

Wine Tasting like a Sommelier

By Brooke Thomson

Most of us are familiar with the painful rituals of the self-proclaimed “wine connoisseur”. The excessive swirling of the glass, holding the wine to the light, gurgling the wine, asking the waiter overly-thorough questions about the wine, inhaling deeply into the wine glass, taking photos of the wine label to store in the special wine app.

But what does it all boil down too? Is all of this fancy procedure for real or is it just a convenient way to look really pretentious? Is it a shared cultural experience that we all need to know about? Here is a rough sketch that will make it possible to navigate the beginning of wine tasting.

1. Have an answer to the question, “What kind of wine do you like?” This is an annoying question because the reason we go wine tasting is to taste it, and then figure out what we like. For white wines, we can get by with saying either **dry** or **sweet**. Something dry will be refreshing while something sweet will be... sweet. For Chardonnay, **buttery** is a good buzzword.

Red wines are more complicated. Something **robust** or **full bodied** will be a wine with aromas you can smell easily in the glass. A **Cabernet Sauvignon** (or a “Cab”) is typically a bold wine. For lighter table wines that you can sip with friends or at dinner, a **Merlot** and **Pinot Noir** are safer “go-to’s”. If anyone asks, “why are you so into Pinot?” [you can always say this.](#)

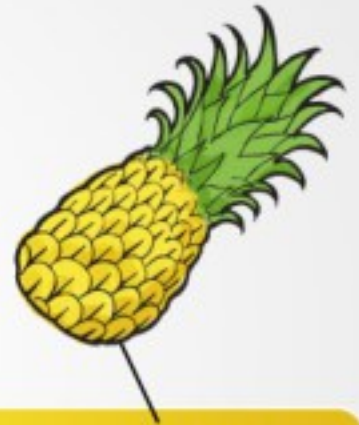
2. When the pourer starts talking about those pineapple and mango tones that could not possibly be in a wine, don’t take it too literally. Often experts use this language to note where the wine is from or what it should taste like. They aren’t really saying that they taste mango in the wine, but they are using code to say that the wine is sweet and not from Europe (like a mango). For example, tasting **green apple** is saying you know a Chardonnay grape was used.



FLAVORS IN CHARDONNAY BY RIPENESS



LESS RIPE



MORE RIPE

3. The concept of **Terroir**. Terroir is a French wine tasting term that literally means soil. For many, the concept of serious wine tasting is almost like reading Conde Naste Traveler when you're bored. The idea is that every wine comes from a specific region with a unique climate, season, minerals, storage, and so many other unique things that make each wine special. For serious wine tasters it is a major part of their repertoire to identify or know exactly where and when the wine was produced. European wine is known as "old world" and everything else is "new world".

4. Don't "blast your palate". Once you make it all the way out to a vineyard, the first idea is probably to drink the wine that's in front of you. Wine tasting is a marathon, not a sprint. The advanced sommeliers use buckets to spit out their wine so they don't blast their palate, but to start with you will thank yourself if you don't finish every glass wine earlier in the day.