Wine

It's no secret that sales of alcoholic beverages spiked during the pandemic. (Who among us hasn't attended a virtual happy hour in the era of COVID?) The intricacies of the changes in the wine market, however, tell a story about the state of the world in general.

TRENDS

Total wine sales soared 27% between March and April 2020, according to Nielsen. Online wine sales exploded between April 2020 and August 2020, according to the Wine Intelligence's October 2020 report "Wine Consumer Trends in the Covid-19 Era," and other estimates show online sales more than doubling.

While sales volume increased, the average price per bottle decreased, says Wine Intelligencer, adding that consumers turned to trusted value brands, rather than pricier offerings, and latched on to local wine brands.

"Our data earlier this year pointed to wine being one of the winners of lockdown, and this trend has solidified over the past few months," said Wine Intelligence CEO Lulie Halstead. According to the report, "An increasing propor-



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tion of wine drinkers are not planning on going out to eat for the foreseeable future, and (vacations) and hotel stays are off the agenda for most."

Another trend noted in both the Wine Intelligence and Nielsen reports is larger wine package sizes. Boxed wine sales surged 44% in March and April 2020, according to Nielsen, while sales of bottled wine with

takeout orders also increased.

A LEVELING OFF

At the beginning of the pandemic, consumers wanted to treat themselves, according to Wine Intelligence, but as incomes dwindled, the trend slowed. "Consumer responses about their broader economic behavior also indicate a general tightening of belts will occur

during the coming months, with household savings prioritized ahead of any large purchases, and the motivation to spend on luxuries, which initially surged in the early weeks of lockdown, has now subsided."

Wine Intelligence predicted that consumers will continue to avoid crowds even after the pandemic, noting "The broad-

er issue of consumer confidence in the economy, and in their own safety, may start to weigh on the category in 2021." Nielsen also warned of a "rebalancing" in the market after the initial COVID-19 alcohol surge.

For now, however, alcohol sales continue to be a bright spot in an otherwise dim pandemic economy. Cheers to that.

Support Local Wineries

Changing regulations and mitigation efforts in response to COVID-19 have led to uncertainty for local wineries and upended their business models.

While they have innovated and adapted, they still need local customers to keep them afloat.

Local businesses tend to keep their profits local and reinvest in their communities. This means that more than ever, supporting a local business will send ripples of goodwill through your hometown. Don't forget to show your local wine industry — and your community — some love. Here are some ways to do your part.

Carry out. The tasting room might be closed but most wineries are offering curbside pickup or even delivery. Swing by for a bottle to go along with your takeout dinner (from a local restaurant, of course).

Stock up. Do you have a favorite local wine? If you can afford it, buy a case now to show your support during difficult times. You might even be able to pre-order an upcoming batch.

Organize a virtual wine tasting. Get some friends together and order bottles from a few local wineries, then taste them together during a Zoom get-together.

Learn about wine. Some wineries are offering online



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courses in wine tasting and winemaking basics. Sign up and learn something new.

Cook with wine. Check local wineries' websites and e-mail newsletters for recipes that include wine, or wine pairing suggestions, and put them to use.

Write a positive review. It only takes a few minutes to drop a nice review on Facebook or Google, but it goes a long way toward helping a business market itself online. Share your positive experiences.

Engage on social media.

Like and follow your local wineries' social media accounts, share and tag them in your posts. Encourage friends and family to support them, as well.

Give wine gifts. Wineries have tons of great products for birthday, holiday and special

occasion gifts. These can include more than just wine, such as tools and gadgets, gourmet foods, apparel, gift baskets and more.

Shop ahead. If you have the financial resources, buy a gift card to help infuse cash into local wineries.

Try a Virtual Wine Tasting

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic affected virtually every business model in the U.S. in 2020, wine tasting rooms saw a drop-off in business due to stay-at-home orders. And much the same as other businesses adapted to change, wine tastings have gone virtual.

Aside from bringing friends, family and loved ones together for a much-needed relaxing evening during an otherwise stressful time, virtual wine tastings are also allowing wineries and cellars to showcase themselves online in unique ways.

WHAT IT IS

A virtual wine tasting is an online video-conferencing event for small groups, or a private session for yourself and a few friends or family. Some wineries even offer one-on-one tasting sessions with a sommelier. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports that even businesses have turned to virtual wine tastings for corporate and team-building events.

Participants may receive their tasting samples, and sometimes accompanying snacks, in the mail to try during the online event led by



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a sommelier. The package might even include gear or gadgets for the wine enthusiast, and may come with free shipping or other perks.

For some events, you may need to buy the wine on your own. In this case, be sure to check with local wine shops and take advantage of curbside pickup or delivery services to stay safe.

TIPS

You will need to plan ahead to participate. Check your favorite wineries' websites and social media channels for virtual tasting events and happy hours, and find out how far in advance you need to place your order. Be sure everyone in your group has the online links ahead of time so everyone arrives on time.

Prepare for the possibility that you might have a lot of wine leftover. Think about how you will preserve the leftover wine, or research recipes to use up leftovers following the tasting.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Consider a virtual wine tasting as a planning exercise for future travel. Wineries may

include in their virtual tasting programming some history about their business and a virtual tour of their facilities. You might discover some new wineries you'd like to visit in person in the future. Keep notes about what you liked about each location. Pay special attention to local destinations you might not have noticed before.

Sustainable Wine

If you enjoy a nice bottle of wine but also want to do your part to protect the environment, sustainable wine is up your alley.

The wine industry has seen a years-long trend in organic wine. The International Wines and Spirits Record expected a 9.2% annual growth rate in organic wine consumption between 2017 and 2022, with a projected 87.5 million cases of organic wine being sold. Sustainable wines, however, must meet different standards.

ORGANIC VS. SUSTAINABLE

In the U.S., the Department of Agriculture certifies wine as organic when it meets the following requirements, according to the USDA:

- The grapes are grown without synthetic fertilizers, and in a manner that protects the environment and preserves the soil.

- Other agricultural ingredients that go into the wine, such as yeast, are also certified organic.

- Any non-agricultural ingredients must be specifically allowed on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances and can't exceed 5% of the total product.

- No sulfites are added. Sustainable and organic



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growing and winemaking share common practices, such as using natural soil additives. Sustainability, however, “includes a broader set of practices, such as energy and water efficiency,” according to the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance.

SUSTAINABILITY 101

In order to get the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance’s “certified sustainable” seal, wine-

makers must “conserve water and energy, maintain healthy soil, protect air and water quality, enhance relations with employees and communities, preserve local ecosystems and wildlife habitat, and improve the economic vitality of vineyards and wineries,” according to CSWA.

Sustainable winemakers ensure biodiversity among their vines, ensure the health of the soil, practice recycling and water conservation, and

use renewable energy in their operations.

TRY A BOTTLE

Here are a few bottles of CSWA certified sustainable wine to try.

Arrowood 2019 Russian River Valley Rose, \$30. Marketed as “spring in a bottle,” it has flavors of pomegranate, grapefruit and hibiscus, followed by white strawberry and raspberry notes. It’s made from 90% Grenache and

10% Syrah grapes.

Murrieta’s Well 2017 Chardonnay, \$52. The winemaker touts “notes of spring flowers highlighted by aromas of orange marmalade and river stone minerality,” with “hints of hazelnut, pie crust, and creme brulee.”

Kendall Jackson 2017 Vintner’s Reserve Merlot, \$24. This Bordeaux varietal has flavors of black cherry, plum, currant and wild berry, with a hint of spice.

How to Navigate a Wine Shop

If you're new to wine, navigating a wine shop can be intimidating. From finding the bottle you want to reading labels to finding deals, there is a lot to know about shopping for the right bottle.

Here's a guide to the basics of wine shopping.

ORGANIZATION

Some wine shops are arranged by varietal. In these shops, if you know you like Cabernet Sauvignon wine, you should find them all in one place. Other wine shops are organized by region, meaning you'll need to do a bit more searching for that cab. For example, Cabernet Sauvignons can be found in every region from Canada to Argentina to Italy to Australia, meaning they'll likely be spread throughout the store. In this case, ask an employee for help finding what you want, or perhaps even discovering something new.

WHAT'S IN A LABEL

Don't be too taken in by a fancy label with artful prose. The label is a tool for finding the information you need about wine. The rest is marketing.

A wine's label should show the producer, the varietal or



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appellation of the grape, the vintage or year of production, the region where it is made and the alcohol by volume (ABV).

Aside from bottle labels, look at labels on the aisle, or "shelf talkers." They often include the types of flavors you might expect from the wine, such as fruity, oaky or tannic. You also might see staff notes about

wines. Choose a wine advertised as a "staff favorite" for a semi-personal recommendation.

DRY OR SWEET?

Wine labels don't always provide the information many wine drinkers are looking for — such as whether the wine is sweet or dry. Wine Enthusiast

suggests checking the ABV. Wines with 11% ABV or above are usually dry, and those with lower ABVs are usually sweet. Super-sweet dessert wines might be sold separately in their own section.

GET A DEAL

If you find a wine you really like, ask about ordering a case.

It may not be advertised on the shelf, but you'll probably get a discount. Similarly, many wine shops offer a volume discount, so if you buy 6 or more bottles, you could save 10-15%.

Ask an employee for their recommendation on a bargain bottle. You don't have to shop from the top shelf to find a great bottle of wine.