**Do I need special glasses to drink wine?**

Only if you also feel the need to drink your Budweiser out of the proper “Pilsner” glass (it’s a thing). Otherwise, as long as it holds liquid, it’s good enough to hold wine.

*TL;DR*

The best research on wineglass shape points toward their being a single basic glass shape (typically described as a Tulip shape) that is generally optimal for all wines but the difference between Tulip-shaped glasses and any other glasses is minimal. It can make a difference if you are professionally examining a wine in a clinical setting but on a day-to-day level is really not that important. Certainly the idea that The idea that you need a special shape for every region and varietal is all smoke, mirrors and snake oil. The appropriateness of any type of glassware is personal and situational. Like dinner plates, sometimes paper plates work best and sometimes you feel the need for fine china. The type of plate can affect the environment and mood of a meal but nobody claims that the plate actually changes the flavor of the food. Special stemware for wine is a very recent occurrence going back only a few hundred years. This is a drop in the bucket compared to how long wine has been produced, consumed and enjoyed. Drink out of whatever makes you happy. I drink most of my wine at home from coffee mugs because they are hard to break and easy to clean.

**What Wines Pair With What Foods?**

Specific foods do not empirically pair with specific wines beyond the taste of the person doing the pairing and the small group of people who share their personal tastes. Most people get this very wrong and it makes most people WAY more apprehensive about drinking wine than they should be. Eat what you like. Drink what you like. When in doubt, the most fun option is usually a diversity of wine styles and foods that you and/or your guests can experiment with. You will often be surprised about what foods and wines actual “pair”.

*TL;DR*

Food and wine share an ancient and fascinating history together but the current idea of putting specific wines with specific foods is actually a very recent phenomenon (+/- 100 years ago). This phenomenon developed primarily due to a confusion between personal taste and universal appeal. Although there are some basic sensory similarities involved in the interaction of food and wine (the tastes of sweet and protein make wine taste stronger/ The taste of salt and acid make wine taste milder) we have long ago moved away from an impartial, objective system to one that attempts to dictate to a large group the personal preferences of the few. This is not only inaccurate but provides an impediment to all consumers who do not share the personal preferences of the individuals doing the pairing.

The sensory science on the subject is very clear. From a genetic base to environmental influence, people’s tastes are vastly different. The phrase "everyone's tastes are different" is often thrown around but our actions really do not reflect how true that is. One of the many clear examples of our taste differences is our taste for bitterness. Our ability to perceive many types of bitterness is a genetic trait that divides our population into three general physical categories. 25% of the world population has a low number of taste buds and a high threshold to bitterness, 50% are average and the last 25% have a high number of taste buds and are extra-sensitive to bitterness. We give very little thought to the fact that this means between 50 to 75% of the population genetically possesses a dramatically different physiological reaction to bitter compounds than we do as individuals. This dramatic difference is made even greater when you factor in other genetic taste thresholds and environmental influences. Everyone's tastes are different and our reaction should be to decrease our reliance on specificity and develop a greater diversity of options that cover the widest range of personal preferences possible.

The second angle that we have used is history. The United States has no actual wine tradition or history. The result of this is the fact that

we end up haphazardly borrowing "wine culture" from places that have a long tradition to draw from (primary France and Italy). Not surprisingly, what has happened is a cultural game of Telephone where the actual cultural practices of a specific region/country end up morphing into an altered version of the original by the time that they are applied here. In general, food and wine in Europe was dictated almost entirely by regional agriculture. People ate and drank based on what their farm/village could produce. They were (and are) perfectly happy drinking the local wine (white or red) with whatever food was available. For the average person there is no historical tradition for altering the choice of wine based on the specific dish that was being eaten. A great example of this discontinuity between fact and myth is the development of "red wine with steak" as a "classic" pairing. This tradition developed in the United States because after World War II, when the French had a lot of wine to sell and the United States provided a huge untapped market. French and American marketers decided the best way to sell Frances' #1 export (red wine) was to put it together with one of Americas primary food items (beef). This was wildly successful despite the fact that the French ate comparatively little beef and commonly drank the reds with fish and poultry.

**What is the restaurant Cork Ceremony?**

90% of the cork ceremony is pure show and serves almost no real purpose. Depending on the restaurant this ceremony can range from simply going through the basic motions to a very elaborate and confusing display of arcane wine traditions. Either way, don't be afraid, it's mostly smoke and mirrors.

*TL;DR*

Originally, the presentation of the cork was developed as a security measure against fraud after the end of prohibition. The practice of refilling wine bottles with lesser quality wines forced premium wineries to brand the winery name onto the cork as a security seal. When presented with a cork in a restaurant you could check to see if the brand on the cork matched the brand on the bottle. This has not been a problem for many decades.

The one actual value of the ceremony is to insure your bottle of wine has not gone bad. 3-5% of all wines are tainted with a compound called TCA that comes from contaminated cork (this is why many wineries are switching to synthetic corks). TCA in wine has a very strong and distinct smell that ranges from moldy cardboard to wet horse. If you smell these in your wine then politely send the wine back and get a new bottle. You can also occasionally have problems with vinegar or other nasty smells. These are luckily rare but it's better to check before filling every ones glasses.

"The Ceremony"- Basic Step-By-Step

1. Pick a wine from the list

2. The waitperson/sommelier should bring this bottle to the table and display it for you.

3. Check to make sure that the bottle they bring is the same as the bottle you ordered (you would be amazed how often incorrect vintage dates and other mistakes happen.)

4. If you o.k. the bottle then the waitperson/sommelier should remove the foil, carefully pull the cork and place it on the table in front of you.

5. It is traditional to smell the cork, but there is really no reason why you need to. Surprise, it smells like cork. You'll learn far more from actually smelling and tasting the wine than you ever will by squeezing, poking, or smelling the cork. For the best entertainment value take the cork when it is presented to you and pop it in your mouth. Next, swish the cork around while looking contemplative before removing it and pronouncing the wine fit to drink. (If you cannot do this without choking on the cork then do not try it.)

6. Next, the waitperson/sommelier should pour a few ounces of wine into your glass.

7. Swirl, smell and taste the wine. This is the only real work that you have to do. If the wine smells or tastes like vinegar, wet horse or something worse then send the wine back. If it's fine then have it poured.

8. Bask in the glory of a job well done and the admiration of your dining companions.

The bottom line is that if you are interested in the history and traditions of wine then the cork presentation can be a meaningful ceremony. If you simply want a nice glass of vino, then don't worry about it. Ultimately, do what makes you the happiest.

**What are Wine Appelations?**

Wine grapes are sensitive. I don’t mean goes-through-a-full-box-of-Kleenex-while-watching-Bambi sensitive, I just mean that even small influences around them can have large affects. One of the biggest influences on these differences is where the grapes were grown. In the wine industry his simple concept goes by the fancy name “Appletation”. This is why, as I’m sure you noticed, you will never find two bottles of wine that taste exactly the same. Every wine is a unique individual; A snowflake with a cork.

*TL;DR*

The French (of course) have a word/concept that they use to describe this difference. They call it “Terroir” (+/- pronounced “Tear-wa”). Although this literally means dirt, the word is used to mean EVERYTHING that could possibly have any interaction with the grapevine. It is the soil, the rain, the wind, the direction and duration of the sun, and possibly an infinite number of other influences. Each of these things has the possibility to change, even if only minutely, the flavor of the grapes and therefore the wine. This principle is true down to each individual cluster on each individual vine.

Because of this range of individuality, each block, vineyard, region, county, state and country has its own personality that is made up of the diverse range of influences within its borders. This is why every bottle of wine sold in the United States is labeled with an “Appellation of Origin” which tells you exactly where the grapes came from. This can legally be anything as broad as “The United States” or “California”, or as narrow as a few rows in a special vineyard. Either way, the areas used are tightly defined and controlled.

If a wine says “California” on the label it must be 100% from California. If a wine is labeled with a specific county name (i.e. Sonoma, Mendocino, Santa Barbara, etc.) it must be 75% from that county. As you get more specific, the standards go up. If the bottle is labeled with an Approved Viticultural Area, or AVA, such as Napa Valley, Dry Creek, or Central Coast then 85% of the grapes in that wine must be from that area. If the label mentions a specific vineyard then it must be 95% from that vineyard. Generally, the more specific that the label gets the more consistent and more expensive the wine is going to be.

**How and Why do wines Age?**

Younger wines tend to be described as being brighter, harsher and/or fruitier. Wines that have aged are most often thought of as smoother, gentler and more subtle. With that said, it is important to note that a vast majority of wines are meant to be consumed immediately and not meant to age for any more than a few years, at most.

For those few wines that are made to age there are many different processes that happen inside the bottle.

Color: Wine color will usually gradually change from deep purple to a brick-like red. This happens because the red/blue pigments that color wines (know as Anthocyans) will gradually precipitate out with other organic chemicals inside the wine, forming sediment.

Harshness: Along with the Anthocyans, many of the astringent compounds found in younger wines (Colloids) also precipitate out making the with taste smoother. This smoothness is enhanced as small amounts of oxygen found in the wine slowly oxidize harsh tannins. A third process, called Esterification, reduces the tartness of young wines by eliminating certain acids.

Flavor: Older wines are generally viewed as having softer and more complex sensory characteristics. This is due to may different chemical reactions that are taking place inside the bottle and are influenced by such factors as pH, air space in the bottle, Sulphur Dioxide concentration and, most importantly, temperature.

Much of the aroma from wine comes from chemical compounds call Monoterpenes. These are the chemical compounds that cause some people to smell raspberries, spice, vanilla, grass, etc. In young wines these Monoterpenes are combined with small amounts of sugars in the wine. While they are bound with these sugars they are odorless. As wines age the Monoterpenes are slowly broken away from the sugars (a process called hydrolysis) and they are able to add their unique smells to the wine.

There is also a different category of smells called Esters that are formed by the interaction of organic acids and alcohol inside the wine. The general fresh, fruity aroma of young wines is primarily a result of Esters. As wines age these fruity esters are slowly broken apart and replaced with many more subtle aroma compounds. Not all of these Esters are good. Sometimes these Esters can also take the form of Acetic Acid and Ethyl Acetate as described above.

A third category of sensory compounds are called Aldehydes. These compounds are formed when some organic acids oxidize. In large amounts Aldehydes smell strongly unpleasant. In the small amounts that are present within wine they can be described as sherry or vanilla or sometime herbaceousness.

A vague definition for when a wine is “perfectly aged” is the point at which the harsh tannins have disappeared and when the maximum amount of complexity has been attained. This is a vague definition because nobody can actually predict when this point is. We are only just scratching the surface of what we know about wine chemistry and aging. There are hundreds of separate reactions going on all the time within the bottle and much of it is a complete mystery.

In addition, most of this information is hopefully interesting but useless because it applies to so few wines. Somewhere around 95% of all wines are consumed within 48 hours of purchase. Because of this around 99.9% of wines are not made to age for more than a few years. The need to age wine is mainly an outdated myth that only applies to those relatively few individuals with the interest, patients, time and money to buy that .1% of wines store them properly for 10, 20, 30 + years. This is ultimately great news for the average consumer because they are able to buy and drink wines that taste great now without the need for long-term planning.

**What Is Ruby Port?**

This is what the average person thinks of when they think of Port. Ruby Port is blended from many different varieties, vintages and vineyards. It is meant to taste like fruit (plum, berries, cherries, etc.) so it is bottled young and only spends a limited amount of time in a barrel (6months to 5-years +/-)

**What is Tawny Port?**

Like Ruby Port, Tawny port is blended from many different varieties, vintages and vineyards. Unlike Ruby Port, Tawny Port is aged in barrel for many years. After at least 10-years in barrel the rich purple of the port turns into a caramel-brown color and the flavors of the barrels(vanilla, caramel, nuttiness) start to dominate the fruit. Tawny Port is typically bottled as 10, 20 or30 Year Old, which reflects the average amount of time that the port has been in barrel.

**What are LBV (Late Bottled Vintage) Ports?** These Ports are a sub-set of Vintage Ports and typically one notch or more below the quality of pure Vintage ports. These are often very good individual lots of port from otherwise inconsistent years. LBVʼs are typically aged a few years more in barrel and are ready to drink immediately on release.

**What are Single Quinta (Vineyard) Ports?**

These are generally the best ports from the best vineyards in a non-declared year such as 1987 (not declared but there are some excellent single quinta wines).

**What is the best Wine Temp?**

The 13°C (about 55°F) temperature makes historical sense since wine storage in France is typically in caves and the natural underground temperature is around 13°C. Thus, the "ideal" seems to have been the result of regional custom and practice rather than scientific study. “ (How Temperature Affects the Aging of Wine,by Alexander (Al) J. Pandell, Ph.D. 05/11/98)

**Do I need special knowledge to drink wine?**

If you know how to drink milk, you know how to drink wine.