

WHY TASTE?

By working through the class modules, you'll gain a unique theoretical understanding of wine. But truly appreciating wine is more than an intellectual exercise; it means using your senses of sight, smell, taste and touch. The tutored tastings in each class:

- Guide you through the process of conducting your own wine tastings
- Train your senses to recognize the aromas, flavors, tastes and textures commonly found in wine

Finally, enjoying wine comes from sharing it with friends. We hope that you will use Understanding Wine to appreciate and enjoy wine to its fullest.

WHEN AND WHERE TO TASTE

Since the tasting materials can be read on-line or printed out, you have a number of options:

- Work through the tastings on-line after completing each class.
- Organize a fun and educational wine tasting with friends.
- Take the materials to a local wine bar where you can purchase the wines by the glass.

REQUIRED MATERIALS (besides wine)

- **Stemware:** one glass per taster, per wine. In Understanding Wine, each tutored tasting highlights a pair of wines, so each taster should have two identical glasses. Ideally, the glasses should be tulip-shaped, with a profile that narrows toward the rim.
- **Corkscrew:** to open the bottles
- **Water:** to cleanse your palate and hydrate
- **Spit container:** opaque cup
- **Tasting note checklist:** printed out from class materials to record your tasting notes
- **Pen:** to take notes

PURCHASING THE WINES

Wines are not supplied by Wine Spectator School.

Learn by doing: Students find that buying their own wine increases their understanding of wine. Some buy all the wines in a single trip to the store. Some take separate trips for each tasting; they provide the opportunity to build a valuable relationship with your wine merchant.

Cost: The wine list (located on the following pages) includes the approximate cost for a good-quality example of each wine. More expensive wines are available should you wish to trade up, but a more expensive wine does not necessarily provide a better illustration of a given point. Always buy at your own comfort level.

There are 10 tastings with 2 wines each, for a total of 20 wines. If you average \$12-15 per bottle and you complete one tasting a week, that's under \$30 per week—and you'll have wine left for dinner. The final cost depends on your market, the amount you want to spend and the number of friends participating in the tastings.

Dialog: To guide your purchase, we've provided a list of specific wines or wine styles along with their approximate prices and the goals of each tasting. Show the list to your local merchant or explain the following points:

- I'd like a pair of wines for a comparative tasting.
- The two wines are _____ and _____.
- I'd like to stay under _____ dollars a bottle.
- The goal for the tasting is to _____.

The staff at any good wine store will be happy to help you select the appropriate wines from their stock.

Tasters per bottle: Approximately 2 ounces of each wine are required for a taste, so a standard 750ml/25 oz bottle can accommodate 10-12 people. Groups of 4-6 are recommended; it's easier to set up the tasting and encourage conversation with a smaller group.

WINES SHOULD BE:

- True to type, emphasizing the hallmark characteristics of each varietal or region
- The same age or within a vintage or two of each other
- In the same general price range or within \$5-6 of each other

CLASS 1: Intro to Tasting: a pair of whites

- Pinot Grigio from Italy, made with minimal or no oak; Pinot Grigio is the grape
- Chardonnay from Australia, California, or Chile made with minimal or no oak

GOAL: The wines should illustrate:

- Hallmark characteristics of each varietal
- Opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of body and acidity

Price: You can find good bottles of Pinot Grigio in the \$10-12 range; expect to pay a few dollars more for the Chardonnay.

A note on vintage: Buy the currently available vintage, which for most Aussie Chards is a year older than the current vintage of Pinot Grigio. Most Pinot Grigios are made to be enjoyed immediately, while many Chardonnays spend some extra time in the winery.

CLASS 2: Tasting Reds

- Beaujolais from France; the region is Beaujolais, the grape is Gamay
- Cabernet Sauvignon from California, Washington, or Chile

GOAL: The wines should illustrate:

- Hallmark characteristics of each varietal
- Opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of body and tannin

Price: You can find good bottles of Beaujolais-Villages around the \$10 mark; expect to pay a few dollars more for the Cabernet Sauvignon.

A note on vintage: Buy the currently available vintage, which for most California Cabernet Sauvignon is a year or two older than the current vintage of Beaujolais-Villages. Most Beaujolais-Villages are made to be enjoyed immediately, while many Cabernet Sauvignon spend some extra time in the winery.

CLASS 3: International Varieties

- Pinot Noir from Oregon, California, New Zealand, or Burgundy
- Merlot from Washington, California, or Chile

GOAL: The wines should illustrate:

- Hallmark characteristics of each varietal
- Medium body

Price: You can expect to pay around \$12-15 for a solid Merlot from Washington. Pinot Noir at a similar level of quality from Oregon may cost a few dollars more.

A note on substitutions: Because wine production in Oregon and Washington is significantly smaller than in California, wines from these two states can be more difficult to find and they may be slightly more expensive. Substitute Pinot Noir and/or Merlot from California if your wine merchant doesn't carry wines from Oregon and Washington or if you want to minimize costs.

CLASS 4: Major Regional Varieties

- Viognier from California or France (Condrieu from the Rhone or Viognier from Languedoc-Roussillon the south)
- Gewürztraminer from Alsace (dry, not sweet Vendage Tardive or SGN style) or California

GOAL: The wines should illustrate:

- Hallmark characteristics of each varietal
- Aromatic whites

Price: You can expect to pay around \$15 for a solid Viognier. Gewürztraminer at a similar level of quality may cost a few dollars less.

CLASS 5: Old World Model: Regional Reds from France

- Bordeaux AOC from Bordeaux
- Côtes du Rhône from the Rhône

GOAL: The wines should illustrate the hallmark characteristics of each region

Price: You can expect to pay \$12-15 for a solid Côtes du Rhône. Bordeaux AOC at a similar level of quality should cost about the same.

CLASS 6: Travelling the Old World: Regional Reds

- Rioja from Rioja, Spain
- Chianti Classico from Tuscany, Italy

GOAL: The wines should illustrate the hallmark characteristics of each region

Price: You can expect to pay around \$12-15 for a solid Chianti Classico. Rioja Reserva at a similar level of quality may cost a few dollars more.

CLASS 7: New World Model: California

- Sancerre or Pouilly Fume from the Loire, France, made with minimal or no oak
- Sauvignon Blanc from California or New Zealand, made with minimal or no oak

GOAL: The wines should contrast Sauvignon Blanc from the Old and the New Worlds.

Price: You can expect to pay about \$12 for a solid Sauvignon Blanc from California. Sancerre at a similar level of quality may cost a few dollars more.

CLASS 8: Discovering the New World

- Syrah from the Rhône, France
- Shiraz from Australia

GOAL: The wines should contrast Syrah from the Old and the New Worlds.

Price: You can expect to pay around \$12 for a good Shiraz. Much less wine is produced in the northern Rhône; Syrah-based wines from this area can be found for under \$20, but many are more expensive.

CLASS 9: Winegrowing & Winemaking

GOAL: The wines should illustrate the influence of oak.

Chardonnay from California (minimal oak)

Chardonnays that in recent vintages have been made with minimal amounts of oak:

Edna Valley, Paragon, Edna Valley, South Coast

Frog's Leap, Napa Valley

Sanford, Santa Barbara County, South Coast

Grgich Hills, Napa Valley

Zaca Mesa, Zaca Vineyards, Santa Barbara County, South Coast

Chardonnay from California (obvious oak)

Chardonnays that in recent vintages have been made with obvious amounts of oak:

Beringer, Napa Valley Private Reserve

Chalone, Central Coast

De Loach, Russian River Valley O.F.S., Sonoma County

Ferrari-Carano, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County

Fritz, Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Gallo of Sonoma, Sonoma County

A note on substitutions: Since many California Chardonnays are made with oak, you may substitute one of the following Burgundian wines for the unoaked Chardonnay. Remember that the difference in terroir will be a factor when you compare the Burgundian wine with a California Chardonnay.

- Mâcon Villages
- St-Véran
- Pouilly-Fuissé
- Chablis

Price: You can expect to pay around \$15 for the unoaked style and a few dollars more for the oaky style.

CLASS 10: Wine in Real Life: Food & Wine Pairing

- Riesling, from Alsace, Germany, Austria, or the U.S. in a Kabinett or dry style
- Zinfandel from California – either a lighter style or a powerhouse will work well

The following foods are required for the Tasting:

- A few saltine crackers
- A couple slices of tart Granny Smith apple
- Gouda cheese (unsmoked)
- Apricot, apple or currant jelly
- A piece of dark chocolate

GOAL: The tasting should illustrate the

- Hallmark characteristics of each varietal
- Interactions of wine and food

Price: You can expect to pay around \$15 for a solid German or Austrian Riesling or for a California Zinfandel.