

» WINE

Savor the Flavor

James Nicas, whose family has owned the Castle Restaurant on Main Street in Leicester, Massachusetts for over 50 years, knows wine inside and out. He has been in the wine business for nearly 40 years, and says that he relishes any opportunity to teach others about it. When attending a wine tasting, "be a sponge and take in all of the information that you can," advises Nicas. While many people feel apprehensive about attending a wine tasting without an esteemed background in oenology, Nicas assures that wine tasting has no absolutes and depends on the individual.

Wine tastings are conducted in several manners. In a vertical tasting different vintages of a particular type of wine from the same winery are tasted. A horizontal manner, however, allows tasters to sample wines from the same vintage but produces at different wineries. While both vertical and horizontal tastings have their own merits and drawbacks, Nicas states that he focuses on conducting a tasting in an educational manner as a way to teach the attendee something new. Historically, men have enthusiastically flocked to wine tastings. In recent years, however, the market has trended more toward women, who tend to be more sensitive to flavors.

When it comes to the mechanics of a typical wine tasting, remember the distinct parts

by thinking of the 5 S's: sight, swirl, sniff, sip, and savor. First: sight. Pay attention to how the wine appears in the glass. Examine at the clarity, intensity, and brilliance of the wine and look out for brown or cloudy red wines and off-colored whites, which will affect the overall experience.

Continue your tasting experience by swirling the wine. Gently swirl the wine around the glass in order to aerate the wine. "Even newer wines have been in a bottle for a while, for years even," Nicas says. After swirling to aerate the wine, you may sniff the contents of the glass. A properly aerated wine will have a much more complex bouquet and better represent the wine's intended aroma. "Sniffing the wine is a very good indicator of how fresh a wine is," adds Nicas.

Now, the moment you've been waiting for: the sip. Pay careful attention to not only the taste, but how it feels in the mouth to pick up on any flavor notes that may be present. When tasting the wine, you shouldn't worry if the flavor notes picked up from a wine don't match that of the sommelier - it takes years of practice and quite simply each person may pick up different flavors or complexities.

The last step to any wine tasting is to savor the flavor. Focus on the finish and the overall

impression that the wine leaves you. "Wine is a progression," states Nicas. "It is a living, breathing substance that can have growth spurts, so you could open a bottle of wine and have a glass, and then later, the wine could taste very different."

When it comes to tasting wine it's fine to listen to what other people say and publish about wine, but trust your own judgment. Be willing to voice your own evaluation, which is as important and pertinent as tasting the wine itself. "The subjective nature of wine and wine tasting makes for the richness of agreement, disagreement, and baseline conversation," muses Nicas. "This makes wine a social beverage. One rule is that there are no rules - enjoyment is what wine consumption is all about."

The Castle Restaurant offers wine tastings on a monthly basis from September to May.

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