

# Wine tasting like a pro

## Host a Tuscan wine competition at home

By Tricia Conover

Whether you are a wine novice or a serious wine collector, tasting competition events are fun and instructive. Wine professionals like me advise new wine enthusiasts to increase their "sensory radar" by sampling as many wines as possible. They recommend matching a winemaker's tasting notes with your own

handwritten observations. Wine professionals stress immediate note-taking to prevent recall problems. "Can you imagine remembering everything about wines after tasting 100 of them? Like wine judges have to do at a competition?" said one of my first wine instructors who regularly judges international wine competitions.

### Top 10 suggestions for a successful tasting event:

1. Decide on the tasting event format. Will you do a blind tasting and set up a competition for the guests to match a concealed bottle to given winemaker notes accurately? Will you do a vertical tasting of different vintages of the same wine? Will you do a horizontal tasting of multiple wines from the same vintage? Or, simply, will you provide a tasting flight of multiple varietals, vintages, and winemakers to satisfy many types of wine drinkers? Know your guests and decide the format.
2. Have paper wrappers or bags available to hide the wine bottle identification for a blind tasting format. Make sure the bottles are hidden before the event begins. Number the bottles 1-6.
3. Pair finger foods with the wines. Wine-friendly foods such as cheeses, meats, bruschetta, pizza, etc. should be provided. Gourmet dining clubs/groups enjoy being "assigned" a wine to match with a food they will prepare. Consider asking guests to provide the appetizers or desserts.
4. Utilize measured stoppers so guests can sample 25-30 ml. of wine. There are about 25 tastings per bottle. Measured stoppers can be found at wine supply stores.
5. Prepare a score and tasting notes sheet for each participant. Consider having the prices and purchase availability information for your guests' favorite wine selection. Winemaker's notes are easily found on their websites, normally in a section called "Our Winery" or "The Product". Letter each wine note A-G or more to be matched with a numbered bottle. Mix up the order of the wine notes vs. the order of the bottles.
6. Wine tasting methods usually recommend categories of analysis including appearance and color, aroma, fruit and non fruit (or any defect odors), taste including sweetness, acid, tannins, fruit, non-fruit, alcohol level, minerality, and body, finish and complexity. Consider having Le Nez du

Wine sensory detection is a practice sport. This event will help your guests hit the practice field like wine pros.



Vinewine essence bottles available. Guests will be able to distinguish isolated scents like oak, cedar, strawberry, black pepper, cigar box, plum and compare them to the wine and winemaker's notes. These bottles can be purchased on-line or at wine supply stores.

7. Set a time limit—suggest two hours for the wine tasting. Guests' tasting plates will get tired at that point. Have wine disposal buckets available for the "spitons" who want to simply sample, but not drink the wines.
8. Have an end-of-event "reveal" of the correctly paired wines toasting notes. Dramatically cut off the bag and ribbon to reveal the hidden wine. Be festive and give a prize for the most accurate "taster". A bottle of your favorite wine might be the most appropriate prize.
9. Conclude the event with desserts and dessert wine. Remember that the dessert wine should always be sweeter than the dessert—to keep the wine from tasting flat. Suggested dessert wines are a Vin Santo or a Brachetto d'Acqui.
10. Annual tasting parties can be matched to a holiday or season. There are memorable, popular events. Consider a wine tasting party following fall wine harvest season or a vintage release date in the spring.

#### About the Author:

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