

Jimmy's Wine Rules

By Jim Bryant

Over the past 40 years of serious studying and drinking wine, I have developed what I call "Jimmy's Rules," which I hope might facilitate your own learning curve in the enjoyment of great wine. Santé!

Temperature

Whites are often served too cold. The better the wine, the closer to 55 degrees it should be served. Similarly, reds are often served too warm. This makes the wines taste alcoholic and "flabby." Put reds in the refrigerator for a half-hour to chill, or if you're in a restaurant, ask for a bucket of ice and water. Ten minutes will chill the wine more quickly than a freezer or bucket of just ice.

Proper stemware

To ensure maximum enjoyment of wine, it should be drunk from appropriately sized stemware. Most wine is consumed in vessels too small to allow the wine to "open" and realize its potential.

Glasses should be thin and have no rolled lip. The thinner the glass, the less it will affect the wine temperature and the better it will feel in the mouth. Riedel, an Austrian glass company, has revolutionized wine appreciation by producing grape-specific wine glasses (both machine and handmade), which deposit the wine on the part of the tongue that "tastes" the wine best.

Fill the glass with only five ounces of wine—never more than one-third full. This permits swirling the wine, which enhances the bouquet.

Whether you're using Riedel glasses or knock-offs, remember the rules: bigger bowls, thinner glass, and no perceptible ridge at the lip of the glass. Obviously, stemware should be clean, free of streaks, water spots, and odors (always check glasses kept in a closed china cabinet).

Hold all glasses only by the stem. For white wines, this avoids raising the temperature of the wine via heat transfer, and for both colors,



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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it avoids oily deposits on the glass. As in diamonds, clarity and color are important attributes for appreciation, and oily residue hinders the perception of the wine's color.

When to drink

Most wine is made so that it doesn't improve with age. However, almost all great wine improves with age—both white and red, but especially the latter. Some very fine whites, such as Condrieu, Verdelho, Arneis, and Pinot Gris are best consumed young (within one to three years of vintage).

Generally, the ageability of the wine correlates positively to price. Although tasting or drinking world-class whites and reds upon release is interesting, I strongly recommend waiting until the wines are "in the window" of drinkability. Since almost all great wines are professionally reviewed, simply refer to the writers' suggestions. If you buy multiple bottles of a vintage, experiment by trying bottles over the recommended period of drinkability, decide which you prefer, and then buy and drink accordingly. Know that while individual prefer-

ences vary, writers often reflect their nationality—Americans and the French tend to prefer their wines on the young side, while the British prefer the same wines with age.

Corked wine

If a wine smells like a dirty wet dog or old wet newspapers, a chemical called TCA (2,4,6-trichloroanisole) has contaminated it. This happens to about seven percent of wine bottles. TCA is found in cork bark, and it can come in contact with the wine and ruin it. Since 90 percent of wine appreciation is olfactory, the wine should be replaced, whether you're at a restaurant or if you have bought the wine from a retail shop. Beware that there are wide thresholds of TCA perception.

Storage

If you're storing large quantities of expensive wine for the long term, a proper cellar is a must. However, this doesn't apply to most wine drinkers. Most homes in the Midwest have basements, and this is adequate for short-term storage. Store wines on their side so the

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cork remains moist; do not turn or rotate the bottles; keep them in the coolest, darkest, and most temperature-stable place in the basement that is free of vibration and odor; do not store near the furnace (due to heat and electrical charges); never allow sunlight to touch the wine, and use (sparingly) incandescent as opposed to fluorescent light.

Use the refrigerator to store opened bottles of either red or white, but only for one to two days. A better way to store open bottles is to use a bottle of inert gas, which is available at most wine shops and works by displacing the oxygen in the bottle and replacing it with inert gases.

Decanting

Decanting is a technique that can be used to improve both young and old wine. With aged wines, it is accomplished by pouring the red wine from the bottle into a decanter. Using a light source (such as a candle) and a steady hand, pour the wine into the decanter until the sediment (yuck) presents itself in the light. The final few ounces can be salvaged by pouring them through an unbleached (brown) coffee filter. The older the wine, the shorter the time that should elapse before drinking the wine, as the nose and taste often fade quickly with very old wines.

Another good rule of thumb is that one hour of substantial exposure to oxygen (decanting or pouring directly into glasses) equals an additional year of bottle age.

And finally

Drink many types of wine to discover what may be “your” grape before wasting time drinking wine you don’t enjoy. And don’t take the rules too seriously. Always remember to have fun when drinking wine. ☺