

WINE Service and Handling

Lindsay Groves offers step by step, practical advice on the proper procedure for serving wine at home or in a restaurant



Talking about wine service and handling procedures may not top the list of fun things to do. But, like it or not, for anyone who takes wine seriously, this is an aspect of the industry that must be addressed.

Whether you are simply a wine lover or deal with wine as a career, we all have questions from time to time regarding proper procedures. The fact that many standards relating to wine fall into a grey area does not make matters easier. Standards also vary from region to region – what is normal in North America isn't necessary the same story in Europe or Asia.

In this issue I will focus on the nitty-gritty of wine service, and will

delve into the topics of wine storage, wine serving temperatures and decanting in the next. The following advice is by no means the final word, but provides sound instructions for the service and handling of wine that can be used to assist staff in a professional environment, or to simply wow friends with your know-how at home.

STANDARD POURS

A glass of wine is traditionally 150 ml (5 oz), however you will find 180 ml (6 oz) pours in many establishments. In North America, standard pour sizes seem to be steadily increasing, with restaurants such as the Keg offering generous 'keg size' pours of 270 ml (9 oz). In some countries like the UK,

the liquor laws require the use of standard measures. The standard bottle size is 750 ml so 150 ml pours work out evenly to five glasses per bottle, whereas 180 ml pours allow for four glasses per bottle with a small amount factored in for a tasting sample.

For sparkling wines, it's possible to go with either a 125 ml or 150 ml pour. As sparkling wine is meant to be drunk well chilled, a smaller portion means the wine can be consumed in less time while still cold compared to a larger pour that takes longer to drink. Sweet or dessert wines and fortified wines are typically served in more modest amounts, usually 60 to 90 ml. When pouring a tasting sample 60 ml (2 oz) is appropriate. The same portion is normally used for wine pairings to accompany a multi-course tasting menu.

SERVICE PROCEDURES

Basic service by the bottle:

1. After the wine order has been taken, deliver the appropriate glassware to the table (wine glass should be placed to the right of water glass).
2. Deliver a decanter to the table if appropriate (place to the front/right of host, or in the centre of the table).
3. Deliver an ice bucket to the table for whites or sparkling wines. Place near the host, out of the way but still within vision of the host.
4. Once you have obtained the bottle

of wine, approach the host from the right and present the bottle with a napkin, folded in thirds length-wise and then in half, behind the bottle.

5. Clearly state the main information on the bottle: "You have ordered the (vintage), (producer), (wine name, ie, varietal or AOC, Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée). May I open the bottle?"
6. Open wine tableside. If there is room, place the bottle on the table (preferred), if not, open in the air. Place napkin on your left forearm.
7. Proceed to remove the foil from the bottle with corkscrew knife (cut below the lip). Once removed put foil in your pocket.
8. Wipe the top of the bottle where foil has been removed.
9. Place the worm in the cork and remove cork.
10. Present the cork to the host, placing it to the top right.
11. Wipe mouth of bottle with napkin.
12. Pour a tasting sample (30 ml approx) into the host's glass, with label facing host while pouring. (See image).
13. Hold bottle with label facing the host while he or she is tasting the sample pour.

Assuming the host approves:

1. If wine is being decanted, proceed to do so at the table. Ask host if they would like a modest portion of wine poured immediately, or if they wish to let the wine decant (and for how long?)
2. To pour wine, always begin with women and move in a clockwise direction, serving the host last.
3. When pouring, avoid touching the wine glass with the bottle, and give the bottle a slight twist near the end of the pour to avoid dripping. Blot the bottle with your napkin (in your left hand) between pours if necessary to catch drips.
4. If there is wine remaining, for reds

leave the decanter or bottle on the table, and for whites ensure that the bottle is placed in an ice bucket located near the host.

SERVING ORDER OF WINES

When serving wines in a sequence, it can be confusing to determine in what order you should pour them. The following are guidelines that are traditionally followed to help each wine to show well without negatively impacting on the others. They are by no means law, and you are likely to come across varying opinions. Some situations will invariably be more challenging than others and may call for some creativity.

1. Whites before reds
2. Dry before sweet
3. Lower alcohol before high alcohol
4. Sparkling before still wines
5. Younger wines before older vintages
6. Lower intensity before more pronounced intensity

WINE PRESERVATION

If you are left with open bottles of wine after service, it is to your advantage to consider a method of wine preservation in order to maximize the life of the bottle. Of course, in a professional environment, it is not simply an advantage but a necessity in order to maximize profit and minimize spoilage. Wine will quickly spoil if left in contact with the air.

A number of options are available, some are better suited for commercial use, others are more convenient at home.

- **Vacuum pumps** consist of a hand pump and rubber stoppers that are used to manually remove air from the space in the bottle. Vacuum pumps can be used any number of times and are very low cost.

- **Inert gas:** There are products under various brand names on the market available for home use that use inert

gas to preserve wine. Generally the canister contains argon and can be used a limited number of times.

- **Verre du Vin:** This machine looks like a giant wine bottle and automatically vacuums the air out of open bottles using rubber stoppers. It can be dual purpose, in which case the vacuum option is used for still wines, and CO2 canisters inject gas into sparkling wines to preserve the bubbles.

- **Enomatic Wine Dispenser:** This machine can be ordered to accommodate a number of bottles, and keeps them purged with inert gas to prolong their lifespan, up to a few weeks. It also dispenses various sized pours that can be programmed into the machine. Because of the cost of this system, it is normally for commercial use.

Even with the use of a method of wine preservation, open bottles of wine will still spoil. From the time a wine is exposed to air, reactions will begin to take place that will eventually result in the oxidation of the wine and the formation of acetic acid (vinegar). Each wine has its own lifespan – after a certain point it will no longer taste fresh, will lose many of its aromatics and begin to show signs of spoilage.

As a safe guide for how long you should keep open bottles, most whites should be discarded after four days; reds are typically out of condition after two days. Some wines may still be drinkable after this, but will not be showing as they should be.

In conclusion, studying the drier aspects of wine can seem like a lot of unnecessary homework, but rest assured – it all pays off. Once armed with the background knowledge, you can spend less time sweating the details and more time confidently entertaining your guests. ♦