

## CHOOSING A RESTAURANT FOR THE WINE LIST

As a normal restaurant patron we choose restaurants by the food and its reputation for food. If you enjoy wine you should look at a restaurant's wine list by the glass. This is a relatively easy thing to do with most restaurants. Today even the smaller ones have a websites. The restaurant should post its wine list along with the menu on their website. In this article I will attempt to give you some tips on how to pick a wine in a restaurant setting.

In selecting a restaurant to patronize for the first time you will tend to use the usual procedures, methods and criteria. The main reasons for choosing an establishment to visit are its reputation, the type of cuisine, and reviews that you have read. But, do you ever consider its wine selection by the glass? Assuming you are similar to most people who dine out, you only drink two glasses each. You and the others joining you rarely drink or enjoy the same wines, red, white, Rose', or other wine varietals; thus making purchasing a bottle impractical. Choosing a glass or two of wine becomes a consideration in the selection of the restaurant. The majority of us would never consider investigating a restaurants' selection of wine by the glass at the same time as we are investigating the food they serve, but this should be a consideration too. Unfortunately, by the time we get to the restaurant it is too late.

The purpose of this article is to make you aware of the pitfalls of not adequately investigating the wine situation before selecting a restaurant. The first question you should ask when looking for a restaurant to patronize is; does this establishment have an adequate selection of wines by the glass? They should have at least five selections of white wines, and five selections of red wines, and a more adventuresome establishment might even have a rose'. (No white Zinfandel ever, this is not a wine but more like a wine novelty drink.) A restaurant with fewer than five selections of each is not paying adequate attention to its wine service. They should never repeat the same grape varietal more then once in a selection of only five; Chardonnay, Cabernet, etc. As an added comment I would always choose a Cabernet over a Merlot, unless the Merlot is from Bordeaux in France.

You as a wine consumer should never choose a wine by simply asking for wine by the wine varietal, thus allowing your server or bar person to give you a wine of their choosing; this is usually the so called "house wine". Always be discerning, by asking to see the wine list by the glass. Pick the wine from the list. Hopefully, the restaurant has seen the necessity of training its staff adequately to answer all questions about the wines they serve.

This writer is located in Pennsylvania. As an oenophile with my own wine cellar I look to my surrounding states and on line buying for my wines. The restaurants in Pennsylvania are limited to buying through the state store system. This limits the wines that can be obtained and served in Pennsylvania restaurant establishments. As a general rule, when choosing domestic wines it is prudent to keep in mind that the large California wineries, whose names you might recognize may not supply the best wines for the most enjoyable consumption. Living in the western half of the United States or other states without a state controlled system, will generally provide you with a better selection of wines from the wineries in California. As a knowledgeable wine consumer, I have found that the wines from Oregon and Washington states are usually a better buy for the money.

When choosing a restaurant, pick one that has included in its wine selections, French wines; principally from the Beaujolais wine region of France. These restaurants are innovative and more enterprising. The more enterprising restaurants would be likely to include wines from Argentina, New Zealand, Italy, and some from Australia. Wines from Chile are excellent and very reasonable. The Chilean wines come in the same grape varietals as wines from other regions. I would classify the wines from Australia in the same vein as the wines from California. The better restaurants would have a good selection of wines from the Bordeaux region of France. This is the premier wine growing region. Only the best restaurants would carry these wines. There is a country area within Bordeaux which produces reasonably priced Bordeaux wines. However, these are not generally sold and distributed unless you know to look specifically for wines from this area. The wines from this area are called "vin de pays D' Oc", this means country wine. Any wines I have

encountered with this on the label have been pleasant and reasonably priced.

Serving wine should be done with care. Wine is a living organism and should be treated as such. It reacts to the environment, especially the red varieties. Red wine needs to breathe. Prior to going over the specific grape varieties, I must dispel a common myth; "room temperature" is not meant to be the temperature of the room in which you are currently drinking your wine. This word is meant to be the temperature of the wine cellar. Different wines are best drunk at different temperatures. Keep in mind that if a red is too cold for your taste, letting it sit at your current room temperature will allow it to breathe more fully, and bring it up to a more palatable temperature for your taste. Temperature is a matter of endless discussion, but it's safe to say that most restaurants as well as most Americans define the phrase "room temperature" to mean the room they are in. As a consequence they serve and consume their red wines too warm. Storing your wines at room temperature or warmer for an extended period of time will speed the aging of the wine. This will also result in the wine being robbed of its aromas and flavors. To properly illustrate these points I will quote from the section of an article by Jon Bonne lifestyle editor of msnbc.com dated September 21, 2005.

"Every wine will have its own optimal serving temperature. But let's establish a few approximate rules of thumb. Note that the typical refrigerator temperature, in the high 30s or low 40s, is too cold for most white wine. If you chill your wine in the fridge, take it out beforehand:

- . Tart, bright white wines: 48-52 degrees
- . Sparkling wine: 50-55 degrees
- . Rich white wines, like an aged chardonnay: 58-68 degrees
- . Light red wines (Chianti, Beaujolais, young pinot noir): 60-65 Degrees
- . Heavy red wines: Bordeaux variety, 63-68 degrees

The perfect temperature for any given wine will depend on how much fruit, tannin and alcohol it contains. No surprise that temperature remains a topic of debate among wine types.

It's a safe bet, though, that you should never serve (or store) a wine above 70 degrees."

These are all good guidelines that work. However, when you are drinking wine in a restaurant setting you do not have control over the way the wine is handled or served. Unfortunately most restaurants do not follow these rules properly. The white wines are usually refrigerated and the open reds stored on the counter or worse on the floor next to the compressor. I am a person who always drinks more than one glass of wine with dinner. I follow a simple rule. I select all the ones I want to drink at the same time, and I almost always order glasses not a bottle. I start with a white which is refrigerated and order the red at the same time. I asked my server to have the bartender pour the red into a glass and put the glass in the refrigerator. This allows the wine to breathe in the glass and also to come down to a more reasonable temperature for drinking. If possible try to confine your red wine selections to other than Bordeaux type wines. These wines can be enjoyed at a higher temperature. In the event that you might have the occasion to buy a bottle of red wine in a restaurant, ask for an ice bucket to bring the red down to the correct temperature. Drink it slowly to allow it to cool for maximum enjoyment. Most of us will not be dining in the caliber of restaurant that would have the wine volume to employ a sommelier full time to deal with these matters.

A few words about wine varietals you will most likely encounter in a restaurant setting. When drinking white wines, Pinot Grigio is usually a dry pleasant Italian varietal wine; however the Pinot Grigio from other areas can be less dry. Try to drink this wine from the Italian vineyards. The more reasonably priced wines from Italy are usually good and substantial. A Sauvignon Blanc is a dry white that is crisp. The best ones are from New Zealand, Oregon or Washington State. A Pinot Gris from these two areas is the German or Alsace version of this Italian

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grape and is like a Sauvignon Blanc but a little less dry. I have recently discovered Chateau Ste Michelle from Washington State. The

Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, and Gewurztraminer varieties from this vineyard in particular get high ratings from the "Wine Spectator." A Vovray is a white semidry wine from the Loire Valley of France and is very nice. It is doubtful that you would find a French Sauvignon Blanc or White Bordeaux wine on most restaurant wine lists but these would be very dry.

When choosing a red wine in a restaurant look for Pinot Noir from other than California if you live in the eastern half of the US. This wine varietal from Oregon, Washington, Italy, Chile, etc would be fine, served as stated above. If you choose a Cabernet, the same rules apply as above. If you must drink a California Cabernet be certain it is at a colder temperature (64 degrees if you can get it). It would be nice to find a restaurant that has a selection of the Beaujolais wines on their wine list. Some of these would be Louis Jadot, George DeBeufe and the B & G Winery, or any of the Village' from this area. If you are really lucky you may find wines from the Cotes Du Rhone area. It is more full bodied red, a little heavier then the Beaujolais, but not as dry as the Bordeaux wines. If you should find a Red Zinfandel, it is mostly indigenous to California. It has a spicy and woody flavor and should follow the normal serving rules for red wines. You can find many articles discussing the difference of Syrah, Petit Syrah and Shiraz grape varietals. To sum it up briefly, Syrah and Shiraz wines are made with the same grape. Australia calls theirs Shiraz, but conventional wisdom holds that they're two different styles. Syrah is thought to be a drier, more restrained wine while Shiraz is thought to be jammier, fruitier.

Follow all or some of my suggestions, and you should enjoy your wine experience more fully. Keep in mind the most enjoyable drinking is always in a more controlled setting such as your home. I usually look for a restaurant without a liquor license; in Pennsylvania we call these "BYOB." This allows me to bring my own wine. Check the rules in your state.

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I have been studying about wine and drinking wine for 35 years. I maintain my wine seller at approximately 300 bottles. I incorporate this knowledge and experience in my professional life. I am a practicing

Accountant in the suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area; I have been practicing for 30 years. My firm specializes in the food and beverage industry. We advise our clients on a variety of issues besides accounting, one of these is wine and their wine sales.

I have written other articles that can be found on "RunningResturants.com", "restuarantreport.com", or on my website [www.dershowitzcompany.biz](http://www.dershowitzcompany.biz). If you have any questions please email me and I will be glad to answer your emails.

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