



How to Maximise Your Enjoyment of Wine

by Tania MacPhee, MacPhee's, everything for the wine enthusiast

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Ask anyone who is passionate about a particular sport or hobby and they'll tell you that to get started, you need the right equipment - a cyclist needs a decent bike and helmet, a golfer needs a good set of clubs. What they don't tell you up front is the kind of stuff that matters - the stuff that makes you feel like you're a part of it - like knowing where everyone meets for that caffeine fix after the Sunday morning ride, or how to get nominated into the best golf course.

The same can be said for anyone getting into wine or getting serious about it. So, how *do* you maximise your enjoyment of wine? Here is a list of ideas/ tips/ stuff that any self confessed wine lover should have. If you can't tick each of these, you're not getting the best out of it, and boy, you're missing out.

Wine Education - expand your wine knowledge

A good way to start here is to get your hands on a good wine book and subscribe to a couple of wine sites plus a magazine or two. The major newspapers have regular features recommending wines so try these and see what you think. You may find that you disagree with some wine writers and that your taste is aligned with others. There's no right and wrong when it comes to wine, all that matters is what *you* like to drink. You could also attend a wine course which is a bit of fun.

Next, get to know a reputable wine retailer and introduce yourself to someone there who has broad knowledge in both Australian and overseas wines. Tell them what you like and don't like and ask them to suggest which wines you should try. Buy a bottle or two then give them feedback on the wine they recommended. If you really like something and it will improve with age, buy a half dozen to pop into the cellar.

When visiting wineries, try a few wines at their cellar door and don't be afraid to ask questions. Again, you can just buy a bottle or two of what you like and subscribe to their mailing list if you really love their wines.

Wine Racks – great for short term drinking

A wine rack at home is fine for short term wine storage, wines that you aim to drink within a couple of months. Of course, your choice of wine rack will depend on a number of factors, including space, budget and aesthetic preference. There are a myriad of wine racks on the market to suit all of the above, but please, please don't keep wines there you plan on cellaring long term.

Wine Storage – start a cellar and maintain good records

There is probably no better sense of satisfaction for a wine enthusiast than opening a bottle of wine you've cellared for a few years. Assuming it was a decent wine to start with, the quality of the wine after cellaring, will depend largely on *how* and *where* it's been cellared.

Ideal conditions for cellaring wine include a consistent low temperature, high humidity, low vibration, minimal lighting and good air flow so storing wine in the home simply doesn't cut it.

Your options here are offsite storage in a professional facility, a good wine cabinet or wine fridge as they are more commonly called, or to build your own cellar. Of course, each option depends on a number of factors and each has their advantages and disadvantages so you really need to do the research to determine the best option.

Serve Wine at its Ideal Drinking Temperature

Whilst *all* wine needs to be cellared at the same storage temperature, its ideal drinking temperature depends on its variety, as the table below clearly illustrates:

Wine Variety	Storage Temperature	Drinking Temperature
Cabernet / Shiraz	14	18
Pinot Noir	14	14
Chardonnay	14	10
Sauvignon Blanc	14	8
Champagne	14	6

Easy to say, but how do you determine the wine's temperature? If you consider that your fridge at home is set at around 4 degrees Celsius, you could take out the bottle of white a bit before drinking, and with reds kept at room temperature (which is around 21 degrees), you could put it in the fridge a bit before drinking. If you want something a bit more precise, there are a number of wine temperature gadgets on the market that will do the trick.

Corkscrews

Get yourself a decent corkscrew. Here are three that I can thoroughly recommend:

1. Screwpull's LM400 Lever Model Corkscrew – a heavy duty corkscrew from a very reputable brand and the easiest corkscrew I have ever used.
2. Forge Laguiole corkscrew – a classic every wine enthusiast should aspire to own.
3. Pulltap corkscrew – a good basic corkscrew to keep in the wine bag or picnic basket.

Decanters

Decanting aerates wine which releases aromas that accentuates the nose and palate and almost every bottle of red will benefit from decanting. Some people collect decanters, but you can't go wrong with the following:

1. Riedel Tyrol Decanter – to impress at your next dinner party.
2. Parabola Decanter or Cantatrice Decanter – something different for you or a great gift for someone else.
3. L'Atelier du Vin Lola Carafe – because it's easy to use everyday.

If you can't be bothered or don't have the time to decant, get a wine finer or wine aerator, which will basically do the same thing. Heck, get one anyway and put it in your wine bag for that weekend getaway.

Glassware

Do yourself a favour and buy some decent wine glasses. Anyone who has ever attended a masterclass where they have tasted the same wine in different 'vessels' will tell you what an incredible difference it makes to the smell and taste of the wine and that you've got to get it right. Here are three glasses you will undoubtedly enjoy:

1. Whilst Riedel is a well known brand, they have so many ranges and shapes that you really need to speak to someone who knows what they're talking about. Riedel Vinnum is a good place to start and buy at least two for your favourite wine variety and you will feel like a king when you drink out of them.

Don't let them get too dusty though, use them whenever you open a great bottle.

2. Spiegelau Authentis – also made of crystal and impressive enough for the dinner party but won't send you broke if someone breaks a glass, so great for everyday use too. Best of all, you can put them straight into the dishwasher.
3. The Wine Enthusiast Fusion Break Resistant Glassware – perfect for outdoor entertaining because it takes a lot to break them. Dishwasher friendly too.

Wine Care

There are a heap of 'wine care' products that make your life easier when it comes to looking after glassware, like decanter cleaning beads, a stemware cleaning brush (which I use almost every night and wouldn't wash a glass with anything else), a stemware drying mat, decanter drainer and the list goes on.

Wine Preservation – for leftover wine

Whenever I talk to people about preserving an opened bottle of wine, they invariably respond with 'but we always finish the bottle'. What they don't get is the flexibility it gives you. It means you can open that special bottle without having to worry that it will go to waste if you don't drink it all. You can also open a bottle of white before dinner and have red with your meal. Most products will preserve your wine for a day or two but there is a new product on the market that will keep your wine as fresh as the day it was opened for up to 10 days. Again, I've listed a few options below:

1. Vacuvin – easy to use manual vacuum pump system that preserves wine for a day or two.
2. Wine Preserva – a thin disc is inserted into the bottle and provides a barrier, keeping wine fresh for up to 5 days.
3. Sowine – unique and high-quality preservation system that keeps your favourite wines at the perfect tasting temperature and preserves your wine for up to 10 days.

Wine Gadgets – toys for the wine enthusiast

This is where we get to the fun stuff, the bits and pieces that you probably didn't know you needed but wouldn't be without once you have them. Examples are label savers, foil cutters, a wine quiz, wine journal, and Le Nez du Vin (a set on scents that allow you to learn about the different smells in wine).

Drink wine at its Peak / Cellar Management tools

Many wine guides will give you an indication of the maturing age of most wines. The idea here, especially if you have bought at least a half dozen, is to try a bottle a couple of years beforehand to see how it's travelling. You can keep manual notes in a wine journal or, if you have the time and discipline, purchase wine software. Don't let the wines go beyond their recommended cellaring dates in hope that they will get better because they won't.

Consider selling wines as your tastes change

You may find that your taste in wine changes over time. If they do, consider selling some of your collection. There are a number of wine auction organisations that are always on the lookout for interesting wines. They generally charge a percentage to do the job and you can put a reserve on the wine.

So, there you have it. I hope I've shed some light on how you, as a wine enthusiast can get the best from your drinking experience. Enjoy!