

THINGS ABOUT WINE THAT EVERY MEETING PRO SHOULD KNOW

BY JÖRN "JOEY" KLEINHANS, CFA, CSW
(MPI ORANGE COUNTY CHAPTER)

Many meeting professionals have to work with wine regularly but may lack important background information on the subject. Indeed, well-structured tastings can fulfill several purposes, including education, entertainment and social engagement. The trick is being able to speak knowledgeably about wine with your client.

By the Numbers

It takes 75 - 100 grapes to make a glass of wine.

How to Evaluate a Wine

Although we have individual opinions and preferences for different wines, there are objective criteria that serve as a guideline for assessing a wine's quality. These are four criteria that every meeting professional needs to understand and put to the test—complexity, intensity, integrity and typicity.

COMPLEXITY refers to the number of distinct flavor components that you can detect in a wine. A wine with high complexity is usually the easiest to identify in a blind tasting, since it provides a complete package of flavor information that helps the taster recognize the wine.

THE LEVEL OF INTENSITY determines, as a relative measure, how strongly you can pick up certain aroma profiles on the nose and on the palate. Many wines remain very subtle, standing in the background as great wines to serve with food, while those with greater intensity can stand out as the main attraction.

INTEGRITY speaks to how well or poorly different components of the wine harmonize with one another. Does the taste on the palate deliver on the promise of the nose? Is the final flavor (the "finish") an extension of the palate impression, or can new and unexpected sensations be picked up? Ideally, a wine evolves as you advance from nose to palate and finish, but doesn't create unexpected contradictions that undermine the integrity of the wine.

TYPICITY requires more experience than the other three criteria: A wine of high typicity shows the typical attributes for which that grape variety and growing region are known. Tasting wines of high typicity is the best approach for a steep learning curve in evaluating wine and wine appreciation.



Wines to Watch

Chile and **South Africa** are offering exciting wines at excellent value, and are joining the world-class level after decades as emerging markets.

Understanding the Essentials

One of the key facts about wine is that there are only a few important combinations of grape and growing regions that produce consistent tasting experiences. Once these combinations are understood, you'll be well prepared to successfully handle most wine-related situations.

Accordingly, the best and quickest way to learn about the world's key wines is to source them from their original (and usually best) growing regions in the Old World. Starting with the essentials this way, rather than venturing into the more experimental New World interpretations of the grape varieties, creates an authentic impression of each wine's identity. ■

TOP 10 WINES

1. **Shafer Relentless** Napa Valley 2008 (\$60)
2. **Château de St.-Cosme** Gigondas 2010 (\$41)
3. **Two Hands Shiraz** Barossa Valley Bella's Garden 2010 (\$69)
4. **Clos des Papes** Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2010 (\$128)
5. **Château Guiraud** Sauternes 2009 (\$60)
6. **Château Léoville Barton** St. Julien 2009 (\$105)
7. **Shea Pinot Noir** Willamette Valley Shea Vineyard Estate 2009 (\$40)
8. **Beringer Cabernet Sauvignon** Knights Vineyard Reserve 2009 (\$45)
9. **Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona** Brunello di Montalcino 2007 (\$60)
10. **Achaval Ferrer Malbec Bella Vista** 2010 (\$120)

Source: *Wine Spectator's* 2012 Top 100

THE GREAT GRAPE

Work with these wines to create tasting events that your clients will remember and request time and again.

White Grapes

CHARDONNAY

- Chablis and Burgundy, France
- Napa, California

RIESLING

- Mosel, Germany (sweet) and Alsace, France (dry)—other regions lack key characteristics

SAUVIGNON BLANC

- Old World: Sancerre, Loire, France
- New World: Marlborough, New Zealand

Red Grapes

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

- Old World: Margaux, Bordeaux, France; Tuscany, Italy
- New World: Napa, California; Chile; South Africa

NEBBIOLO

- This grape only shows well in Piemonte, Italy (especially Barolo and Barbaresco)

PINOT NOIR

- Old World: Burgundy, France
- New World: Marlborough, New Zealand; Oregon

SANGIOVESE

- Tuscany, Italy (especially Chianti Classico and Brunello di Montalcino)

SYRAH

- Old World: Northern Rhone, France (especially Cote Rotie and Cornas)
- New World: Australia (where the grape is called Shiraz)

TEMPRANILLO

- Rioja, Spain (look for the nicely oak-aged "Gran Reserva" level)



Don't Smell the Cork!

Smelling the cork will usually send misleading or inconclusive signals. It's best to determine whether a wine is spoiled—known as being 'corked'—by tasting the small pour the sommelier offers after he opens the bottle for the host. It's the only way to assess flaws in a wine.