

LIVE UP!



ENTERING THE WORLD OF WINE SENDS YOU ON A COMPLEX, YET BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY OF FLAVOURS, AROMAS AND PAIRINGS. WE ALL ADORE A GLASS OF BIG RED OR DRY WHITE (SOME OF US MORE THAN OTHERS!), AND REALLY, WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE?! BUT, ASIDE FROM RELISHING IN RELIEVING SIPS AFTER A LONG DAY, HOW DO YOU *REALLY* UNDERSTAND THE VINO IN FRONT OF YOU?
SHIHAAM HASSANALI
TAKES A GULP.

Grape Expectations

LIVE IT UP!

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, evenings at bars go from drinking all the Screwdrivers possible to ordering a glass (or bottle) of wine. It happens, almost like a rite of passage. Sure, you'll sometimes pick a vodka-orange, but those orders will be few and far between. Instead, you'll find a steady wine is all you really need. But, unlike with Screwdrivers, ordering wine is a little more complex. There's the grape to consider, the year it was bottled, the price you're willing to pay...and it goes on! If you're lucky and have grown up with a sound knowledge of vintages and grape varieties (Thanks, Mom and Dad!), you'll be able to conquer the wine list faster than the sommelier can utter, 'Cabernet Sauvignon'. But, the rest of us are left scrambling at restaurants, swirling our glasses of *whatchamacallits* in a valiant attempt to appear like we know what the eff we're doing. After one too many times picking an ill-chosen Riesling, we decided to put down the corkscrew and discover what *really* goes into picking a fine bottle of wine.



Figure out what you like

"Taste is key. Whether or not you have a refined wine palate, it's important to know what you like," explains Shiyani Saranapala (WSET-Certified), Customer Relations Manager and Wine Adviser at House of Wines (Pvt.) Ltd. "Fundamentally, it is about finding the right balance of sweetness and acidity in a wine." So, while you do not need to know the exact difference between an old world Syrah and a new world Shiraz (two different names for the same grape variety), you'll probably know if you like super sweet wines or not at all. In wine lingo, wines that are not sweet are typically called 'dry'.

When you're purchasing a bottle of wine, says Shiyani, turn it over to read the tasting notes on the back label. "This is a great starting point to determine the style of the wine."

"For example, the wine might be described as 'A light to medium-bodied wine. Yellow with bright green hues. Intense aromas of white peach, pear and apricot, with a rich floral bouquet. Refreshing taste, fruity, lively and crisp with a pleasant balance between acidity and sweetness.'"

Try not to overthink it: It's mostly impossible to actually taste the white peach and pear on the label, but it indicates that the wine is fruit-forward and rich. If, on the other hand, the label mentioned pepper or oak, you'll know that it's a slightly more forceful wine...not a bad thing at all! Similarly, words like "refreshing," "fruity" and "lively" indicate that the wine is fun and can be enjoyed without food. But words like "full-bodied," "rich" or "complex" could indicate that the wine should be left open for a few hours (AKA decanted) before drinking, or might be better paired with food.

Reading the back label helps you understand how the wine might taste, which will help you decide if you like it.

Look (closer) at the details on the bottle

Laure Oger, Wine and Spirits Master at Wine World, suggests looking for a bottle that looks great to you. "When selecting a bottle of wine, the consumer will almost always prefer purchasing something that is aesthetically pleasing to her," she says. Once a few bottles have been shortlisted, the labels on each bottle convey helpful details.

Here's how you decode:

Check which country the wine hails from.

Wines either come from Old World or New World regions. Old World wine-producing countries (for example, France, Italy, Germany and Spain) employ different methods of winemaking, typically blending grape varieties. New World countries (like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, to name a few) typically prefer single varieties.

If you want to know exactly which grape you like, start with single varietal wines, recommends Shiyani. "This means that a wine is made of only one particular type of grape [like Shiraz, for example] as opposed to a blend, where two or more grapes are used to make a wine [like a Bordeaux]. Starting with single grapes is a great way to figure out exactly what you like, and taste more of it. Additionally, blends are much easier to appreciate once you know which styles and grapes suit your taste."

The other details you find on a bottle are the **area of production** (whether it was produced in a cold or warm region, thereby affecting the flavour) and **the**

vintage (or the year the wine was harvested). "These details will help explain whether the wine has kept its freshness and fruitiness, or if it has started ageing," explains Laure. Depending on where a wine stands in its bottled life-cycle, its taste may change.

Furthermore, she says, "The label will also indicate the **brand or producer**, which can be either a family owned vineyard steeped in years of tradition and heritage, or a brand that meets the global consumer's taste." While this doesn't indicate how good the wine would be, it often indicates how many bottles of the particular wine are out there in the market—wines made for global tastes will typically have much larger supplies than a unique wine from a small family vineyard...which often comes at a fancy price!

"If time permits, the internet can aid you in your search for quick facts about the wine you are about to purchase," promises Laure. "Also, you can't go wrong with the guidance of an experienced wine professional!"



But as much as you read about wine, the best way to know more about it is to keep tasting. (We swear—it's true!) The more you experience different grapes and blends, the more you'll understand the kinds of wine to add to your collection. Buying different bottles for your dinner parties is a great way to feel out your preferences, but wine tastings are also fantastic occasions to taste tons of different wines without purchasing a whole bottle—if you don't like one, it's super easy to keep it aside and move on to the next!

Troubled by the wine lover in the corner who's totally putting you to shame with all that sniffing and swirling? Don't be intimidated. Discovering wine is super personal, and you don't have to have your swirl down pat to get to the tasting. Instead, here's what you should focus on.

Develop your sense of smell

"Train your nose!" laughs Laure. "Practice daily by smelling everything you come across. Smell the vegetables/fruits/spices in the market, smell while you cook and when you eat." Most of the aromas found in wine are those you will recognize instantly—lemon, lime, orange, rose petals, jasmine, pineapple, green apple, wood, cinnamon, pine and fresh grass to name a few.

She goes on to explain, "It is important that you are always conscious of your sensations, allowing the information to embed into a part of your brain that is directly connected to memory. The more you practice smelling, the more you will be able to identify and remember the aromas found in wine!"

Take notes for future reference

You don't have to remember every single wine offered to you at a tasting. "Focus more on what you like and enjoy," suggests Shiyani. "Start with sparkling, then dry whites, rosés and reds. Lastly, taste the sweet wines. Working from light to heavy will keep your

palate from getting tired." It's hard enough to remember the date of your next gym class, let alone remembering the subtle tastes of wine, so don't be afraid to use your phone to take down notes and pictures of your favourites. That way, the next time you walk into a wine store, you'll know which one you want, pronto!

Spitting is highly suggested

Most professional tastings will provide spittoons, which you can use to spit out the wine after you have swirled it in your mouth to fully experience its taste," explains Shiyani. "It is absolutely not essential to drink the wine to taste it."

Here's how it works: Take a sip of wine, swirl it around in your mouth (pursing your lips helps), and once your taste buds start tingling, spit it out. This way, you'll start understanding the undertones of the wine, completely clear-headed.

WINE-LOVERS TIP: SIP-AND-SWALLOW MAY NOT BE ESSENTIAL TO TASTING WINE, BUT IT DOES ADD MORE FUN TO THE GAME! FAIR WARNING THOUGH—YOU'RE PROBABLY NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO KEEP AS CLOSE A TRACK OF THE GRAPES YOU TASTE AS YOU WOULD WHEN YOU SPIT. THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

Trust your palate

So, how are you supposed to tell the difference between a great and a 'meh' wine? In reality, it all depends on personal taste; 'good' and 'bad' are very relative terms. "If you like the taste of a wine, and you can enjoy it on its own or with food, then that is a good wine," explains Shiyani. "What is the point of drinking something recommended by a wine critic, if your palate does not appreciate it?"

Trust your tongue. If something feels really off, ask the sommelier if the wine has been corked (the

wet-paper smell given off by wine if it comes into contact with chemicals in the cork); or sometimes, wine is damaged in transportation. Don't force yourself to like something you're supposed to; a cheap, well-formed wine is as fab as a high-end Sancerre. As long as it tastes great to you, that's all that matters.

"Another factor to consider is storage," says Shiyani. "If wines have been stored in a temperature-controlled facility, then even if the wine is inexpensive, it will be in good condition. Purchasing wines from a reputed shop, where staff are well trained, can almost guarantee a good purchase."

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—LAURE OGER,
WINE AND SPIRITS
MASTER AT WINE WORLD

LIVE IT UP!

Store your bottle of vino properly

If you're throwing a dinner party and want to serve your wine like a pro, always remember to keep your bottles in the fridge.

"Irrelevant of it being sparkling or still, or red or white, it must be stored in a wine cooler or a refrigerator. Steady, consistent temperature is key," stresses Shiyani. "Wine gets damaged by the heat of the tropics, so even red wines must be stored and served at colder temperatures. If the label states 'room temperature,' it implies 16-18 degrees Celsius, not 30-32 degrees, which is room temperature in Sri Lanka."

Pair wine with the right food

There are endless possibilities when pairing food and wine. "It's all about balance, where the food does not overpower the wine and vice versa," says Shiyani. "The lighter the food, the lighter the wine should be. So, if you're having a salad, then have white wine, which has complementing acidity." Laure agrees, typically advocating dry white wines (like a Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio) with seafood and white fish. "If the white wines are sweeter and creamier, like some Chardonnays from Burgundy, opt for poultry or red tuna. For aromatic whites like Gewurztraminer, Moscatel or Torrontés, Asian curries pair perfectly."

Japanese food and some very fine meats go well with delicate, elegant reds like Pinot Noirs. "Light to medium-bodied wines are very versatile and can be paired with almost everything," confirms Laure.

"However, fuller reds like, Merlot, Pinotage and Zinfandel pair marvelously with pork chops and duck. Heavy wines like Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon or even Malbec, which contain a higher amount of tannins, go well with rich red meats, like beef and lamb." The reason big reds pair so well with meaty counterparts lies in the tannins (the stuff that adds

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bitterness to a wine), Shiyani explains, because it breaks down the proteins in the meat, giving a more well-rounded taste to the meal. What about that dark chocolate mousse you've been saving for dessert? "Pair it with a sweet wine, such as a Vin Santo," she recommends.

Decadent dinner party menu

"Champagne always goes great with caviar; Chablis with oysters; Riesling with Peking Duck; Cabernet Sauvignon with steak; and Port with Stilton [AKA Blue Cheese]," suggests Shiyani.

Wine pairings are fantastic for creating a fab meal; but once you're comfortable with the grapes, feel free to experiment—you may prefer a light red with a salad, which is perfectly okay! Also, a sparkling wine often goes great with a cheeseburger and fries for a mid-week mini party.

Ready for a wine riot and need a few recommendations? Our pros reveal their must-sip tips!



Laure Oger,

Wine and Spirits Master at Wine World

WHITE:

Oyster Bay Sauvignon Blanc,
Rs. 4,100

Dr. Loosen Riesling,
Rs. 3,500

Joseph Drouhin Chablis Premier Cru,
Rs. 10,200

RED:

Familia Antinori Peppoli Chianti,
Rs. 6,100

Penfolds Bin 389 Cabernet Shiraz,
Rs. 21,700

Penfolds Koonunga Hill 76 Cabernet Shiraz,
Rs. 3,200

Penfolds Bin 2 Shiraz Mataro,
Rs. 7,400

ROSÉ:

Château Roumery Cotes de Provence,
Rs. 4,200

(Wines are available at Victorias Wine Store or online www.wineworld.lk.)



Shiyani Saranapala

(WSET Certified), Customer Relations Manager and Wine Adviser at House of Wines (Pvt) Ltd.

WHITE:

Aliwen Reserva Sauvignon Blanc,
Rs. 2,670

Sacchetto Pinot Grigio L'Elfo,
Rs. 2,800

RED:

Las Moras Barrel Select Malbec,
Rs. 3,000

Gerard Bertrand Syrah Réserve Spéciale,
Rs. 3,700

ROSÉ:

Kanonkop Kadette Pinotage Rosé,
Rs. 2,950

(Wines available at House of Wines.)

Understanding wine is an ongoing process, but it's never too late to start. Keep this info on hand the next time you're at a restaurant or at a store, trying to pick a bottle. What's more, you'll have a fair bit of know-how to have an adept conversation on your wine preferences. Now that's what we call a win! ■