

1 Tasting and Evaluating Wine

Tasting wine rather than simply drinking it increases our appreciation of the wine by allowing us to examine it in detail. Although the process can seem repetitive at first, with practice it becomes a subconscious habit. Forcing us to put our sensations into words means the impression of the wine lingers longer in our memory. It also helps us communicate to other people what the wine is like, sometimes long after we have tasted it. This is an essential skill for anyone involved in the production, distribution or sale of wine. As we will see in Chapter 2, successful food and wine matching requires us to consider the separate components of the wine. The systematic approach to tasting, outlined below, shows us how to do this.

PREPARATION FOR TASTING

It is important that our impression of the wine is not altered by any outside influences. The ideal tasting room will be odour-free (no smells of cleaning products, tobacco, food or perfume), with good natural light, and white surfaces against which we can judge the appearance of our wines. Our tasting palate should be clean, and unaffected by tobacco, food, coffee, gum or toothpaste. Chewing a piece of bread can help remove any lingering flavours. Hayfever, colds and fatigue affect our ability to judge wines, because they affect our senses of taste and smell.

Many glasses have been developed to show different wines at their best. However, we need one type of glass in order to make fair comparisons between wines. At the WSET, we

use the ISO glass, as illustrated. It has a rounded bowl that is large enough to swirl the wine. The sides slope inwards in a tulip shape to concentrate the aromas, and the stem allows us to hold the glass without warming the wine.

THE WSET SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TASTING (INTERMEDIATE)

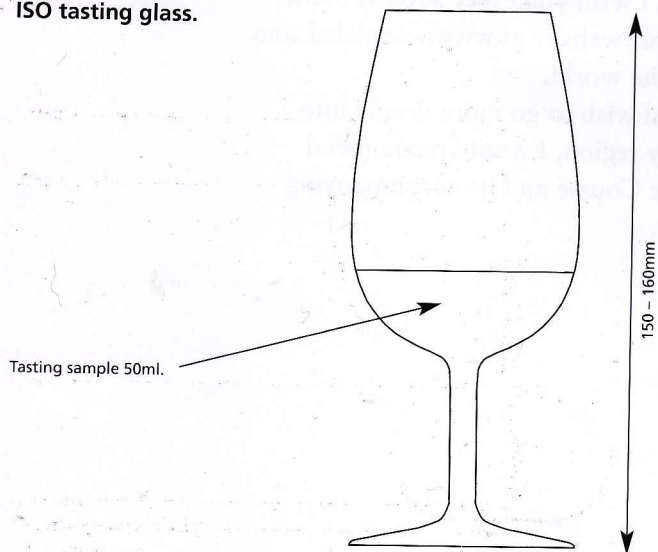
This approach systematically describes aspects of a wine in the order we encounter them. Appearance first, then the nose, then the palate, and finally we may use our impressions to draw a conclusion about the quality of the wine.

Appearance

The main reason for looking at the appearance of a wine is that it can warn us of faults. If a wine is too old, has been badly stored, or the cork seal has failed, allowing air to damage the wine, then it is described as **out-of-condition**. This is the most common fault that shows itself in the appearance: out-of-condition wines will be dull in appearance, and will have at least a hint of brown, though a brown colour does not always indicate a faulty wine. (Brown hints can appear in healthy old wines, particularly those that have been aged for very long periods in oak.) Haziness may indicate a fault, or it could be that the wine has deliberately not been filtered before bottling (see Chapter 4).

It is worth making a quick note of the colour. Look at the intensity: is it particularly intense or pale? If it is a red wine, is it ruby (purply-red) or garnet (orangey-red)? Purple is an indication of youth; orange, amber and brown colours are indicators of age. However, bear in mind that some wines change colour more rapidly than

ISO tasting glass.



ruby
← garnet