

RÖD  WINE

MAKING THE
BEST WINE PICK
WHEN EATING
OUT AND
KEEPING DINING
COMPANIONS
HAPPY TOO!



We have all had our evenings out at a top restaurant for special occasions with friends or family and even dined for business purposes. The menus are distributed around the table and the wine menu makes its way around. Since you might be the host or guest of honor, it makes it to you and now the pressure is on. The server stands by your side after they have taken the food orders and awaits your decision. What wine do you choose? Is it based on style, red, white or rosé? Or is your decision based on price? After all, no one wants to be judged as cheap. Right?

While the circumstance may make one feel under pressure, choosing a wine for such occasions does not have to be so complicated or stressful. Nor does it have to be out of budget. Here are some steps which will help you and your company have an enjoyable wine experience with their meal.

MAKING THE BEST PICK...

STEP 1

Instead of thinking about the pressure you might be under, which you are not, take note of the dishes your dinner companions are making. The best thing to do is to ask them before the server returns to the table to take the orders. Not only will this help you narrow down the choices, but it might even give you some bonus points among your dinner companions. You want them to truly enjoy their meal and even have a great wine to match their food. They will appreciate the attention.

STEP 2

Now that you know what everyone is ordering, narrow down the wine menu. Of course, there is always going to be that one person who orders the fish when everyone else has ordered the steak or pork dish, but you can still make the best of it. You know where to go on the wine menu. Reds. You can't please everyone. Or, maybe you can.

HERE IS HOW...

SCENARIO 1

Say the person who orders the fish or whatever dish that won't go with a red simply doesn't want any red wine you might choose. Or maybe they just dislike red wine. No worry. There is often a good white wine or rosé by-the-glass available. Check the menu for any half-bottle options too, especially if they're planning on having more than one glass. You will pay less for a half-bottle than you would for multiple wines by-the-glass and it is usually better quality. Establishments with a good list of half-bottles are accustomed to single diners. Go with the half-bottle.

SCENARIO 2

Maybe you luck out and the person will go along having the red wine that you order for everyone else. Still though, they're having fish (or chicken). Find the light-bodied reds on the wine list or reds with some complexity and aromatics. Some examples, Pinot Noir (Old World), Chilean Carménère, a Bairrada from Portugal, a Folle Noir (Jurançon Noir) from Provence. These choices will easily please the carnivores with their steaks as well as your guest with the fish.

Now that you have successfully chosen the wine, you can enjoy some light conversation until the bottle arrives. Since you've chosen the wine, you will be the one to take the first sip and approve its quality before it is poured for the rest of the table. Again. No pressure. Really.

TASTING THE WINE...

The server approaches the table and you are once again in the spotlight. If you are quick and clever, which you are, you might be able to avoid the spotlight all-together. If your guests know each other well, hopefully they will just go on and chatter amongst themselves whilst you try the wine. If they don't however, which can be the case during business dinners, introduce them. Take some tips from Bridget Jones' Diary, you know, introduce people with thoughtful details. Don't pretend you haven't seen it. That way they can start conversations on their own and it'll keep the attention away from yourself.

LET'S DO THIS ONE IN STEPS TOO ...

STEP 1

The server presents the wine to you, check to see that the label is what you have ordered. The wine is then uncorked and the cork is given to you or properly placed on a small plate or on the table next to your plate. Before you bring it to your nose and give it a smell, stop. You are not going to smell anything from the cork which will sway you to say whether the wine is good or bad. There is actually a small history to the presentation of the cork to the customer. Read on. We'll save that for the end.

Now the server will pour a small amount of wine in your glass. Give it a good swirl and bring the glass up to your nose, slightly tilted and smell. Does it smell good? Does it have the aromas particular to the wine you chose? Or does it smell off? Corked? Or have another flaw? If it is corked this is sometimes easily noticed on the nose, sometimes not. Take a sip and pull it around your palate. Take note especially of the aromas on the aftertaste (tertiary aromas). If it is off there, then request another bottle. You do not have to change wines and the server cannot refuse.

If you can properly conclude that the wine is deserving of service to the rest of the table then give your approval. Whew! Glad that is over!

STEP 2

ALTERNATE SCENARIO ...

Let's say you have absolutely no clue about wine or how to tell if it is good or bad. Let's say you have absolutely no clue about wine or how to tell if it is good or bad. Ask around the table. It might be better to do this before ordering the wine. See if anyone in your dinner company would be willing to make the order. There might just be one of your dinner guests who might know a thing or two about wine. There is no need to be proud. If one of them volunteers, more bonus points for you and you have just opened another conversation and recognized the prized wine geek at the table who will be more than happy to share their knowledge and pleasure with the rest of your group. And then you can relax.

A wine glass filled with red wine is the central focus, set against a dark, blurred background of a wine cellar or bar. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the glass and the rich color of the wine. The text 'HOW TO SPOT A GOOD WINE...' is overlaid in a large, bold, white font on the left side of the image.

HOW TO SPOT A GOOD WINE...



As a wine consumer, if you have read enough on wine, tried enough wine and consciously took mental or written notes, by now you are able to go out to most wine shops and pick out a good bottle. They are right in front of you, the labels carry the information and you can easily just get out your smartphone and look at any reviews of any wine and get an idea of what you are buying. When you are dining out however, it's a bit different.

Sure, you can familiarize yourself with some notable winery names and such, but there is a lot of wine out there. For a lot of people it is well worth the extra effort to pick a wine they will really enjoy, especially considering the markup on a wine list, when you can get the same bottle at a shop for a third of the price. So how does one order a good wine?

BY THE GLASS

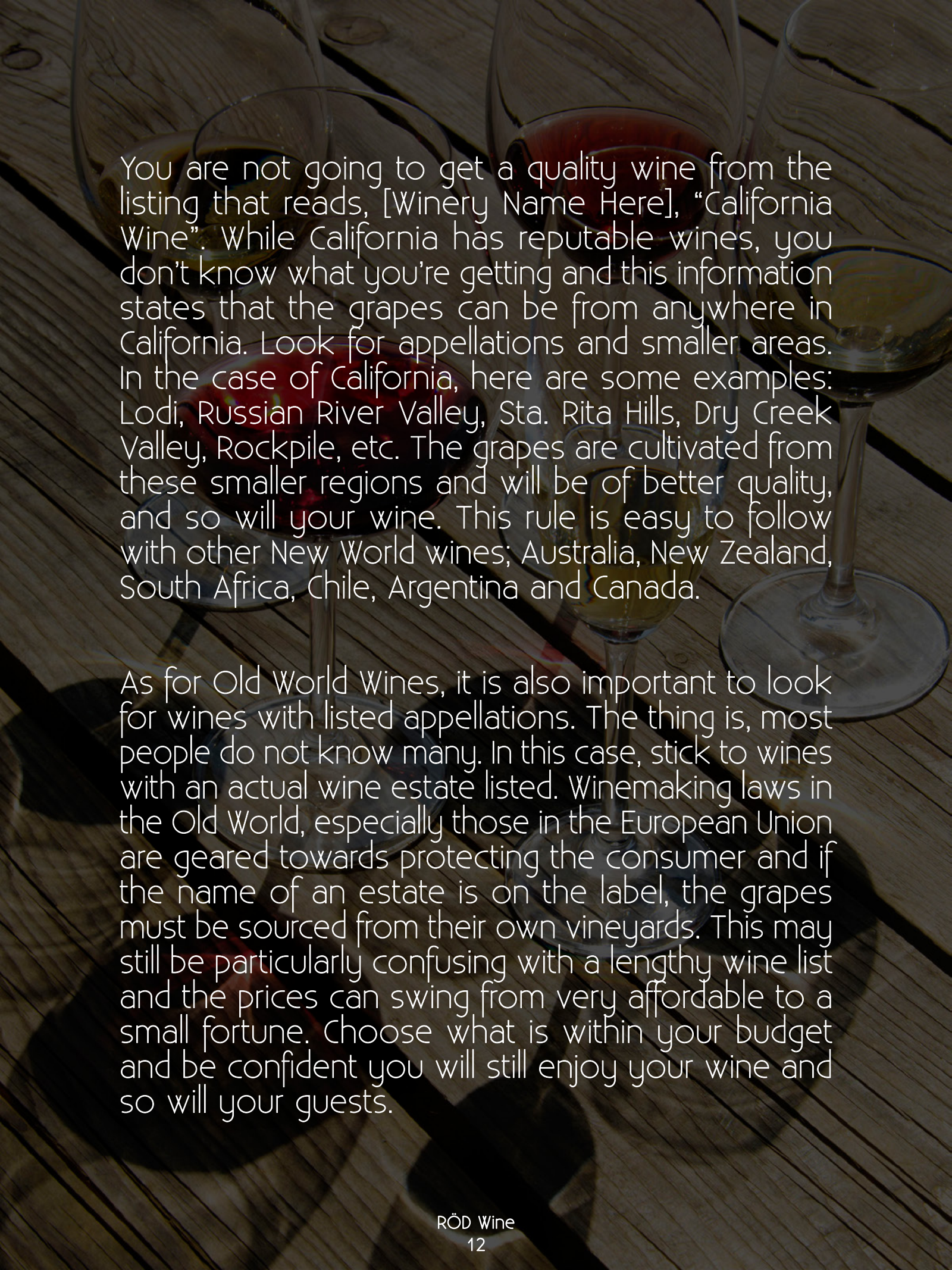
Most restaurants will have a by-the-glass list, and traditionally, we all know these are never the best or even middle-range wines of the establishment. Today, that is changing significantly. Many places are starting to buy their wine in kegs. Not only does the pressurized keg keep the wine fresher than a bottle that is open even for just a few hours, but it is cheaper for the restaurant to keep in stock. There is also less waste. A good restaurant will dump the remaining wine down the sink if a bottle has been open too long. And they can actually offer a quality wine to their customers. Just ask your server how the by-the-glass wines are kept; in bottle or by the keg. Most often you'll already know, as restaurants who offer wine by-the-glass from a keg will advertise.

Then there are some restaurants who offer wine by-the-glass from wine dispensers that keep the bottles at a proper temperature and gassed to keep the wine fresh. Some of these wine dispensers are even calibrated to pour out just a sip or two. You can try a couple of wines (or more) and find one to enjoy a full glass. Take note however, while there is an added value in being able to try different wines, a full bottle will still be a little less money.

BY THE BOTTLE

We all know you can't judge a wine by its label. You can't always judge a wine by the price either. Many people feel the pressure, especially when dining out with business partners that they need to spend a lot of money on a bottle of wine or buy the best bottle. This is not true. Picking out a good wine that everyone will enjoy is what matters, not breaking the monthly budget.

As with shopping for any wine in the wine shop, choosing a quality wine is easy. Look for a wine with the most information on the label and in the case of dining out, on the wine list. A good wine list will have the pertinent label information on the menu. This will include the name of the winery and/or estate, the appellation or region, the subregion if it applies, the grape variety and the vintage. In the case of Old World wines, the varietal(s) may not be listed, however because there are laws for each appellation for what grapes can be used to make their top wines, that is understood, if not by yourself, then by the wine server or sommelier. Just ask.



You are not going to get a quality wine from the listing that reads, [Winery Name Here], “California Wine”. While California has reputable wines, you don’t know what you’re getting and this information states that the grapes can be from anywhere in California. Look for appellations and smaller areas. In the case of California, here are some examples: Lodi, Russian River Valley, Sta. Rita Hills, Dry Creek Valley, Rockpile, etc. The grapes are cultivated from these smaller regions and will be of better quality, and so will your wine. This rule is easy to follow with other New World wines; Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Argentina and Canada.

As for Old World Wines, it is also important to look for wines with listed appellations. The thing is, most people do not know many. In this case, stick to wines with an actual wine estate listed. Winemaking laws in the Old World, especially those in the European Union are geared towards protecting the consumer and if the name of an estate is on the label, the grapes must be sourced from their own vineyards. This may still be particularly confusing with a lengthy wine list and the prices can swing from very affordable to a small fortune. Choose what is within your budget and be confident you will still enjoy your wine and so will your guests.

THANKS FOR READING

It is hoped that you learned some helpful information. It was promised earlier there would be mention of why the cork is presented at the table. Another tidbit us wine geeks will be happy to share at our next dining occasion.

In earlier times, wines in restaurants were often stored in stone or brick basements that were the right conditions and still would be today, but they were dusty and wine labels over time would be damaged, rubbed off, or the print would become illegible. In order to avoid wine fraud and protect consumers, wineries would label their corks with the vintage and the estate. If it was the case their wine bottle's label was damaged and unable to read, then a server bringing it to a customer could prove it was the wine ordered based on the information on the cork. It was never meant for the consumer to smell.