

HOW TO TASTE WINE

Christopher Cooper, Soho House's European sommelier, gives us an introduction to wine tasting, plus recommendations of some perfect wines for summer.

Photo by Steven Joyce

Wine is such a personal thing and the beauty of it is that we all taste different things, so there are no wrong answers. Tasting wine is an art form, but in the same way that primary school kids create art and artistic geniuses create art, we all have the ability to do it to some extent. What stops us getting into wine, is that we have a horror of not being right or feeling alienated from those around us, having our shortcomings in knowledge exposed.

Surely, though, we can all taste things? Like the difference between apple and orange juice...sure, that's easy! And the textural differences between eating an apple or a banana... absolutely, of course they have a different texture. If we can all do that then we all have the ability to taste, but to be really good at it we just need experience. I'm not talking about those people who know the difference between a St Julien Bordeaux and a St Emilion Bordeaux, though. I'm talking about what we taste every day.

Our experiences to date made us into the kind of individuals that we are today. It is no different with tasting and eating. We all eat the things we like the taste of and we don't eat what we dislike, but we do remember what things taste like and it's that back catalogue of fla-

vours and references we remember that make us the wine tasters that we all are, or can be.

Ordinary everyday flavours like lime, lemon, apple or plum are great initial reference points when tasting wine, but there's a whole lot more flavour out there than those. There are tropical fruit flavours, leafy (or herbaceous) flavours, vegetable flavours, dairy flavours, or others like spices, earthy ones like hay or soil, and minerally flavours like chalk. (I'm not encouraging people to lick any stones.) Some of these flavours may seem a bit odd but they really are flavours that can be tasted in wine, other than just "wine".

Of course, some people find that wine does just taste like wine, and that's fine. But I'd encourage you to taste again and look beyond the big "wine" flavour to find the subtle flavours that make each wine taste different. When you meet people who are wine buffs and they exclaim "This tastes like a 2001 Pauillac", then they probably know only because they've tasted a 2001 Pauillac and can remember it (and I daresay if you tasted one, you'd probably remember it too). That's all a wine expert is...someone who has tasted a load of wines and can tell you what they taste like.

Five things to do when tasting wine

Look at the wine – Use the white table cloth or a white wall to check out the colour of the wine.

Smell the wine – Swirl the glass around in your hand or on the table to get more aromas in the bowl of the glass.

Taste the wine – Do the silly slurpy thing! It increases your

ability to taste the aromas of the wine.

Taste it again – This is where you get to taste the underlying flavours and look past the big initial hit of flavour.

Tell us what you think – You're not wrong with what you can taste, because it IS what you can taste.

Five of the best summer tipples

Lambrusco 'Vecchia Modena' Cleto Chiarli, Italy NV – forget everything you think about when you hear the word Lambrusco, this is an outstanding sparkling red that's so refreshing on the roof at Shoreditch.

Assyrtiko, Tsantali, Agioritikos, Greece 11 – pronounced 'a-sert-icko' this indigenous Greek white wine is a fantastic Sauvignon Blanc alternative and proof there's more to Greece than Retsina.

Godello, Mara Martin, Monterrei, Spain 11 – there are some great

fresher and lighter whites from Spain and this Godello does not disappoint. Smooth and tropical with flavours of apple blossom.

Chateau Beaulieu, Aix-en-Provence, France 11 – an amazing and delicately balanced Provence rosé. This wine has the classic salmon pink colour and fragrance. (Pictured, right.)

Zweigelt 'Junger Knabe', Heiderer-Mayer, Austria 11 – if you're in Berlin then this is a must-try wine. Zweigelt is the name of the grape and it's a bit like a smoother, aromatic Pinot Noir.

