



Home Wine Tasting 101

By Allison Palermo-Record

Hosting a wine tasting in your home is a great way to get together with friends and try new wines. When Dale and I lived in Granger, Indiana, we, and our friends who lived next door, organized a wine tasting group of five couples. Our palates were all very different and our collective knowledge of wine was extremely limited. We thought that getting together once in a while, trying new wines and enjoying one another's company would be a fun idea. And it was. We tasted some really nice wines (and some not so nice ones, too), our palates grew and everyone had a fun time. We always selected three whites and three reds to sample. Sometimes we would select a varietal and compare three wines from different regions; or, we would select three white and three red wines from three different regions. We might have selected a theme of Italian wines and selected three whites and three reds to compare. The choices were endless and the host always set the theme.

We looked back at how we conducted our neighborhood tastings and thought we would pass it along. Feel free to download and print out the Tasting Journals and Wine Tasting Suggestions and use them for your wine tastings at home. To help you get started on your home wine tasting please come into The Savvy Wine Cellar, let us help you choose your wines, and you will receive a 10 percent discount on your selections. We'll also give you 10 percent discount cards for your guests to use in our store if they come in to purchase the wines you tasted or any other wine in our store. We would also be happy to answer any questions that you might have about hosting a tasting in your home.

Remember these are merely *suggestions* for hosting an *informal home wine tasting*. Once you're comfortable with hosting tastings, get creative, change it up. It's *your* wine tasting so have fun!

Wine Tasting 101

Preparation

Decide what type of tasting you would like to have. Since you want to make the evening fun and interesting, it's a good idea to choose three whites and three reds to taste. Remember, you're "tasting" and not drinking full glasses of wine. Next, call and invite five or six friends who you think would enjoy having fun trying new wines. Then, come to The Savvy Wine Cellar to select the wines for your tasting. In addition to the wines, we can also provide you with information about the varietal, the producer, the history of wine, etc., so you can share that with your fellow tasters.

Savvy Suggestions for types of tastings: White Wines

- Compare three different whites (a New York Riesling, a Pinot Grigio from Italy and a California Chardonnay); or
- Compare Chardonnays from three different regions (one each from Burgundy (France), California and Australia); or
- Compare three Sauvignon Blancs from different regions (California, New Zealand and South Africa).

Tasting order:

White wines should be tasted lighter to fuller bodied wines; *i.e.*, Pinot Grigio, then Sauvignon Blanc, then Chardonnay. If you taste a fuller bodied white, like a Chardonnay, first the very next wine that you taste might seem weaker or thinner. So, it's important to follow the lighter-bodied to fuller-bodied progression. It's also important to taste drier wines first and not start with one that is sweet. Tasting a sweeter wine first might make the next wine that you taste seem too tart, unpleasant.

The wines should be:

- Current releases from a recent vintage or within a vintage or two of each other.
- In approximately the same price range. Fine examples can be found at \$10-15 per bottle. More expensive wines don't necessarily provide better illustrations of the points highlighted in this tasting.

Savvy Suggestions for types of tastings: Red Wines

- Compare three reds (a Gamay from Beaujolais (France), a Cabernet Franc from New York and a Cabernet Sauvignon from France); or
- Compare three Pinot Noirs from three different regions (Burgundy (France), California and Oregon); or
- Compare three different reds from Italy (Nero D'Avola from Sicily, a Brunello di Montalcino from Tuscany and a Barolo from Piedmonte).

Tasting Order:

Again, red wines should be tasted in a lighter-bodied to fuller bodied progression for the same reason as white wines; *i.e.*, Pinot Noir, then Merlot, then Cabernet Sauvignon. Additionally, you should taste red wines with less tannin first. If you taste a more tannic wine first, the next red wine may appear weak or thin.

The wines should be:

- Current releases from a recent vintage or within a vintage or two of each other.
- In approximately the same price range. Fine examples can be found at \$15-18 per bottle. More expensive wines don't necessarily provide better illustrations of the points highlighted in this tasting.

As you can see, there are many methods you can select from to host your tasting. The point of the evening is to taste new wines with friends and have fun.

Setting Up for Your Tasting

Glasses

You should have six glasses per taster. Ideally, all the glasses for all the tasters should be the same. At the very least, each taster's glasses should be the same.

Information

Print out one copy for each taster of the Tasting Journal and Tasting Notes. These can be downloaded from our web site.

Equipment

Wine discard bucket (Since you want to keep your senses clear)

Water for drinking
Bread or plain crackers

It's a good idea to hold off on the cheese and other snacks for later after you've tasted all the wines. Food can definitely have an effect on how a wine feels and tastes on the tongue. Once you sampled all of the wines, bring out some snacks for your guests to enjoy before they go home. You might like to end the evening with a dessert wine and an appropriate dessert.

Getting Ready for Your Tasting

- White wines: These should be chilled to about 50° F-55° F or 10° C-12° C. The bottles should be cold to the touch.
- Red wines: These should be at cool room temperature, or about 65° F or 18° C. The bottles should be cool, but not cold, to the touch.
- Fill in the top portion of your Tasting Journal with information about the wine from the label.
- Place the six wine glasses in a semicircle in each taster's place. When tasting, move from left to right.
- Pour about one to two ounces of the first white wine into each taster's glass, filling each no more than 1/4 full. Keep the other whites chilled until it's time to taste them.
- As the host pours the wine into the glass, announce the name of the wine, the producer and the vintage year. Follow the same procedure for each wine poured
- Uncork the red wines and set them aside until you are ready to taste them. When ready to taste, follow the same procedure as you did for the white wines.

Let the Tasting Begin:

Look, Sniff, Taste, Summarize

- If tasting both red and white wines, begin with the white wines first and then progress to the reds.
- Hold up your glass (by the stem) and tilt it to about a 45-degree angle. Swirl the wine a little bit and look at the wine. Is the wine clear or cloudy; yellow or light? Is it bright red or is it darker? Refer to the notes on your tasting sheet. Record your own impressions.
- Next, using your nose and your mouth, sniff the wine. Take a couple of really good whiffs. Swirl again and sniff again. What aromas do you detect? Is there a floral bouquet; is it herbal or grassy? Do you smell any fruits? What are they? Can you detect tobacco or leather or smoke? Refer to the notes on your tasting sheet. Record your own impressions.
- Next, take a sip of the wine. Let it fill your entire mouth and move over your tongue. What does it feel like? Is it tart, dry, sweet? Does it feel buttery or oily? Does it feel crisp? Do you detect tannin? Refer to the notes on your tasting sheet. Record your own impressions.
- Take another sip of the wine and try to identify its flavors. Can you detect tropical or citrus fruit? Maybe it tastes like melon. Does it have the flavor of herbs or grass or minerals? Does it taste of apple or pear? Do you taste vanilla? Is it heavily oaked? Can you detect berries or plums? What else can you taste? Can you taste the alcohol? Do you like the taste of the wine? Refer to the notes on your Tasting Sheet. Record your own impressions.
- Discuss the wine with the other tasters and learn what they saw, smelled, felt and tasted. Don't be surprised if each person tasted something different than the others because everyone's taste buds are different.

- If you don't want to drink the rest of the wine in your glass, dump what's left into the provided bucket.
- Take a couple of sips of water and, if you like, eat a bite or two of a cracker before moving on to the next wine.
- Follow the same steps for each wine tasted.

DISCUSSING THE WINES

When we were having our home wine tastings, we always paused in between tasting the white wines and the reds. Each person would share with the group his or her impressions of the wines just tasted.

Here are some suggestions for sharing:

- Refer to your personal Tasting Sheet and the impressions you recorded on it.
- Share how the wine looked to you; what aroma or scents did you detect?
- How did the wine feel in your mouth?
- What flavors did you taste?
- Did you like it?
- Would you purchase it?

As previously stated, everyone's palate is different. Some people are "naturals" at identifying aromas and flavors, while others may realize that they taste "something" but just can't identify it, and that's fine too.

At this point, the host can share with the group more information about the individual wines and give some background information on the varietal, the producer and the price.

Additional glasses of tasters' favorites can be poured. Just remember to drink responsibly!

CinCin!