

# On Storing and Decanting WINE

In Part 2 of her article on wine service, **Lindsay Groves** informs us that it's our duty to ensure a wine reaches the glass in the best possible condition



Courtesy Chateau Latour

Decanting wine: a widely

**I**n the last issue we tackled the basics of standard pours, step-by-step service procedures, wine preservation and the serving order of wines. Now it's time to talk about proper wine storage, wine serving temperatures and the concept of decanting. Let's cut to the chase.

## WINE STORAGE

After a bottle is out of the winemaker's hands we, as wine lovers, have a moral obligation to see that each wine that crosses our path reaches its final destination in the best

condition possible. The suggested parameters for wine storage don't vary too much. However, when faced with a decision, what matters most is consistency.

Think of what it takes for most of us to get a good night's sleep. Sleeping wines like the same conditions (plus a little extra humidity). They require:

- A dark environment, away from natural and artificial light (or at least as dark as possible).
- Cool temperatures, anywhere from 10-15°C. The actual temperature you choose within this range is less important than the lack of fluctuations.
- A place away from loud noises and vibrations, such as large appliances etc.
- Horizontal orientation: this applies to bottles with natural cork closures that need to remain in contact with the wine in order to maintain their integrity. It could also be suggested that any wines with synthetic corks are also placed horizontally as they can lose their seal over time. If the seal is lost, you are more likely to notice the problem (indicated by leakage) if wines are stored on their side.
- High humidity, usually around 75%: higher humidity will not harm the wines but will wreak havoc on the labels.

## A Guide to Wine Serving Temperatures

- Sparkling Wines: 6-8°C
- Light/Medium bodied whites: 10°C
- Medium/Full bodied, oaked whites: 12°C
- Rosé Wines: 10-12°C

- Light bodied reds: 12°C
- Medium/Full bodied reds: 17-18°C
- Sweet Wines: 6-8°C
- Fortified Wines: 10-18°C (variable, depending on wine style).

It is true that we still generally serve red wines too warm and white wines too cold. Think of temperature the same way you would the volume on your stereo. The colder a wine, the more subtle the flavours will seem. Warming a wine will amplify the aromatics, for good or for bad. Too high a temperature and even a nice wine can seem overly aggressive or harsh.

Lower quality wines, both reds and whites, are better served cooler as this will dull any potentially unpleasant character. With lighter bodied red wines, a slightly cooler temperature will bring out the fruitiness and freshness. On the other side, complex, fuller bodied whites benefit from being served slightly warmer and can be treated more like a red wine, even to the point of being decanted.

## DECANTING

The concept of decanting is still very misunderstood. Contrary to popular belief, not all wines need to 'breathe'. Equally, simply taking a cork out of a bottle and letting it sit on the table does not constitute decanting. The most important thing to consider is the objective. There are generally three reasons why a wine should be decanted as outlined below.

### First, to separate a wine from sediment in the bottle.

Some wines will develop sediment in the bottle as part of the maturation process. Tannins and colour present in red wines begin to form polymers over time and precipitate out of solution. The following are factors that will increase the likelihood of sediment:

- If the wine is made from grapes that are naturally higher in tannin and pigment.
- If the wine is unfinned and/or unfiltered.
- Age of the bottle (the older it is the more likely it is to have some sediment).

### Second, to aerate a wine

Wines that are high in tannin (especially in their youth) can be unpleasantly aggressive and astringent. Although heavily debated, decanting can seemingly soften tannins and help to 'open up' the wine, enhancing the aromatic intensity.

It is also very important to consider the quality of the wine and how it has been made. A straightforward, ready to drink, commercial style of Shiraz for instance will not need decanting, whereas a more premium, structured wine made with the same grape may benefit from some air. Most of the wines we come into contact with would fall into the first category, and do not really need to be decanted.

Some complex white wines, as mentioned in relation to temperature, could potentially benefit from decanting. An example of this would be a good quality white Burgundy, or an interesting, less-conventional white such as Château Musar.

In order for decanting to be effective a wine needs to be transferred into a separate vessel allowing for a large surface area to come into contact with the air. Wine should also be aerated for a minimum of 25 minutes in order to have a noticeable effect.

### Third, for visual appeal and to add value to your wine service

Decanters are available in an array of styles, many of which are designed specifically to impress. Going the extra mile to decant even the most pedestrian of wines makes guests feel special and adds to the overall showmanship of the dining experience.

Hopefully, this guide to wine service and handling procedures has been helpful and provided the answers to some common questions. It is up to each and every one of us, as ambassadors of wine, to promote (and in a professional environment to enforce) proper practices. We want to ensure that our guests and customers have a positive experience with wine, and this is highly dependent on the education of those handling and serving it. ♦

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