

How to enjoy the special pageantry of ordering wine

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Of all the etiquette of food service, perhaps the greatest pageantry surrounds opening a bottle of wine for a table. The presentation, the uncorking, the tasting: They all say that ordering wine is something special.

However, some people feel they don't know quite what to do when the waiter arrives with their bottle. If the presentation of wine is a dance, many people feel they don't know their steps.

The first step in the process is selecting a bottle and ordering it. If you are not sure which wine to pick, ask your waiter for a recommendation. Don't be intimidated by foreign words if you want to try something new. You wouldn't be the first person to mispronounce Châteauneuf du-Pape (sha to nöf doc päp) or Gewürztraminer (g vurtstr men r).

After the waiter arrives at the table, he will present the bottle to the person who ordered it. Assuming you are that person, you will want to check the label to make sure the vintage and name are correct.

You might also want to look at how much space there is between the wine and the cork. Young wines should come up well into the neck of the bottle. If there is too much space, called *ulage* (yoo lü), at the top of the bottle, it could allow for oxidation of the wine, according to Susan Clements, dining room manager and wine steward for Green St. Café in Northampton.

If everything is OK, you should nod or tell the waiter so. He will then open the bottle and present you with the cork.

If you want to, you can feel the cork to tell if the wine has been stored properly. "It should be dry on one side and wet on the other," said Clements.

If wine is kept in storage that is too hot, it might seep, she said. However, she points out, some corks warp as they age, but most wines in restaurants are young.

"It's not appropriate to smell the cork," said Matt Pitoniak, owner of Union Station, and The Tunnel Bar in Northampton. Besides, the smell of the cork won't tell you much about the wine, said Clements.

After the waiter opens the wine, he will pour a small amount of it in your glass for you to taste. "When you taste a wine in a restaurant, you are not tasting it to see if you like it, you're tasting it to see if it's in sound condition," said Clements.

It may be in bad condition if it has fizziness to it (and it's not a sparkling wine), has started to oxidize or has a brownish color and is a young wine, she said. Young wines often start to lose their youthful, fruity quality after six years, she said.

As part of tasting the wine, many people will swirl the sample around in the glass to aerate it to get more of an aroma. They will also look at the "legs" of the wine, the bands of liquid streaming down the side of the glass. The bands can indicate a wine's body, alcohol and sugar content and viscosity, said Clements. If a wine has oak in it, a second, thicker and slower, line will come down the side of the glass after it rests for a couple of minutes, she said.



CAROL LOLLIS

A wine steward, or sommelier, stands ready to help a restaurant's patrons select the right wine for their meals. Here, Susan Clements of Green Street Cafe sits with a collection of red wines.

Some people choose to have the wine "decanted." In this process, the wine is poured into a carafe, or decanter.

Usually done to red wine, the reasons for decanting are twofold. It is done to soften a young wine and to aerate it so that its aromas develop. It's also done to separate any sediment from the wine.

"If something is not particularly old or not particularly young, there is really no need (to decant it)," said Clements. Most of the wine in the world does not have to be decanted, she said.

Once the wine has been tasted and its quality approved, the waiter will then pour wine for the person to your immediate right, going around the table and topping off your glass last. Traditionally, women were served first, but this custom isn't followed much anymore.

"It's a toss-up whether women should be served first," said Pitoniak. Throughout the service, the waiter should not pick up a wine glass unless it is in a position that would make pouring awkward, uncomfortable or impossible.

If the wine is red, the waiter will usually leave it on the table, often with a napkin wrapped around it to stop any spills. If it's a white wine, he will put it in an ice bucket nearby.

Throughout your meal, the waiter should visit your table to refill the glasses.

However, there is an unfortunate consequence if you don't finish off your bottle: It is against Massachusetts law to take it out of the restaurant.

Pairing up food and wine

Beef: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Bordeaux, red Zinfandel, Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Hermitage, Cote Rotie, Australian Shiraz, Super Tuscan, Barbaresco or Barolo

Lamb: Bordeaux especially Medoc, Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Barbaresco or Barolo

Pork: Riesling, Cru Beaujolais, Rioja, Cotes du Rhone or New World Chardonnay

Chicken: California or Australia Chardonnay, Riesling, dry Vouvray, white Burgundy, red Burgundy, Gigondas, Cotes du Rhone, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merot, red Zinfandel or Valpolicella

Pasta: Pinot Grigio, Vernaccia, Barbera, Dolcetto, Chianti, Pinot Noir or Cabernet Franc

Pasta with a tomato sauce: Chianti, Morellino di Scansano, Salice Salentino or Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

Fresh-water or lighter fish trout, sole, etc.): White Bordeaux, Meursault or other good white Burgundy, Mosel

Oily or heavier fish mackerel, swordfish, tuna, etc.): Rich Australian Chardonnay or Semillon, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Noir or Beaujolais

Shellfish clams, mussels, scallops, oysters, etc.): Muscadet, Vinho Verde, Verdicchio, Sauvignon Blanc, Albarinho, Chablis or Champagne

Lobster: Semillon, white Burgundy, Champagne or Sauternes
Soft, creamy cheeses with a washed rind Brie, Camembert, etc.): Beaujolais, North American Pinot Noir or well-aged St-Emilion Cabernet Sauvignon, red Zinfandel, Merlot, Rioja, ruby Port, Fino or Manzanilla Sherry

Goat's cheeses: Sauvignon Blanc, Sancerre, Vouvray or white Bordeaux

(Adapted from a pamphlet written by T. Sean Holland)