

“No

Sweat” Wine Tasting

5 helpful hints to survive wine snobs

By Dennis Elliott

Maybe you are a passionate wine connoisseur or maybe a newbie. For many, wineries often are too crowded, or the experience is just too daunting. To enjoy a friendly, low pressure, award winning fine wine tasting experience consider Lodi, Clarksburg, Courtland and the other smaller towns in the California Delta area.

Use these helpful hints to get started with your wine tasting experience...

1. The first rule of wine tasting is good common sense. If you like how it tastes, forget what the wine experts proclaim. Buy what you want to drink and share it with friends.

2. Red wine with red meat, white wine with fish... Bah! See rule #1!

3. Wording printed on a label such as Reserve, Select, Premium, Old Vine, Wine Maker’s Choice, or Limited Blend must mean the wine is really very high quality and justifies a higher price... Nope! In Europe and other parts of the world such designations are protected by law. In America these descriptors are often marketing hype and are not protected by a legal definition. However, if Estate is printed on the label, the wine is usually grown, fermented, aged and bottled at the winery.

When it comes down to determining what wine you want, your choices are just...

- **Color** — Red, white or pink.
- **Taste** — Ranging from sweet to “mouth pucker” sharp.
- **Grape variety** — Over 10,000 wine grapes are grown worldwide, but around ten, such as Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Chenin Blanc, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, Riesling, Merlot and Zinfandel grapes are the most popularly grown.
- **Alcohol content** — Most table wines are 14% alcohol by volume, with desert wines generally above 14%.
- **Aroma** — Fruity, earthy or smells like the oak barrel it came out of.
- **Soil or growing region** — Another key consideration is the soil or the region where the wine was grown.
- **Vintage** — The year the wine grape was picked is important if weather had a radical impact on how the wine grape ripened and was picked.

4. Folks who fancy themselves wine gurus impress with a plethora of terms such as balance, body, tannin, dry, young, aged, sweet, vintage, corky, nose, fruity, and many more to describe wine. Your defense (a way to pick up new knowledge about wine) is simply asking the wine server at the tasting room what these terms mean. That’s their job.

5. How do I taste wine? Begin by holding up your glass while tilting it away from you and observing the wine’s color. The color should be consistent from the center of the glass to the rim. Swirl the wine around in the glass and watch how the wine “clings.”

Cling describes how well the wine adheres to the glass. Good cling is when you see “legs” of the wine forming on the glass as it slowly settles downward.

Next, bring the rim of the wine glass to your nose and inhale the wines aroma. Inhale deeply through your nose, with your mouth barely open to encourage air flow. Notice if the wine smells lightly of fruit, oak, or earthy, among other possibilities.

Raise your glass and take a *small* sip. Let it linger on your tongue, then swirl it around in your mouth, open your mouth slightly to mix the wine with air as it covers all your taste buds. If the wine tastes sharp it is from the residually tartaric acid in the wine. This is often found in a white wine. When drinking red wine your mouth may pucker due to the high tannin content from the seeds (pips) and the grape skin that ferments with the wine during the aging process. The more tannin in the wine, the longer the grape skins were left in and how red the wine color will be. In reality all wine juice starts out yellow in color. If the vintner only wants a white wine, no grape skins or seeds are allowed in the wine juice. For red wine, the skins are left with the grape juice for a set time.

Knowing these 5 helpful hints will go a long way to enriching your wine experience.

