

Chapter 3

Wine-Tasting Procedures

Whether you are in Sydney, Cape Town, New York, London, or Tokyo there is an accepted way to taste wine. There are tasting norms, including various procedures and steps. They are usually conducted in sequence, so you start with the wine's **Appearance**, move on to **Aroma**, **Taste** as well as **Current Condition and Storage Potential** and finally create a **Summary**.

In addition to tasting wines, wines can be graded and points assessed to establish a grade. Chapter 5 shows you in detail how to grade wines using the 100 point system: moreover, I highly recommend that you follow the grading sheet, included at the back of this book, as you read through this chapter. The more practice you receive in the various stages of tasting the easier the procedures will be to remember.

Variables affecting taste.

There are many variables that can affect the taste of a wine and before we proceed to the tasting procedures I would like to introduce the following basic facts.

1. *Variety of grape*
2. *The climate and growing conditions within the district*
 - Soil (mineral content, pH levels, etc.)
 - Water levels (irrigation, drainage...)
 - Annual and vintage changes in weather conditions
3. *Viticulture practices*
 - Ecological conditions
 - Use of pesticides
 - Timing of harvest
 - Fruit at picking: pH, acidity, sugar and phenolic (grape skin) quality
 - Crop size (pruning and trellising practices)
 - Diseases within the vineyard (health of the vine)
4. *Winery operations and procedures*
 - Length and temperature of fermentation
 - Maturation in steel, oak, etc.
 - Filtering techniques
 - Adjustments (tannin, tartaric acid, aroma enhancers, micro-oxidation, etc.)
 - Varietal grading, selection and blending of both single grape varieties and blends
5. *Distribution and storage conditions*
 - Temperature en route
 - Bottle storage conditions (temperature at store, storage standing upright or laying down, in direct sunlight, etc.)
6. *Home storage conditions*
 - Temperature and humidity conditions
 - Lighting conditions
 - Fluctuations in temperature
7. *Wine-serving conditions*
 - Time of the day
 - Temperature of the wine
 - Temperature of the room or location in which you are serving the wine
 - Environmental conditions (grading conditions, social occasions, and whether or not the wine is served with an accompanying food or cheese)
 - Decanting or aerating (number of times done and how long before tasting)
8. *Atmospherics*
 - Surrounding conditions (comfort zones, people, lighting, equipment etc.)

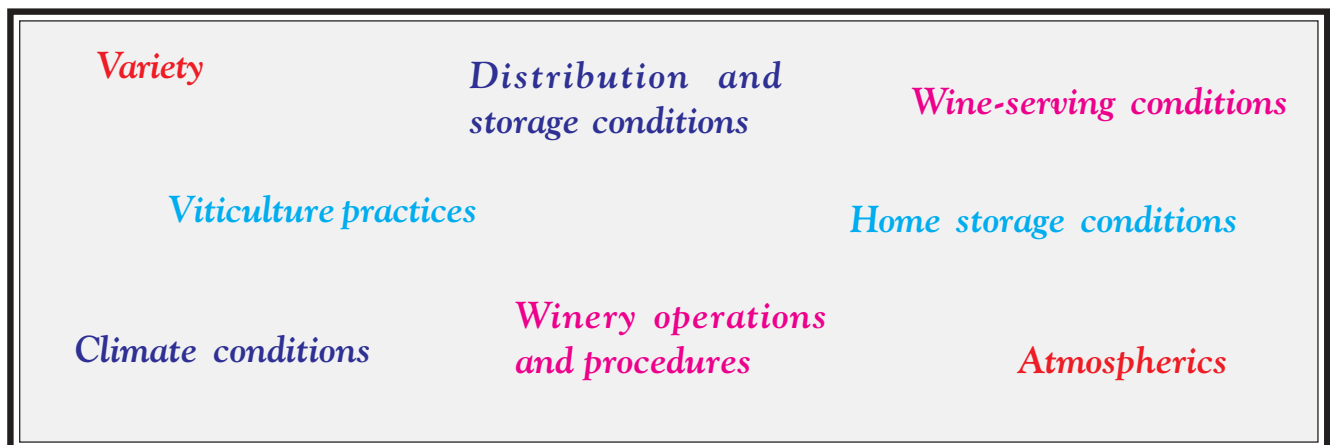


Fig. 3.0. Variables affecting aroma and taste.

Appearance

The wine’s appearance and color can reveal a lot about its present state and/or condition, where it might have been made, possible grape types, and some defects.

Procedures for Analyzing the Appearance

1. Vertical position (Fig. 3.1). Viewing the wine from above, from a vertical position, allows us to analyze the wine’s surface brilliance, clarity, and depth of color, as well as potential defects such as bubbles (CO₂), protein, etc.

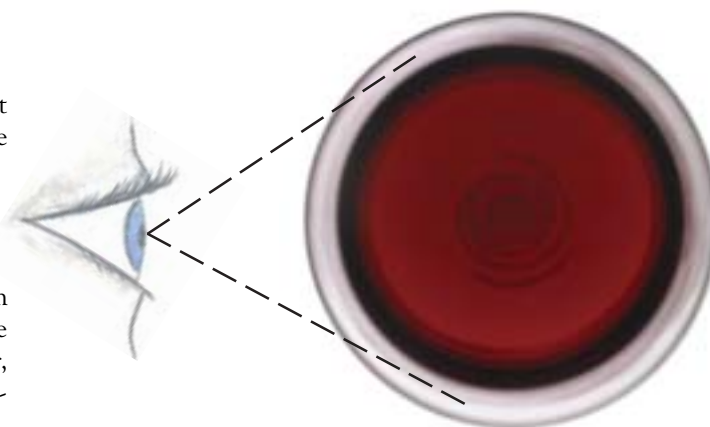
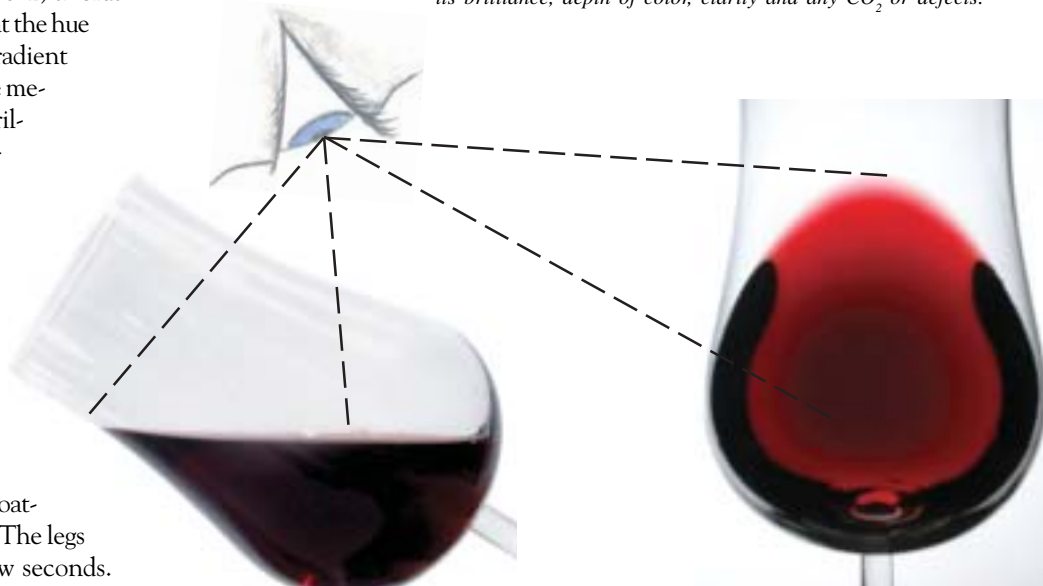


Fig. 3.1. Viewing from above (glass vertical): Look at the wine’s surface, its brilliance, depth of color, clarity and any CO₂ or defects.

2. The 30 deg. angle (Fig. 3.2) affords us the possibility to look at the hue of the wine, the wine’s gradient from the midpoint to the meniscus, the liveliness or brilliance, and potential defects.



Figures 3.2. & 3.2.5. Viewing from above (glass at 30 deg): Look from the center of the wine (bowl) through the rim edge. Look at the wine’s color (hue), gradient of tone, width and depth of color, clarity and any CO₂ or defects.

3. Horizontal position (Fig. 3.3) presents the wine’s viscosity by comparing the legs or arches running down the sides of the glass. To view this you would have to swirl the wine rapidly coating the sides of the glass. The legs would appear after a few seconds. The amount of viscosity depends upon the alcohol and fruit content of the wine. The larger the alcohol and fruit content the broader and longer the legs.

Scanning the three views gives you the best possible chance to view both the quality of the wine’s appearance and also the possibility of identifying any defects in the most proficient way. The key is to have reflected light from beneath the glass. This shows the best color (hue and tone) in addition to any possible defects.

Natural white blue light is best for viewing wines but not a necessity. A consistent and reflective light source is by far more important when analyzing the wine’s appearance.

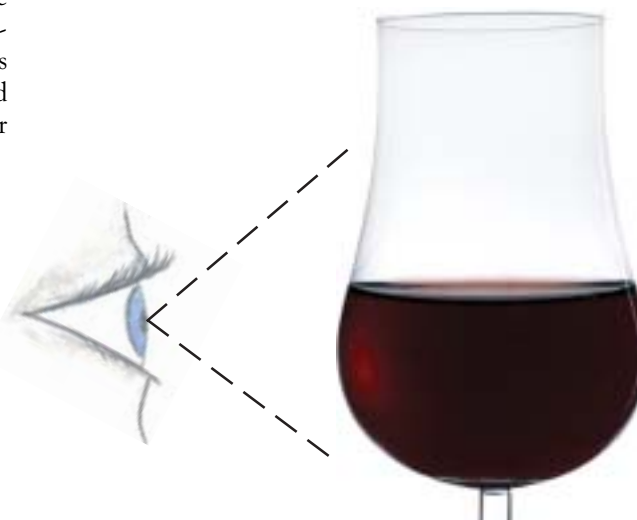


Fig. 3.3. Viewing from the side (glass vertical): Look at the wine’s legs or arches, its viscosity and any possible signs of defects.

Appearance: Clearness

Clearness is the clarity of the wine. Viewing the wine from all angles, as shown in the previous figures, would help you to categorize the wine's appearance into one or more of the items below.

1. Unclear wines are red and white wines with major defects
2. Clear red wines (Fig 3.4.) are red wines free from defects or white wines with the possibility of some defects.

3. Crystal Clear (Fig 3.5.) is usually reserved for white wines clear from defects.

4. Protein-haze (Fig 3.6.) is a small, white, flakey sediment and a defect.

5. Salt / Calcium / Tartrate crystals (Fig 3.7.) are small white, off-white or clear crystals and are considered cosmetic defects.

6. Sediment (Fig 3.8.) is a normal occurrence caused through ageing, seen as small dark flakes or bits and can be very fine or coarse and are not defects.



Fig. 3.4. Represents a clear red wine appearance, showing no signs of defects.



Fig. 3.5. Represents a crystal-clear appearance in a white wine, showing no signs of defects.



Fig. 3.6. Illustrates a Protein-haze defect within a white wine. The Protein-haze is caused by warmed excess protein within the wine which coagulates to form a haze. This can be prevented through fining with bentonite.



Fig. 3.7. Shows calcium-tartrate crystals in a white wine. This is not a manufacturing defect but more of a cosmetic irritant. It is caused through attraction of various acids and calcium along with cold storage conditions.



Fig 3.8. shows typical sediment that is found in older, heavily macerated and unfiltered wines. This is not a defect and is totally normal. It is made up of a combination of acids and phenolic substances (color pigments and tannin). As wines age, their phenolic substances coagulate with the acids to form the sediment. In time this results in a lighter wine with a larger bottle ullage because the sediment requires less space due to the compactness of its coagulated form.