



THE  
FIRST WINE BOOK  
FOR THE YACHTING  
INDUSTRY

The Yacht Cru

# WiNe GU<sup>IDE</sup>DE



by Master of Wine  
Louise SYDBECK

*Riviera Wine*

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SERVICE EXPERTISE PASSION

# Riviera Wine

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Hello dear reader,

The aim of this book is to make you more confident dealing with wine in your daily job on board. It's not a wine book for wine connoisseurs nor is it a book filled with statistics or technical information. I have tried to write it in a clear informative manner mainly focusing on themes and wines most relevant to the

yachting industry whilst still allowing for a broader more general overview of the world of wine. Some of the topics will not be of relevance to senior crew members but can be helpful when you start out in the industry so apologies for sometimes stating the obvious.

After having supplied fine wine to yachts for over 15 years and having thought WSET wine courses to over 350 crew members, it never ceases to surprise me how much knowledge and experience that is required to run the interior of a yacht. On top of all the yachting related skills, senior interior crew is also expected to have a god grasp of wine. Quite challenging really! So with this in mind, and of course the fact that I LOVE wine, I though a wine book for the yachting industry seemed like a grand idea.

I hope you will find it helpful!

In conjunction with this book there is also an educational website where you can find more information, articles and video teaching sessions; [www.theyachtcruwineguide.com](http://www.theyachtcruwineguide.com)

*Louise Sydbeck, MW*

A handwritten signature of Louise Sydbeck in black ink.





## How to taste wine

Learning how to properly taste wine, as opposed to simply enjoying it, is the only way to learn about wine and is therefore also the most logical start to this book. To the average wine consumer, the quirks associated with professional wine tasting may seem unnecessary, if not downright silly. Assessing legs, shade and rim, aroma, structure, length, sniffing and spitting can all, understandably, seem frivolous. However, wine tasting is a fascinating art. It helps wine lovers and professionals alike to correctly judge the maturity, style, quality, and even origin of a given wine. It also forces the taster to put words to sensations, which is hugely helpful in remembering wines, and when describing wine to a client or a friend. It will also improve your food and wine pairing skills, as you will get a better understanding of the structural elements of the wine.

Wine tasting is no longer the reserve of sommeliers or wine buffs - It's a useful skill for anybody involved in the wine industry. As a steward or stewardess, you are likely to be working with some of the most exclusive wines in the world, which is quite a privilege. You will taste wines that most wine lovers can only dream of, so learning to taste like a professional is a great opportunity to accurately assess and appreciate these special bottles. When drinking wine from now on, make a habit of properly tasting by following these four steps. While writing tasting notes for every wine you drink may feel excessive, becoming familiar with these steps and considering this approach will be of tremendous benefit and vastly improve your wine knowledge!

## 1. Appearance

In assessing a wine's appearance, there are three aspects to consider: clarity, colour intensity, and shade.



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Regarding clarity, most wines should be clear, that is, without any haze or sediment. Some wines appear slightly cloudy because the winemaker has decided not to fine or filter them, as these processes can remove some of the wine's complexity and flavour.

The intensity of the colour can hint towards the grape variety. Darker wines tend to be made from thick-skinned varieties and tend to be fuller in body, such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec. A paler wine will usually be lighter in body, with Pinot Noir being the classic example.

The shade of the wine will give an indication as to its maturity. All red wine start its life with an almost purple shade and will eventually evolve to a tawny colour. Depending on the type of wine, the journey from purple to tawny can take just a few years, such as with a simple Beaujolais Nouveau, or several decades for top wines such as Grand Cru Classé Bordeaux. Purple hues in a wine are a sign of youth, while tawny shades suggest maturity. For rosé wines, the shade will

shift from a cooler pink to a more orange hue with age. White wines will go from pale lemon colour to more golden and, eventually, amber if completely oxidised. A white wine showing hints of brown is very likely to be oxidised. There are of course some deliberately oxidised wines, where this colour and associated aromas are simply part of the wine's character. One final consideration with appearance is the wine's legs or tears. These are the droplets that run down slowly on the inside of the glass after swirling. Wines with more legs tend to have high viscosity, a result of either high alcohol, sweetness, or both.

## 2. Nose

A very pleasurable part of wine tasting is simply to smell the wine. To get the most out of the wine, it's important to swirl it around so that oxygen can assist in releasing the aroma. Complex wine can reveal a world of different aromas that continue to develop in the glass. This complexity is also a critical factor when judging wine quality. Simpler wines tend to be rather one-dimensional, with a limited aroma profile. A more complex wine, on the other hand, may offer



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aromas like tar, roses, leather, truffles and smoke, all at the same time.

Smelling wine can cause difficulty for many new tasters, as searching for aromas can feel unfamiliar. “It just smells like wine!” is a common remark. With practice, it becomes evident that there is much more to find. When starting out, I recommend splitting aromas into one of two categories: The first covers fruity, floral and fresh aromas, while the second shows more earthy notes, like mushrooms, leather and smoke. Once you have decided on a category – remembering that some wines will have both – then you can begin to drill down and assess whether what you are detecting is citrus fruit, stone fruit, red fruit or whatever else. White wines tend to be described in terms of white fruits, and red wines with red fruits. The second category of more earthy aromas is mostly relevant for more mature wines.

Use this simplified system to get used to identifying some aromas. When you are comfortable, you can then take things a little further. Wine tasters tend to divide aromas into three categories:

- **Primary aromas**, which come from the grapes and include fruity, herbal and floral notes;
- **Secondary aromas**, which come from winemaking methods including oak and malolactic fermentation, and include things like toast, toffee, almonds, vanilla, cloves, butter, brioche and more;
- **Tertiary aromas**, which come from the ageing in bottle, oak, or both. These aromas include dried fruits like prunes, leather, earth and mushroom.

### 3. Palate

We may think that we can detect flavours with our tongue, but it's not that simple. The tongue can only detect a relatively small range of tastes, namely: salt, acidity, sweetness, bitterness and umami – a savoury substance related to monosodium glutamate. The actual flavours we feel on the palate are in fact thanks to our nose.



To get a full impression of a wine, take a sip and roll it around all parts of your mouth. Next, comes the tricky part: Draw some air through the wine to aerate it while still in your mouth. This will release more flavours, and, despite its inelegance, is the only way to taste a wine properly. More important on the palate than the actual flavour perceptions are the wine's structure and balance. The main structural elements to consider are tannin, acidity, alcohol and sweetness – or lack thereof.

Tannin is only found in red wine and results in a drying, almost bitter sensation on the palate. If you are struggling to detect tannin, taste some black tea that has been steeped for too long and you'll know all about it. All these elements



should be balanced for a wine to be of good quality. Thankfully, it's quite rare today to find wine that is out of balance, as modern winemaking techniques allow for adjustments.



On the palate, one also talks about the body: Is the wine full-bodied, medium-bodied or light-bodied? The higher the alcohol, the fuller-bodied the wine is likely to be. However, it is not alcohol alone that defines the body, but rather an overall impression of all structural elements.

Having assessed how the wine tastes, it's now time to spit – at least if you are tasting at a wine course or professional wine tasting event. Spitting is necessary, despite how unflattering it may sound. Believe me, after your tenth sip of wine you will have lost much of your tasting ability, so you are much better off to get accustomed to spitting.

## 4. Conclusion and assessing quality

The main aspects to assess in your conclusion are quality level and readiness for drinking or maturity. Wine quality can be difficult to evaluate when you first

start tasting. Although wine professionals sometimes disagree on quality, the same criteria are always assessed. These are **balance**, **intensity**, **length** and **complexity**, or **BILC** for short.

### Balance

Though the clear majority of wine today is balanced, it is still something to look for when assessing quality. Balance refers to the structural elements of wine such as acidity, alcohol, sweetness and tannin. Are they all in balance, or does one of the elements stand out in a harsh or excessive manner? Note, however, that a wine can be very sweet and be fully balanced if it has enough acidity to back it up. Or, a wine can be high in alcohol yet still balanced, provided there is enough richness and concentration of fruit in the wine.

### Intensity

Intensity on its own isn't enough to indicate a high-quality wine, but together with the other criteria it certainly is. There are plenty of rather simple wines that can have an intense aroma and flavour, yet be very short and one-dimensional.

### Length

Once you have swallowed or spat the wine, it's time to assess its length or finish, which is a surefire indicator of quality. The finish can be tough to judge when starting out, but it is defined by how long the pleasant flavours of a wine stay on your palate after tasting. The operative word is "pleasant": If the wine is very bitter and leaves you with a long, harsh and bitter feeling, this is not considered as a long finish.

### Complexity

This is a highly desirable quality in a wine and refers to a large array of different aromas and flavours. This is often, though not always, a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary aromas. A simple wine, on the other hand, is more one-dimensional and with a more limited range of aromas, for example offering aromas only of citrus fruits.

### Personal Preference

Whether or not you like a wine can be a good starting point in evaluating the wine, but just because you love it doesn't necessarily indicate objective quality. Many consumers love crisp, fresh and fruit-driven wines like Provence rosé, Italian Pinot Grigio and Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. Though there are great

examples of these styles, there are also plenty of rather one-dimensional examples lacking in depth and quality. Try to be objective in your assessments, and focus on the key quality aspects we've outlined here. This approach will take you a long way in assessing quality.

### Tasting Notes

Another great habit is to start taking notes. Collect your notes in a tasting book, on your phone, in a wine app or anywhere else that it's easy to access. Forcing you to put words to your sensations will help you to remember the wine, and help to describe a wine with ease when you need to. It may feel a little repetitive at first, though it's a great way to get fully immersed in the world of wine!



## Food and wine pairing



This is probably one of the most pleasurable aspects of learning about wine, yet it often becomes more complicated than it should be. The key factor when pairing wine and food is personal preference. Most people prefer a robust red wine with steak and white wine with smoked salmon, but if you prefer a Chardonnay with your steak, that's fine too. Aside from personal preference, there are several helpful guidelines to follow in order to find the best pairings and to avoid some bad matches.

Traditionally, professional food and wine recommendations were based on classic combinations that considered aspects such as the weight of the food and wine, acidity, sweetness, flavour intensity and fat. More recently, a more modern view has emerged focusing on four key components in the wine and food: sweetness, umami (a savoury taste which is distinct from the other primary tastes), acid and salt. This is a huge topic, so this section will provide a short overview to get you started. The classic guidelines will be explained first, followed by the more modern viewpoint.

## Stay Local

Many wines, especially in the old world, have been made to suit local cuisine. If in doubt about what to serve, a local wine can be a good place to start for local cuisine. For example, much Italian food is based on tomato and garlic, both of which are very high in acid. Most Italian wines are also high in acid, and therefore make a good match for this kind of food. Another example is goat's cheese and Sauvignon Blanc. Sancerre and Pouilly Fumé, both made from Sauvignon Blanc in France's Loire Valley, are perfect matches for goat's cheese which is produced in this region. Other examples are boeuf bourguignon with red Burgundy, oysters with Muscadet and truffles with Barolo.

## Weight

Another key consideration is weight; a light-bodied wine is suitable for a

“A local wine can be a good place to start for local cuisine

lightweight food. For example, if one were to serve a full-bodied, creamy Chardonnay to accompany a light salad, the wine would be overpowering and the salad tasteless. The goal of food and wine pairing is to have the wine and food co-exist and allow each to express its character without being dominated by the other. A better suggestion for a light salad would be a fresher and crisper wine such as a Pinot Grigio or a Sauvignon Blanc. On

the other hand, a heavyweight food, such as a mushroom risotto would overpower a light-bodied wine, and so the oaky, creamy Chardonnay would be a good choice.

## Flavour Intensity

Flavour is another important aspect. A full-flavoured wine will overpower a very mildly flavoured dish and vice versa. A full-flavoured and full-bodied Barossa Shiraz is an excellent match for BBQ meat because both food and wine are spicy and full of flavour. A lighter red such as a Beaujolais, however, would not be able to compete with the intensity of the food. Related here is the classic rule of pairing white wine - or a light red - with white meat, and red wine with red meat.

## Acidity

When pairing acidic food with wine, it is important that the wine has equal or higher acidity than the food, to create balance. Gambas with a lime dressing, for example, would be well matched with a crisp white wine with naturally high





## Fat



We mentioned that weighty food should be paired with full-bodied wine, though fatty foods can be a little different. Sometimes the best match here is a wine with high acidity to counterbalance the fat. Smoked salmon is heavy and relatively high in fat, and is a great match with Champagne or Chablis. The naturally high acid in these wines will cut through the fat and make the meal seem lighter and more refreshing.

## Red Wine with Fish

Generally speaking, pairing red wine with fish is not recommended. If you don't know what you're doing or haven't tried the combination before, you should choose a white wine. Red wines contain tannins, and in combination with certain umami-rich fish, they create a metallic and bitter taste which can be quite unpleasant. As is always the case with wine, there are exceptions: reds that do work well with meatier fish are low in tannins and light in body, such as Beaujolais or red Sancerre.

## Sweetness

Sweet foods need sweet wine. Otherwise, the wine will taste sour, and the dessert will not show its full potential. Pairing a lemon meringue pie with a full-bodied dry red does a disservice to both the food and the wine. The wine should be as sweet, if not sweeter than, the dessert. Pair chocolate desserts with red Port, or with French dessert wines such as those from Banyuls and Maury. Fruit desserts benefit from a fruitier white wine such as Muscat. Muscat de Beaune de Venise is a prime example.

## Hot Spice

Chilli is one of the trickiest foods to match with wine, though sensitivity to chilli heat varies greatly from one person to another. Thus, this guideline will largely come down to personal preference. Some of the best matches are with off-dry to medium sweet white wines from Alsace, such as Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminer. The wine makes a lovely match with the exotic spiciness and can even soften a hot dish. High acidity and tannin should be

avoided since this can make the heat even more intense and hard.

## Classic Combinations (and Some Personal Favourites!)

One might think that the above would be sufficient to cover food and wine pairing. While it goes a long way, this section would be incomplete without covering the more modern viewpoints mentioned in the introduction.

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Sauternes                                   | blue cheese                |
| Port  | Stilton                    |
| Sauvignon Blanc                             | goat's cheese              |
| Asti  | strawberries               |
| Sauternes (or Vendange Tardive from Alsace) | foie gras                  |
| Vouvray                                     | scallops                   |
| Red Burgundy                                | sushi                      |
| Amarone                                     | Parmesan cheese with honey |
| Banyuls or Maury                            | chocolate dessert          |

The driving force behind this later development is Tim Hanni MW, chef and Master of Wine. He has conducted extensive research on the topic for the past 20 years and has concluded that most traditional guidelines, such as red meat with red wine or seafood with white wine, are just myths. According to Tim, any wine with any food is fine as long as the

seasoning is adapted accordingly, a concept called “flavour balancing”. Many chefs around the world are now adopting this way of thinking, and wine education programs have changed their syllabus to incorporate the new findings.

Simply put, there are two components in food that makes the wine taste more bitter and less fruity - **sweetness** and **umami** (see page 15). Two other components in the food, **salt** and **acid**, will render the wine fruitier, less acidic and smoother. To experience the first effect, pair a sweet dessert with a dry wine. Witness how the wine changes, losing its fruit and roundness and becoming hard and bitter. For a similar effect, pair a food high in umami, such as smoked salmon or asparagus, with a dry and tannic red wine. In other words, umami and sugar in food diminish the enjoyment of the wine. To witness the enhancing effect of flavour balancing on a wine, add lemon or salt to any food and see how the wine becomes fruitier and rounder. Surprisingly, the addition of salt or lemon can even improve a terrible combination such as dry red wine with smoked salmon or asparagus!

Though the concept of flavour balancing does work, it is likely that past traditions and deeply rooted guidelines have already formed our taste preferences.

“ According to recent research, red meat with red wine or seafood with white wine, are just myths.

Experimental tasting environments may reveal that even an unconventional pairing can taste fine once the acid and salt levels are correct and the flavours are

balanced; a Margaux wine with perch in white wine sauce, for example.

## UMAMI

Although quite a new concept to most, Umami is one of our five basic tastes and is described as having a meaty or broth-like taste. It is quite difficult to isolate but to give you an idea, it is the main component of Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) which is widely used in all processed food as a flavour enhancer. Foods that naturally are containing high levels of Umami are for example asparagus, eggs, smoked salmon, cured meat and many hard cheeses. Umami makes the wine taste bitter and less fruity but if the effect is offset by salt and acid the impact is less noticed.

Nonetheless, I am unlikely to choose such a combination in a restaurant. I believe that most people prefer a crisp white wine when they eat fish and a fuller red wine with a steak, even if this is just a concept programmed by tradition. My guess is that the classic guidelines will stay

for many years to come, and that flavour balancing will serve as an interesting complement and as a topic to play with in tasting classes and experimental restaurants with experienced chefs and sommeliers.

## Pairing Wine with People

As mentioned above, this is perhaps the most important aspect of food and wine pairing. Wine is made for our enjoyment and whoever is drinking the wine is, of course, the ultimate judge of whether a combination is successful.

When I started my wine drinking career in my late teens, I thought sweet Asti Spumante was a great match with pasta and ketchup, which I must say I don't agree with any longer! A client of mine once served her charter guests the unusual combination of Pétrus, a legendary and super-expensive Bordeaux wine, with hamburgers. It's certainly not conventional, but I must admit it's a pairing I wouldn't turn down!



## How to Open and Serve a Bottle of Wine



*I*'m aware that many of you won't need to read this section, though after having taught wine courses to over 350 crew members, I think it is worthwhile to include.

For more junior crew members, opening a bottle of wine is not always as straightforward as it may seem – I often hear comments about crumbling corks breaking apart, questions about which corkscrew to use and more. This section will cover everything you need to know to open a bottle of wine with confidence. Serving wine on a yacht can be very different to doing so in a restaurant, particularly when yacht owners or charter guests may have specific requests or habits. Nonetheless, I'll explain how things should be done in a top-class restaurant setting as this is industry best practice.



Let's imagine that your guest has chosen a wine to have with dinner, and now you must present the bottle.

First, it's vital to always handle the bottle with care. With older red wines, the wine may contain a lot of sediment that can be stirred up if the bottle is moved around too much.

When you arrive at the table to present the bottle to the host, it's helpful to gently state the vintage and name of the wine. Wine labels are often full of information, and it may be difficult for the guest to identify that the bottle is the one that they have requested.



Now, it's time to open the bottle. This should always be done in view of the guests, on a side table near theirs. On yachts, this may not always be practical, and opening the bottle in the galley may appear the easier option. In top restaurant service, a sommelier would never open a bottle out of the guests' view, however, as this could lead to doubts about the authenticity of the wine, with the risk that the wine may have been exchanged for something less expensive.



Opening a bottle of wine properly requires a good corkscrew. Though some yachts use other devices like a screw-pull, this is not considered so elegant and would be seriously frowned upon in fine dining. Good corkscrews need not be expensive – the main aspects to look out for are that it has a Teflon screw and that it is double-hinged, as in the photo below. This way, you are considerably less likely to break the cork when opening the bottle..





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After opening a bottle, some people choose to smell the cork. This is an old tradition, the idea being to detect any wine faults. Simply sniffing the cork is not an adequate means of checking for wine faults, however, so the act itself is more for show than anything else. A cork may look and smell fine, yet the wine is corked or have some other defect. Conversely, a cork can look mouldy or wet, yet the wine inside is perfectly fine.

As a result, the only way to truly know if a wine is defective or not is to taste it. Someone should always taste to check that the wine is in good condition before it is poured to the guests. Depending on the quality of the cork itself, as much as 5% of wines sealed under cork may suffer from cork taint (*see page 46*) – hence the importance of tasting the wine before serving to guests.

In wine service, the wine may be checked either by the host at the table or by the sommelier or both. If you don't feel comfortable tasting the wine in front of guests, or you don't know how to spot a faulty wine, then it's always preferable to pour a tasting measure for the host to try (the latter should be done even if you do decide to taste the wine yourself).

Keep in mind that each successive bottle that is opened must be tasted, not just the first one. Let's say that the guests are drinking a Chateau Lafite 2000, and the host decides to order a second bottle of the same wine. For this purpose, it's convenient to have some small glasses to hand, so that you can swiftly pour a small sample of the second (and any subsequent) bottle for the host to check before you continue to top up the guests' glasses.

If the guests go through several bottles of

the same wine, the host may find it an inconvenience to check each and every bottle. In this case, I recommend that you pour a small sample from a bottle that he or she has already approved, and put it aside in a small glass. Later, you can use this sample as a reference point when you open new bottles – you can check that the wine is in good condition by comparing the newly-opened bottle with the approved sample.

Though this may sound like a complicated procedure, or even unnecessary, take caution: In theory, all bottles should be checked before serving. Let's imagine that your guests are enjoying that Chateau Lafite 2000, and the host requests another bottle. You decide not to check it and top up the guests' glasses, only to then discover that the new bottle is corked. Now, you must change all the glasses and open even more of this very expensive wine. You can avoid this entirely by simply checking the wine first.

## Opening a Bottle of Sparkling Wine

Opening Champagne is a far more dangerous procedure than you might think. The pressure inside a bottle of Champagne is around four bars – the same as you'd find inside the tire of a large truck. People have been blinded by having a Champagne cork shoot out during an inattentive or careless opening.

The only equipment you'll need to open Champagne is a clean linen napkin. First,

“Opening Champagne is a far more dangerous procedure than you might think

remove the foil then gently loosen the wire cage. As soon as this is done, it's vital that you keep a finger firmly on the cork, as it is now liable to shoot out with great force at any time. You should remove the wire cage elegantly, though if you find this too tricky, then you can simply loosen it and leave it in place before removing the cork.

Removing the cork is best done by positioning the bottle at a 45° angle and twisting the bottom of the bottle, as opposed to the cork. Twist the bottle carefully while you hold the cork firmly in

place, and you'll have a very slow, controlled and safe opening.

Remember that the sound coming from opening a bottle should be no more

than a light “sigh”, and never a loud or violent pop.







## Decanting Wine



There are two primary reasons for decanting a wine: the first is to separate the wine from any solid matter in the bottle, and the second is to aerate the wine to make it more expressive and accessible in the glass. Decanting to remove sediment is less important with wines made today, as modern winemaking techniques virtually ensure a clear wine even years after bottling. There are exceptions, however. The main reason for decanting today is to allow the wine to come into contact with oxygen. This process of aeration allows the wine to “open up” and release its hidden aromas.

It is mostly red wines that are decanted, though white wines can also benefit from aeration. A third reason for decanting may be merely aesthetic, as discerning diners enjoy the ceremonial aspect of fine wine service at the table.



In the past, winemaking was not as refined as it is today, and it was important to decant all wines, even those that had only been recently bottled. Most wine made today is fined and filtered, limiting the need for decanting to remove sediment. Mature wines often still need to be decanted to ensure they are clear. This should be done with the utmost care however, as decanting very old wine runs the risk of ruining its flavour. As old wine is so fragile, its exposure to large amounts of oxygen can turn it flat and dull in a matter of moments.

Unfortunately, there are no set rules for when a given wine is too old to decant. It will depend on the region, producer and vintage. If in doubt, it is best to ask the owner or charter guest for their preference or to call your supplier for advice.

Young wines also benefit from decanting, though the aim is not the same. The goal here is not to remove sediment – young wines rarely have any – but rather to aerate the wine. The action of decanting itself will bring the wine into contact with air, softening it, making the tannins less grippy and making for greater harmony overall. If the first taste reveals a tannic, grippy or youthful structure, then even inexpensive wines can benefit from decanting. Aerating a young wine several hours before serving it can be highly beneficial. A common misconception, however, is that a wine can be sufficiently aerated just by opening the bottle. This is not the case, as the surface area of the wine exposed to oxygen is too small; only the first few centimetres in the bottle neck will be aerated and not the rest of the bottle.

Decanting for the first time can seem intimidating or complicated, especially in front of guests. It is, however, very simple. To start with, take the wine carefully from where it has been stored, ideally lying on its side in a suitably cool, dark environment. Avoid any rapid movements of the bottle to ensure the sediment stays where it is.

If the bottle is old and you anticipate a lot of sediment, let it stand upright for a couple of hours if possible. When the time comes to decant the wine make sure you have everything you need. This includes a good corkscrew, white linen napkin, decanter, a candle and of course the wine. Slowly pour the wine into the decanter with the candle just below the bottleneck so you can see when the sediment starts to come. Then stop pouring and put down the bottle.



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The wine in the decanter will now be clear and without any solid matter. In older wines it is quite acceptable to have a little sediment in the wine after decanting. This is almost impossible to get rid of unless using a coffee filter, which is simply not permitted in fine wine service! When decanting a young wine for the purpose of aeration, less care needs to be taken when pouring, as there will be no sediment.



## Temperature



Managing temperature for wine service can be difficult enough in a restaurant, let alone on a yacht. Things become extra tricky on board because storage space is limited, and what space is available is often not suitable for wine storage from a temperature control point of view. The issue of temperature is crucial to maximise wine's potential. Temperature is a key factor in how a wine tastes alongside the type of glass used. Warm temperatures will increase the release of aroma molecules and make the wine taste more alcoholic, seeming heavier and less fresh. Cold temperatures, on the other hand, will reduce the release of aromas and mask some off-flavours, making the wine seem crisper and fresher. The ideal service temperature will depend on the style of the wine, including its complexity, body, colour and sweetness.

| Style of Wine                                     | Examples  | Service Temperature                   |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Light to medium-bodied white wines                | Pinot Grigio, Provence rosé, most Sauvignon Blanc         | Chilled 7-10°C (45-50°F)              |
| Medium to full-bodied white wines, often oak-aged | White Burgundy, white Rhône blends                        | Lightly chilled 10-13°C (50-55°F)     |
| Light-bodied red wines                            | Valpolicella, Beaujolais, some young and light Pinot Noir | Lightly chilled 13-14°C (55-57°F)     |
| Medium to full-bodied red wines                   | Most other red wines                                      | "Room temperature" 15-18°C (59-64°F)  |
| Sweet wines                                       | All sweet white wine                                      | Well chilled 6-8°C (43-45°F)          |
| Sparkling wines                                   | Champagne, Cava, Prosecco                                 | Well chilled/chilled 6-10°C (43-50°F) |

## White & Rosé Wine

Most white and rosé wine should be served cool to maximise the delicate flavours of the wine and enhance its freshness. However, wines with medium or full body – often oak-aged – are potentially more complex, and will benefit from being served only lightly chilled, between 10-13°C. This will include most white Burgundy, many premium Chardonnays from the New World, and white Rhône blends. A crisp, light to medium-bodied white wine, such as a Sancerre, most rosé or Pinot Grigio, benefit from a cooler temperature of around 8-10°C. Most fridges today are around 4-6°C, so if taken directly from a refrigerator it will most likely be too cold initially. If this is the case, rinse the wine bottle in warm water for a minute or so, or take it out from the fridge 15 minutes before service. The best option, however, is to store the wine at the correct temperature in the first place.

## Red Wine

The term "room temperature" is common when it comes to wine service. It dates to a time before central heating, when 15-17°C was the average household temperature. This expression is no longer correct, however, as most households, restaurants and, indeed, yachts, have a temperature of between 20-24°C, depending on the season. This temperature range is too warm for wine and would have an adverse impact upon how it tastes. Nonetheless, most wine books today continue to refer to the

“Medium or full body – often oak-aged – are potentially more complex, and will benefit from being served only lightly chilled, between 10-13°C

ideal red wine serving temperature as “room temperature”.

Just like white wines, different styles of reds require different temperatures. A light-bodied red, like a traditional Valpolicella or a Beaujolais, will benefit from being served lightly chilled at around 13–14°C. A medium or full-bodied red, like Bordeaux, Rhône or Australian Shiraz, should be served between 16–18°C. If your yacht is lacking proper wine fridges, just put the red bottle in the fridge a while before serving to bring its temperature down to the correct level.

## Sweet Wine

Sweet wines benefit from the coolest temperatures, around 6–8°C. The reason for this is their high sugar content. A lightly-chilled sweet wine will often seem heavy and cloying, and lacking in freshness. As the cold temperature also gives the impression of an overall fresher and crisper wine with higher acidity, it's imperative to serve sweet wines well-chilled. At the wrong temperature, a sweet wine can easily seem out of balance.

## Sparkling Wine

The range of temperatures for serving sparkling wine is wide, between 6–10°C. A light-bodied, simple wine like most Prosecco, Asti and Cava, will benefit from being served at around 6–8°C, enhancing its freshness and light fruit characteristics. A more sophisticated vintage Champagne, however, would need higher temperatures to fully open up and release

all its complexity. Around 10°C would be more suitable in this case.

## Fortified Wine

There are many different styles of fortified wine, and ideal service temperatures will vary according to style. The most common styles in yachting are Port and Sherry. White Port should be served well chilled, tawny Port lightly chilled, and vintage Port at room temperature. Classic Fino Sherry is best served chilled at around 7–10°C, while Oloroso and Amontillado should be served lightly chilled (*see page 112*).

## Practical Considerations

“ It’s virtually impossible to achieve the perfect serving temperature for each and every wine

It’s virtually impossible to achieve the perfect serving temperature for each and every wine. To start with, there are very few yachts equipped with adequate wine fridges to accommodate the guidelines discussed above. Additionally, if served on a hot summer day on the aft-deck, the temperature will change rapidly as soon as the wine is poured into the glass. Especially if the service is taking place in a hot temperature, it is better to have the white or rosé wine on ice, even if it may be too cold at first. This way, the wine will be pleasant to drink for longer than it would if you were to start serving at the correct temperature. With indoor service, in a cool environment, it is easier to serve at the correct temperature from the outset.





## How to build and manage a wine list

Given the luxury and prestige of yachting, you would think that having an impressive, carefully selected wine list on board would be standard. That's rarely the case, however. Over the last 15 years of supplying and consulting in the industry it is clear that finding a great wine selection on yachts is indeed rare. This is very understandable though. First, yachts do not have sommeliers on board. There is rarely someone on the crew with the time or expertise to craft a well-planned list, as there would be in any top restaurant. This is not to downplay the great wine knowledge of many crew members, but rather to highlight that the role of sommelier simply does not exist here. Instead, this work tends to fall to the chief steward or chief stewardess, who will have many other responsibilities and skills and from whom it would be unfair to expect the sort of in-depth wine

knowledge you'd expect of a sommelier or other wine professional.

There is also the issue of crew turnover. Yachts frequently change crew, and so wine selections tend to be incomplete or scattered. New crew members may want to add their preferences to the list, which may not necessarily be in tune with the existing list.

Another consideration is the preference of the yacht's owner. Some owners have very strict guidelines on which wines to keep on board, leaving the person in charge with no choice but to follow instructions. Owners' requests are often heavily label-focused, with choices made on perceptions of prestige as opposed to any particular wine knowledge or insight. That's not all. Yachts that are for charter may have separate selections for the owner and charter guests. Space and storage are also a major concern. With respect to these and many other issues, it

would be impossible to suggest a one-size-fits-all wine list solution. Each yacht has its own combination of variables in play and will need its own approach to wine selection. Instead, I will give guidelines on how to create a good, balanced and broad wine selection that will have something for all palates, and, most importantly, allow for good food and wine pairing.

Before we continue, it's important to bear in mind that, as with everything in wine, personal preference counts for a lot. What is a great wine list to

some might not be considered as such by others.

One definition of a great wine list that I find very true comes from American sommelier Joe Campanale:

*“A great wine list must first and foremost complement the chef's food and be a good representation of the style of cuisine offered. It should have options for many different types of wine drinkers, both regarding price point and style. It must be presented clearly so that it's easy to navigate for the guest. It must feature wines that are craft products and are not made industrially. When all of that is accomplished, it can reach its highest point: a work of passion for a dedicated wine director or sommelier who knows the wines well and loves sharing them with their guests.”*

Though this definition may appear difficult to attain for all yachts, it is an excellent standard towards which to aspire. Keep it in mind when you start putting your wine selection together. First, though, let's look at the basics: the structure of the list, wine styles and

presentation, followed by some tips on how to manage your wine selection.

## Structure

A wine list should be structured in a logical order, echoing the format of the meal. It should start with sparkling wines, followed by whites, rosés, reds and dessert wines. Under each category, the wines should be listed according to their origin. The way to structure the list depends on the size of the selection of course. If a yacht has

less than ten references each for red and white wines, it's sufficient to simply list them under the categories “white wine” and “red wine”. For a medium-sized selection, it is suitable to list the wines under their different countries. For more extensive ranges, the wines should be organised by country and region.

To illustrate, an example: Under the heading of “White Wine”, a logical place to start would be “France”. Under the sub-heading of “France”, you would then list the different regions whose wines are represented. Typically, you might find “Loire”, “Burgundy”, “Alsace”, “Rhône” and “Bordeaux”. Then, list your Italian whites. If you have a broad selection, you should also list these under regional subheadings, though for shorter lists the simple heading “Italy” will suffice. Follow this model too for your red wines. For rosé and dessert wine, it is enough to simply list the wines under the category headings “Rosé Wine” and “Dessert Wine”. When listing the names of individual wines, use a consistent format. Start (or

“ What is a great wine list to some might not be considered as such by others

finish) with the vintage, followed by the name of the producer and the region of origin. For example, simply listing a wine as “Puligny-Montrachet” is not sufficient. This is just the region, and without stating the producer and vintage it doesn’t offer the client enough information to make an informed choice. This may seem obvious to many, but I have seen lots of wine lists where basic information is missing.

Below you can find an example wine list in a logical structure for a small to medium-sized selection, grouped by country and with the wine names written out in a logical manner.

## Wine Selection

A good wine list should have something that pleases all palates and enables good food and wine pairing. This requires some thought regarding the styles of wine chosen. I have sometimes come across lists with only oaked Chardonnay, for example, and though this is a lovely and classic style, it is not to everybody’s taste and will not be suitable for all types of food. It needs to be accompanied by other styles if the list is to be balanced.

Let’s start with the **sparkling wines** as this is where a meal tends to start. I

recommend stocking at least one Brut Champagne, one rosé Champagne and one or two prestige Champagnes, such as

Cristal or Krug. Prosecco is very popular and thus may make a welcome addition. Another option is Franciacorta; another Italian sparkling wine made using the traditional method. A quality Spanish Cava

will also make a good addition.

In **white wine**, it’s important to have at least three or four different styles represented. First, you’ll want crisp, light and unoaked whites, like most Sauvignon Blanc, Chablis and Pinot Grigio. The second style should be medium to full-bodied oaked whites like Puligny-Montrachet, Meursault, and New World Chardonnay. A third style would be aromatic whites with some residual sugar, like an off-dry Gewürztraminer or Pinot Gris, to go with more exotic spicy dishes. For **rosé**, most people like crisp, fresh and fruit-driven styles, so this is a must. Lately, there has been strong growth of more serious wines in this category so I would recommend adding an oak-aged version too.

Your **red wine selection** would cover light and full-bodied styles. Lighter styles relevant to yachting will typically be quality red Burgundy, from the Pinot Noir grape. Fuller-bodied wines can include Bordeaux, Tuscany and lots of New World reds – though, of course, this is a broad generalisation. If possible, also try to have a variation in maturity levels, so that all wines are not from the same vintage and your guests can enjoy both young and old wines.

**Dessert wine** is a category that is very limited in yachting – and, sadly, in the rest of the world! Nonetheless, you should have a couple of dessert wines

on every list. You should stock a Sauternes and something from another country or region, such as Alsace, Vin Santo from Italy, or Tokaji from Hungary.

Regarding producers, I recommend that

“A good wine list should have something that pleases all palates and enables good food and wine pairing.”