

HOST A WINE BIBLE TASTING EVENT

TOOLS

WINEGLASSES

CORKSCREWS

GLOSSARY OF TASTING TERMS (provided)

PENS AND PAPER

WATER PITCHER AND GLASSES

BUCKET For guests to discard any extra wine

WINE We suggest 4 to 6 varieties, with 1 bottle of each per every 10 to 12 guests and 1 extra bottle on hand

FOOD Optional, but encouraged (*For further details, please refer to pages 115-118*)

HOW TO HOST A WINE TASTING EVENT

SELECT A THEME

A theme can be based on a region, grape varietal, or an idea—like what does it mean for a wine to be feminine?

SERVE THE WINE

Pour approximately 2 ounces per guest. It's best to pour the wine before you get started so that it's ready to serve.

PROVIDE INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND

Tell your guests the theme of the tasting and the wines you have selected.

TASTE!

Help your guests by sharing ideas on the tasting process. (Details on how to taste are on the next page.)

SAVOR

After taking 5 to 10 minutes to savor a wine, move on to tasting the next one.

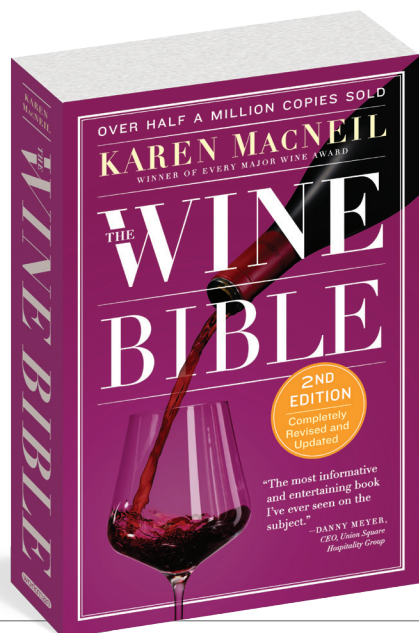
SHARE

Keep copies of *The Wine Bible* on hand for easy reference.

CONDUCTING THE TASTING

Giving your guests some background about your theme and the bottles you'll be tasting will help inform them and shape the event. Start your tasting with an introduction to the theme. For example, if you'll be sampling pinot noirs from Sonoma County, California, and Burgundy, France, tell everyone a bit about the two regions, including similarities and differences and their respective climates. The book has tons of information about each region, so feel free to pull as much from Karen MacNeil as is helpful.

Next, give a quick introduction to each bottle: Tell your guests the name of each wine, the grape(s) it's made from, and any other fascinating facts. (Is this the only wine that particular winery makes? Is this wine unusual in any way?) You should be able to find some basic information on a given winery's website if it is not a featured wine in the book.



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HOW TO TASTE WINE IN 6 STEPS BY KAREN MACNEIL

(For further details, please refer to pages 101-114 of *The Wine Bible*)

1. ASSESS THE AROMA

Start by swirling the wine in the glass. Swirling aerates wine, helping to volatilize the aromas. The best way to do this is to rest the glass on a table and, holding it by the stem, rapidly move it as if you were drawing small circles. (All wines—whites, reds, and rosés—should be swirled.)

As for actually sniffing the wine, nothing is achieved by holding your nose 2 inches above the glass and taking a polite whiff. You must get your nose (a big one is an asset) into the glass near the liquid. Then take a series of short, quick sniffs. Put your nose into the glass only when you're absolutely ready to concentrate, and then try to put names to the aromas.

2. GAUGE THE BODY WEIGHT

The term *body* is used to describe the weight of a wine on your palate. A wine's body is described as light, medium, full, or some permutation in between. How do you decide? Imagine the relative weights of skim milk, whole milk, and half-and-half in your mouth. A light-bodied wine,

like skim milk, sits lightly on the palate.

A medium-bodied wine has more weight, like whole milk. A full-bodied wine seems heavier still, like half-and-half.

3. FEEL THE TEXTURE

Closely related to body is texture, sometimes called mouthfeel. A wine's texture is the tactile impression it leaves in your mouth. Fabrics are often used as metaphors for texture or mouthfeel. A wine can be as soft as flannel (an Australian shiraz for example), as seamlessly smooth as silk (a pinot noir), or as coarse and scratchy as wool (some southern French reds feel this way). It can also feel syrupy, gritty, crackling crisp, or have any of dozens of other textures. In order to assess a wine's texture, you must roll it around in your mouth and feel it.

4. CONSIDER THE TASTE

The world of taste is commonly described as encompassing five—possibly six—basic characteristics: sweetness, sourness, saltiness, bitterness, savoriness (umami), and possibly heartiness (kokumi). Pros tend to suggest taste ideas to themselves as they are tasting, rather than wait for specific flavors to occur to them (and risk that absolutely nothing will occur to them). That is, while the wine is in his mouth, the professional taster is running possible flavors through his mind—apples? caramel? grass? tobacco?—and in a sense, checking off those flavors that are present.

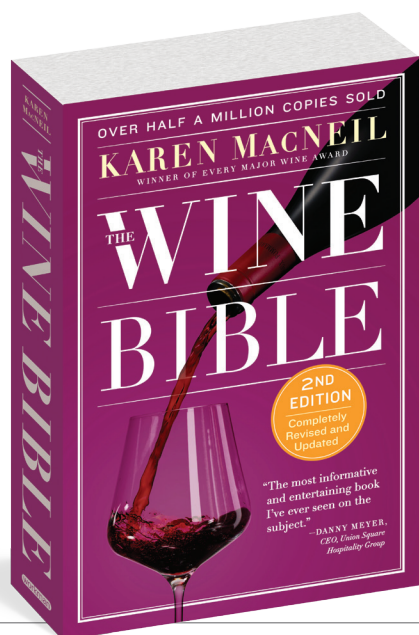
Don't swallow too quickly. As with medicine, if you swallow a wine super quickly, you won't taste it at all.

5. FOCUS ON THE FINISH

The finish of a wine is the extent to which its aromas and flavors persist in your mouth, even after you've swallowed. All truly great wines have a long finish. You can get a good sense of the length of the finish by using a technique called retronasal breathing. To do this: Take a sip, hold the wine in your mouth, swirl it around, and swallow it, keeping your mouth closed. With your mouth still closed, breathe out forcefully through your nose. (Make sure you swallow before breathing out, or you'll be in for a dry-cleaning bill.) Now notice the sensation. If the wine has a long finish, you'll still be able to smell and taste it even though you've swallowed. If it has a short finish, you'll sense very little, if any, flavor or aroma.

6. CONFIRM THE COLOR

The correct way to look at color is not to hold the glass up in the air, but rather to look down and across the wine-filled glass while holding it at a 45-degree angle. Different grape varieties have different hues. Finally, clarity of color—often called limpidity—is also important.



"Wine is one of the most civilized things in the world and one of the natural things of the world that has been brought to the greatest perfection, and it offers a greater range for enjoyment and appreciation than, possibly, any other purely sensory thing."

— ERNEST HEMINGWAY,
Death in the Afternoon

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SAMPLE WINE TASTING

THEME

NAPA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC

THE BOTTLE

ROBERT MONDAVI Fumé Blanc 2013
(Napa Valley, California)

INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND

Sauvignon blanc (aka fumé blanc) is a major grape; it makes simple dry wines that are snappy and citrusy, as well as more complex wines modeled on dry white Bordeaux.

About 48 miles north of San Francisco, Napa Valley is California's best-known and most renowned wine region, even though it is responsible for an astoundingly small amount of all the wine produced in the state—just 4 percent.

Napa Valley produces a vast array of wines thanks to its soil variations,

irregular topography, highly independent winemaking styles, and variable climate.

What virtually all of the valley shares (thanks to the nearby Pacific Ocean) is a huge diurnal temperature fluctuation. Nighttime temperatures can be 30 or even 40 degrees lower than daytime temperatures. This allows the vines to grow according to a nearly ideal rhythm of nighttime rest and daytime photosynthesis.

Most every-night sauvignon blancs in California are simply made in stainless steel tanks which, because they protect against oxygen exposure, help the sauvignon blanc retain its beautiful, fresh green aromas. More complex, expensive sauvignon blancs are often made by blending small lots of wine that have been made in a variety of containers (new oak barrels, used oak barrels, concrete eggs, and stainless steel drums, for example), giving the final wine greater depth and character on the palate.

*Partimque figuras rettulit antiquas,
partim nova monstra creavit.*

(Partly we recovered the old,
familiar things, partly we created
something wondrous and new.)

— OVID,
Metamorphoses 436–7

ABOUT THE WINE

ROBERT MONDAVI Fumé Blanc Reserve |
To Kalon Vineyard | Napa Valley

Within the To Kalon vineyard is one of the oldest plots of sauvignon blanc in Napa Valley, the source of this unusually distinctive, exotic, exquisite wine. Unlike most sauvignon blancs, it doesn't taste vividly "green." Instead, it's fresh and stony—like the air in a dry creek bed after it rains. The late Robert Mondavi was one of the first vintners to use the name fumé blanc (now a synonym for sauvignon blanc), which he felt sounded more sophisticated than sauvignon blanc.

(For further details, please refer to page 701)

SUGGESTED FOOD PAIRINGS

Sauvignon blanc has a cleansing acidity, which leaves you wanting to take a bite of food, and after taking a bite of food, you'll want a sip of wine. The perfect seesaw. Saltiness in food is a great contrast to acidity in wine. Think about smoked salmon and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Asian dishes that have soy sauce in them often pair well with acidic wines.

(For further details, please refer
to pages 115–118)

