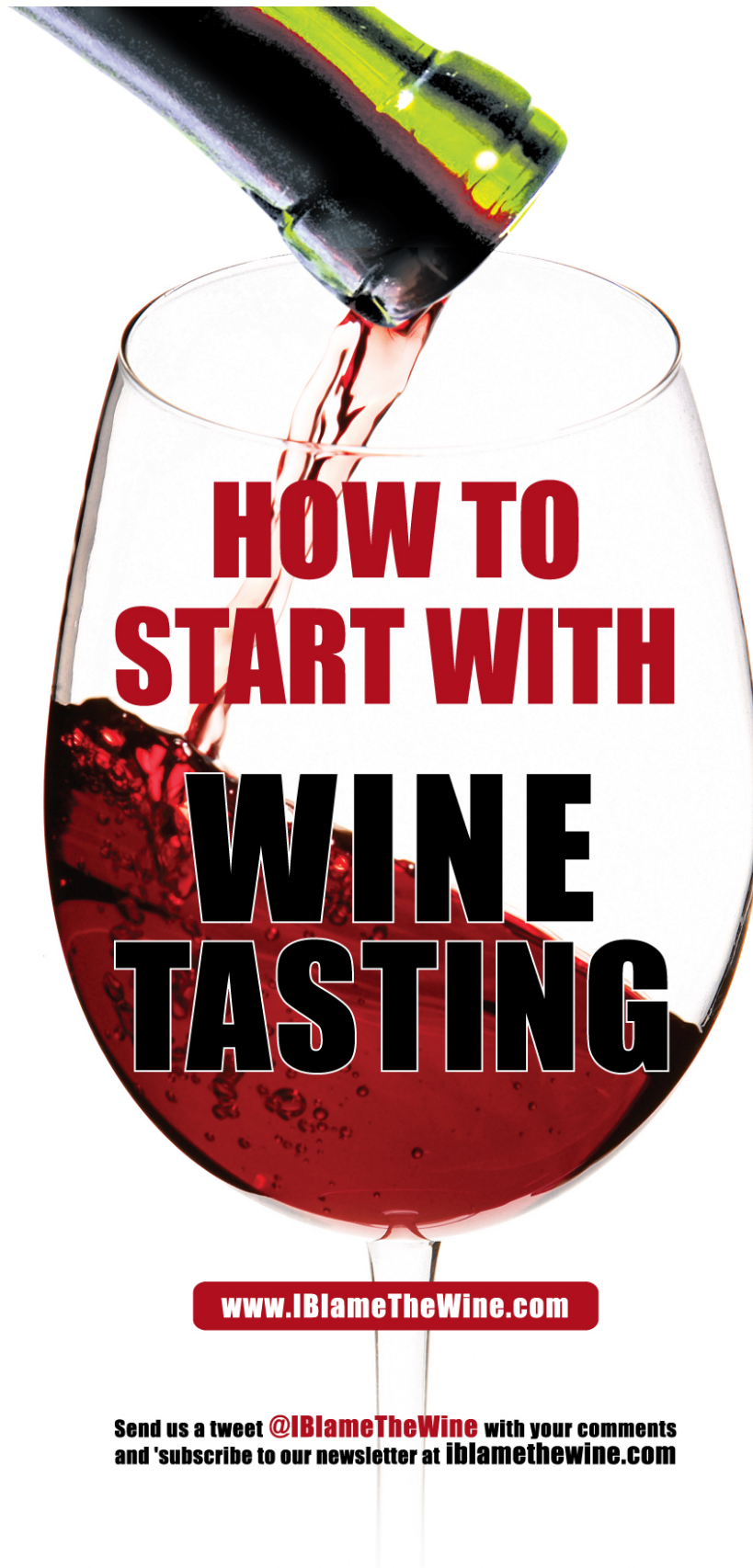


How to start with wine tasting. IBlameTheWine.com



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Welcome to this wine tasting guide. It is designed for wine tasting newbies, but even if you are familiar with the world of wine, you will find something interesting here as well!

My own wine tasting journey was a bit rough - I found it too snobbish, and full of terms I could not understand. After a few years of learning about wine and, this is a part where I should agree with some friends of mine, tasting many wines, I now find a lot of wine tasting reviews quite patronising. Some people tend to offload their views in a father-son manner, which doesn't help to appreciate wines with ease, does it?

This approach of how not to conduct wine tasting is the basis for this guide: no snobbery, just a few facts and hopefully a lot of inspiration to buy wines and try this all for yourself!



[I Blame The Wine](#) is my creation to further explore and discover the world of organic wines and share my findings with you - welcome to visit my Top Organic Wines page, or browse through all organic wines in order to buy wines online with confidence.

With this short guide you can set up your own tasting and share your findings with us. Bon voyage!

Why do we even do wine tasting?

Wine is an important staple in any dinner party, event, soiree, and evening with friends; well, you name it.

Wine tasting is a way of appreciating wine in a more mindful way: enjoying this sensory experience more by appreciating the flavour detail, how complex is the wine, and how well it can match to a particular food. Wine can

be a topic of conversation itself or provide an stepping stone to other subjects
- serious or fun.

What do you have in mind? Having the goals set will definitely help you to think about what's important. Are you after some entertaining evening? Well, then think about some games, be it role-playing, card or trivia one to go with your wine tasting - it will be fun. Do you want to invite friends to learn more about wine? It will be a bit different type of fun - more about wine flavours, be it tasting similar grape varieties or wines from the same country. Is it about food and sensory experience first? Have a look at my quick 'Basic matches' section to see how even the world's simplest foods can influence wines - from apples and biscuits, to cheese, meats and nuts.

Most importantly, only knowing why are you hosting this, and what makes you happy as a host, you can say that it is a success. Get your answer to this 'Why' question, it is almost like doing half the prep. Awesome.

What will you need for a wine tasting

Environment

As a generic rule, you need bright environment with a table. You will need to look at your wines assessing the colour, so it would be easier to do by tilting the glass against some white surface, be it your table or a wall. An optional extra of a spittoon is needed when you are tasting many wines and do not want to reach a state of flux too early!

You may want to supply paper and pens for writing the notes. If you really want to develop this skill then the more you do that, the more you progress (just mind drinkaware.co.uk please!)

Glasses

You should be filling your ISO wine tasting glass (215 ml), or any good wine glass to a about 50 ml mark, so it is not half, but not too little as well. You will need to hold it at the stem and swirl a little bit, so that is why the

amount of wine in the glass should have some freedom to move around, aerate and play a bit.

The only exception is sparkling wines - they will need to be assessed in a flute type of a glass.

Your tasting glasses do not need to be expensive, you can shop around and buy simple ISO glasses for under £15, whereas some retailers offer Riedel glasses, those can be much more expensive. Have a look at my [Wine Gifts](#) selection, it features ISO glasses and more fancy Riedel ones.

Some people wonder whether the glass will be an important factor. The tulip shape of most glasses is essential, the amount you are to pour in it as well, the rest is an optional extra. When you progress on your tasting journey, you may wish to buy some grape variety specific glasses, they will enhance your experience, but you need to master the basics first!

Wine

When considering which wines to buy, please refer to the next chapter. You will need to think about wines that are suitable for a particular occasion. In example, on a very cold rainy day I will prefer to engage in a tasting of a round, juicy and maybe slightly oaked red wine, whereas a clear, warm and sunny day will probably make you want to try something refreshing like a white or rose one.

You should also prepare wine well - think about a serving temperature: room temperature of 18-19 C is appropriate for reds, whereas younger and more delicate reds alongside with rose wines should be slightly chilled (15), 10-12 degrees Celsius is the temperature of well chilled white wine and, finally, your sparklers should be served under 10 C.

Many will also recommend to pour your wine into a decanter. Please note, that it is only required for mature reds in order to ensure you are not consuming any sediment (which can occur naturally when your wine spent quite a few years in that bottle). For the rest of the reds it will only speed up the aeration, so if you are keen to speed up the tasting, you can use a decanter as well. As a general rule, do not decant white wines, the delicate flavours will evaporate quickly.

Company

My firm belief is that your tasting experience is greatly influenced by people who are tasting these wines with you. Consider pleasant and calming music, and definitely no major smell intrusions, so your guests feel relaxed, comfortable and nothing is interfering with the sensory experience they are about to share.

All this will create a positive atmosphere, and uplifting mood will enhance your wine tasting. Nothing can harm this experience as some angry people, even the best wine will taste bitter in that case.

Ensure positive vibes and an open environment, so your guests can freely express how they taste the wines, no judgement of others!

Snacks

Unless you are matching your wines to particular dishes, you can simply provide finger food and staples like nuts, cheese, charcuterie and crackers to your guests and see how flavour sensations differ depending on the snack. Later on, I will show you an example of how red wine flavour changes (only in your perception) depending on whether you are having an apple slice, a piece of brie cheese, a gluten-free biscuit, a handful of walnuts or a piece of salami (any charcuterie).

Which wines to buy?

This question is not as difficult as it seems - even though you can find dozens of books on wines and find yourself lost with thousands of different wines available in the supermarkets or your independent wine stores. Let's discuss how you can approach this.

I suggest you decide on the type of your wine tasting first. The following choices are the most wide-spread:

1. Same grape variety (say, Cabernet Sauvignon).

It is quite a popular choice, because it is easy to organise, easy to pick the bottles and it offers a lot of learning about wines: you can mix and match Old

World (Europe) and New World, or go for classic and restrained Cabernets from France to contrast them with robust and rich ones from Australia. These are called single varietal wines and in most cases for a wine to have one variety on the label it needs to have more than 70% of that grape variety in the resulting wine. It is always good to check the label whether you're really buying 100% of that variety or not, so you are comparing similar wines really.

Red wine grape varieties include: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah (Shiraz), Garnacha (Grenache), Monastrell (Mourvedre), Tempranillo, Pinot Noir, Gamay, Zinfandel and many more.

White wine grape varieties include: Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc, Viogner, Verdejo, Albarino, Chenin Blanc, and also many more.

It is like with languages - you just need a basic set of words to properly speak the foreign one, but you occasionally look up some unusual word in a dictionary.

Overall, this type of wine tasting is great to better understand the grape variety and provide an introduction how it can taste depending on the climate, use of oak or ageing.

2. Same producer (say, Marques de Caceres, but different vintages).

I would say this is already intermediate to advanced level, because if you buy 2007, 2007, and 2008 vintages and they would taste the same (for some big brands which tend to produce more or less unified product), that will not be an exciting tasting, don't you think?

You may want to check whether there is a difference in those wine samples - one of the easiest ways is to source young, unbaked, baked and aged ones - they will be all quite different and all of you can make your notes how important is winemaking to a resulting wine. In this example the grapes are the same, but what happens in the winery makes the resulting wines so different. Try to also make sure the blend is the same in those wines (i.e. all of them are approx. 60% Tempranillo and 40% Garnacha) and make notes of the differences.

3. Same region or country (say, Priorat or Montsant in Spain).

This can be one of the easiest types of wine tasting, simply because you won't have any mistake in sourcing the wines and it can be as easy or difficult as you want. In addition to that, the results are so unpredictable, so even you, knowing slightly more about the wines, will be learning a lot about how they taste.

You can organise a themed party, say French, and serve three wines from different French regions; and as an optional extra even serve some traditional French food to match with the wines and record your thoughts about this experience. It is a very safe, fun and entertaining way how to start inviting guests for your wine tastings and picking a particular cuisine to cook and match your wines to it.

If you want a bit of a challenge here: source only organic wines!

4. Blind tasting (you can select a few unrelated wines, cover the labels and offer them for a tasting).

Supposedly a very easy way to source wines could be the trickiest one as only more advanced tasters will be able to facilitate it right and learn from each other by sharing their tasting notes. All you need to do is select three unrelated wines, preferably matching them to your food (so you can also assess how well they match with it) and start taking notes about their appearance, how they smell and taste.

Please see my 'Lost for Words' section for additional descriptors of aromas and flavours.

How to assess a wine and compose a tasting note

You know your goals for wine tasting, you have picked your wines, probably cooked something delicious and invited your guests, now it is turn for all of you to taste the wines and compose a tasting note. It can be just an informal discussion, or something more robust as writing down your tasting notes; whatever it is you need to know the basic framework what to describe.

Let's start with *Appearance* - this is where you tilt your glass and look your wine in a bright environment against a white table. Your wine will display the

following ranges:

Red - from purple to ruby then to garnet and tawny to brown.

White - from lemon-green to lemon and then gold to amber and brown.

Rose - from purple to ruby, then garnet, tawny and brown.

Younger wines tend to have lighter colour spectre, lighter bodied wines will also have a wider rim at the edge (some people call it watery).

Appearance can give away whether the wine was oaked or not (especially for whites when the colour is more towards to a gold or amber one), exposed to oxygen or not (brown wines are quite oxidised, hence it is another factor of maturity - aged reds display more garnet colours).

Practice identifying the colour and you will start to learn much more about wines instantly (before even smelling it). It is not magic as you can see!

Aroma is assessed by swirling the wine in your glass and then sticking your nose into the glass and capturing the aromas straight away after the swirling. Some people overdo it and make it look much more pretentious than it is in reality. At the end, all this is done so you can maximise your expose to the aromas the best you can - how you personally will do it, it is up to you!

One fact that you should know about, it was actually one of the major revelations when I started to learn more about wine tasting,- we get more information how the wine tastes from the smell as our nose (and what follows after) has more receptors than your mouth, so when we drink we do not realise that the majority of 'taste information' passed on to you already when you smelled the wine. Amazing, right?

So the aromas could be fruity (citrus, red fruit, stone fruit, black fruit, green fruit, tropical fruit), floral, spicy, of vegetable character (herbal, herbaceous, veggie like beans or olive), oaky or dairy.

Have a look at the 'Lost for words' section for more descriptors.

After sniffing quite a few wines you will be able to say whether the intensity of the aromas is light, medium or pronounced. It will tell you more about the quality, ability to age well and the concentration of flavours even before you taste this wine.

Yes, now you can finally have a sip and, without looking pretentious or on

contrary shy and scared, swirling the wine in your mouth and aerating it a bit (that is what tasters do to enhance the intensity of flavours, not to look silly as some people think) by passing some air through your mouth, *taste the wine*.

When you know you will taste quite a few, you should spit, you will have a full tasting note regardless if you swallow this sip of wine or not!

When you taste your sample, note how dry is the wine - is it bone dry, just dry, off-dry, medium dry, medium sweet or sweet? As a general rule, still reds will be dry, or in some cases (predominantly in the US or Australia) some reds can be off-dry - you can taste some residual sugars there. Whites can be bone dry (i.e. Chablis), dry (most of them), off-dry (some examples of Gewuztraminer and Riesling) and further up the scale (Riesling can go way up, and Semillon can be used for intensely sweet Sauternes).

Assess acidity - is it low, medium or high? This mouth-watering feeling of acidic whites is unmistakable.

Tannin is an unusual word for people new to wine tasting, yet there is nothing to be scared about - tannic wines are the ones that you feel with your gums. You may remember that tingling sensation when you drank a very strong cup of black tea - well that is tannin! Tannins are formed after black grape skins, their pips and stems are thrown to ferment together with the juice - that is why they are found in reds only. You will taste yourself that young reds are normally quite tannic, some varieties are more tannic than others (i.e. Cabernet Sauvignon is much more tannic than Merlot, with the equal ripeness of fruit of course). Just make a note whether it tastes like a low amount of tannins, medium or high. After you are comfortable with this, you can add some descriptors whether they are ripe and soft (when your gums feel it was a round and pleasant sensation), rough and stalky (it is sometimes a case for colder climates' reds), coarse or fine grained (is the sensation heavy or very well integrated).

Alcohol is assessed (without looking at the label, cheeky!) by a warming sensation - strong reds will feel warm and pleasant, whilst lower alcohol whites will not be that warm.

Have you ever been intimidated when asked whether you are looking for a medium or full bodied wine? Well, I was! Several times at least! It is a little bit subjective, and definitely not a light-medium-full scale, it should be at least

5 to 10 points scale to properly say that one rich red will be more full bodied than the other rich red. Yet it is a good place to start - we assess body of a wine by simply thinking how full was the mouth-feel: was it rich and full, or light and delicate?

Now it is your turn to describe the flavours - use similar approach to the one you employed for aromas and break it down to separate flavours like apricots or brambles, citrus fruit or blackcurrants, vanilla or black pepper. It is not surprising that you may get the same (or just a few more actually!) descriptors as you have already noted earlier - it just means your nose was correct!

After you have your flavour descriptors notes you can summarise whether it was light, medium or pronounced. Similar rule applies - wines with pronounced intensity of flavours are simply more concentrated, and of a higher quality. Do not discount wines with medium intensity - a perfectly balanced wines with most of the characteristics described as medium could be extremely pleasant if there are multitude of flavours (complexity) - it is quite often what you find in most prominent Bordeaux chateaux.

Did you notice how long those flavours linger - do they disappear almost instantly or stay with you for almost a minute? This is another conclusion you can make - whether the wine has a short or long finish. The longer the better as it is a sign of quality.

Can you form some sort of *overall impressions* of the wine's quality, balance, suggest some matches to a particular food? Is it typical to its grape or region, or there was something extraordinary? Share your thoughts with your guests - you do not need to come up with the uniform opinion, but it is so interesting what exactly other people think about the wines you both tried just now.

Are you excited to compose your first wine tasting note now?

Lost for words?

Words are important. They serve as anchors - as long as you can link your flavour sensations to particular words, it stays in your memory and you can remember these experiences and evaluate which ones are more pleasant.

Here is a list of descriptors you can look up every time you are just smitten with flavours in a wine.

Basic terms to describe wine characteristics:

Floral

Acacia

Blossom

Camomile

Elderflower

Geranium

Honeysuckle

Iris

Rose

Violet

Fruity

1. Green fruit

Apple

Gooseberry

Grape

Pear

2. Red fruit

Cranberry

Plum

Raspberry

Red cherry

Redcurrant

Strawberry

3. Citrus

Grapefruit

Lemon

Lime

Peel (orange or lemon)

4. Stone fruit

Apricot

Peach

5. Tropical fruit

Banana

Lychee

Mango

Melon

Passion fruit

Pineapple

6. Black fruit

Blackberry

Blackcurrant

Black cherry

Bramble

Blueberry

7. Dried or cooked fruit

Fig

Jam

Kirsch

Prune

Raisin

Stewed fruit

Herbal or vegetable

1. Spicy

Cinnamon

Clove

Ginger

Juniper

Nutmeg

Pepper (black, white)

Vanilla

2. Herbal

Dill

Grass

Lavender

Leafy

Mint

3. Vegetable

Asparagus

Beans

Cabbage

Cucumber

Olives

Peas

Potato

Tomato

4. Oaky

Butterscotch

Cedar

Charred wood

Smoke

Toast

Vanilla

5. Dairy

Biscuit

Bread

Brioche

Butter

Cheese

Cream

Pastry

Toast

Yogurt

6. Aged

Cedar

Hay

Forest floor

Game

Earth

Mineral

Mushroom

Savoury

Smoke

Stony

Tobacco

Wet leaves

Where to buy wine online

There are a lot of online wine offers and deals around, let me present a few, where you can buy wine online with confidence. Rest assured, you are getting a good deal – be it on the mixed wine case or a promotion on your favourite country or grape. I highly recommend the following online wine merchants:



[Majestic Wine](#) Warehouse – shop around their amazing up to 33% off Mix and Match offer. Online wine shopping is easy as their efficient delivery is a

major plus for busy customers.

WaitroseCellar

[Waitrose Cellar](#) – with thousands of wines, hundreds on 1/3 off offer and ethically run business, I believe it is an attractive choice where to buy your wines online.



[Sunday Times Wine Club](#) is packed with attractive wine offers – my favourite is the wine plan – and besides some awesome benefits with your first order, you can still customise your case down to a bottle, whilst keeping your exclusive discount being a wine club member.



[Laithwaite's Wine](#) – tap into the wide selection of wines starting from just £5.99 and try their Wine Plans, mixed cases or maybe your own Wine cellar at [Laithwaite's](#)?

If you want some *examples of mixed cases* you can buy for your party, then look no further:

[Majestic Wine](#) offers 4 mixed red wine cases ranging from £59.88 and some of them offer savings of up to £33! Would it be Smooth and Plummy, or Powerful and Spicy – you decide. Check them out, and remember, you can always construct your own case of 6 or more.

[Waitrose Cellar](#) goes further and their 12-bottle red range goes to 13 different offers ranging from £44 to under £85. The discovery series are of an incredible £44 value and feature Shiraz, Pinot Noir and Cabernet / Merlot cases.

For the ones who already tried the introductory ones, I would recommend trying the case called [Quintessentially Waitrose Reds](#), it doesn't come as cheap (at £83), but all wines are lovingly created 'in association with', and still are £6.92 per bottle.

If you want something even more exclusive, come to [Vintage Wine Gifts](#), they have offered 30 very special cases of more mature red wine cases, they will set you back either £114 for the more affordable case, or a whopping £1380 for 6 bottles of Grange 1996 wine. They feature mostly French St. Emilion or some incredible New World Australian Shiraz wines. Plenty of gifts could be purchased here.

Want to know more *how to select a case of wine* for your wine tasting?

Let's start with something pretty much usual – your workweek. What do you drink with your dinners?

Right, I hear, that depends on what's for dinner! True that, so what are the most common options?

Fish-based

It's rather difficult to suggest a case without knowing how you are going to cook and serve your fish. Yet if you want a top class white wine case with some variety of styles, this [6 bottle](#) one is for you: for under £116 (ouch, that is quite steep) you get two bottles of the best in class Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2014, two bottles of an even lighter, but top quality Pinot Grigio from Friuli and two bottles of full bodied oaky Chardonnay that is creamy, fruity and powerful. It is a hit, but you get it by ordering online at [Majestic Wine](#) with a discount of £35 (already applied).

Poultry

I like matching light or medium bodied reds with your chicken, turkey or poussins, simply because there is this heavenly roundness in your mouth when tannins in your red wines marry with protein in your poultry. It is science, not art! This case of [6 outstanding Burgundy wines](#) is highly recommended for a feast. Priced at £93, it contains 3 whites and 3 reds, which were carefully selected to match the lighter or more robust styles and tastes. One of the reds is organic and biodynamic, so you will be drinking extra good stuff!

Pork

I do not eat Pork often, well, apart from cured meats like jamon serrano; yet it doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy a well cooked pork dish – be it a grilled chop, or something more robust, both technically and flavour-wise. Pork offers a wide variety of flavours – from simplistic and tender grilled ones, to the dishes requiring rich sauces, including cheesy ones and spicy ones. I had a good look around and this time turned to [Sunday Times Wine Club](#), their [6 bottle Clearance wine case](#) is exactly what your party will love. It has Riesling, if your pork dish is slightly spicy, but also rich and powerful reds to match full bodied flavours of pork if it is closer to jamon style. Castillo de Almansa Selección is a glorious Spanish red, which is normally £17.99, and if you buy this 6 bottle mixed case, you get that one for just £9.99, that is what I call a deal!

Red meat and game

I am so much into red meat and game; well the same says my GP, so I am limiting it to something special. This reflects with the same approach to wines to match – they should be rich both in flavour, but in character as well. It was quite exciting to search for a case that will contain a selection of top red wines with different stories, character, flavour, but having some important things in common – an unmissable quality and distinct flavour. I am happy to share it with you – the offer exists! Check this [6 bottle top red wine case by Majestic Wine](#): 2 bottles of top class Rioja (from Alta region), 2 bottles of more mellow, but super elegant Bordeaux (from St-Estephe) and a bombastic flavour explosion of an Ozzie Cabernet, delightfully named ‘Sexy Beast’ (I can only imagine a reaction at the table. That’s what I call sparkling conversation!).

Vegetarian

This is not going to be easy, don’t you think? Vegetarian menu can be very light and fresh, yet this is more or less a typical everyday menu; if a veggie eater wants a feasts, they go for something spiced- aromatic or just flaming hot. I will not be matching wines with the latter – hotness is just not a great friend to alcohol (even beers); yet fresh dishes can be easily matched to this approachable [6 bottle case of white wines by Majestic Wine](#)– even the lightest can be easily matched to Muscadet (it is light, refreshing and clean); whereas a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Ugni Blanc and Colombard will offer more fruit (think sweeter spice or fruity notes in your dishes); to finish off with your more robust vegetarian main course there are two bottles of Chardonnay, bursting with peachy flavours (and bit creamy as well, so you can get away with a richer sauce!) – [view it here](#), it is only £41.94.

Asian-inspired (presumably intensely spiced)

If you are thinking Thai, Chinese or Indian, then forget your beers, you can try something more adventurous – off dry whites! You won’t find mixed cases with off-dry whites as they are a bit too niche, but you can construct your own and include a few bottles of these intensely perfumed, honeyed, and aromatic whites with just a slight touch of residual sugar (it will counteract with spiciness of your food and create a wonderful sensation!) – have a look at this flavoursome [Gewurztraminer](#) from Alsace – it is not overly sweet, so don’t worry, but rich on tropical fruit flavours. It is quite expensive at £17.99, but currently on offer – if you buy two bottles, you get 33% off, so it will be just under £12 at [Majestic Wine](#)!

Comfort food

Rich, bold, comforting – these are the dishes we cook for the cold winters, sitting near the fireplace and enjoying a company of the closest friends. These dishes are predominantly meat-based, with some notable exceptions of a fish pie and kedgeree. My experience is quite limited with good matches with smoked fish, my latest trial with rose wines wasn't very successful I must admit, so I will leave these options to beers and ales actually. As for other types of comfort food as stews, casseroles and pies, they are demanding something robust, flavourful and potentially with a bit of spice, as they can be rich, but lacking spice as a dish. My first recommendation will be to opt in for these wonderful 6 bottles of Rioja – order it as gift as it comes with the wooden box and contains wonderful [Rioja Crianza Marques de Caceres](#). It is priced at £82.94 at [Majestic Wine](#) and can only be bought online – hurry up! If you are sold on Rioja idea, but not sure about buying 6 bottle of the same wine, I can recommend these 6 bottles – an [Explorer case](#), which contains two bottles of Rioja Reserva 2010 CVNE, one of my favourite wine houses in Spain, amongst others. It is just under £50, which includes a discount of £25, so it is an amazing deal!

Ok, let's move on to something less mundane – *dinner parties*!

So have you thought about the menu?

Is it balanced with fish course, meat course and a variety of flavours and textures?

Try this case of [6 bottles](#) that represent some [French regions off the beaten track](#). At £52 it won't break the bank, but instead give you an opportunity to serve 6 distinct styles of wine in one evening, how exciting! Starting from Muscadet (the lightest and the most crisp of the whites, moving on to Chardonnay; and from a lighter red, which is Saint Chinian to a more robust Cote du Rhone one and finally to something full-bodied, rich and mulberry fruit intense.

Is it more sort of a tapas-themed with a lot of nibbles and finger food?

This can be so much varied and range from very light nibbles to robust tapas and 'raciones' – tapas style main courses, so it makes it really difficult to suggest some sort of universal case of wine. Yet this concept can accommodate pescaterians (fish diet), vegetarians and meat-eaters just fine, – just add the variety of tapas dishes! I think I have just found a case for you – this [Party Case from Majestic Wine](#) delivers in so many ways – it has 2 bottles of Prosecco to get your party started (as a welcome drink, but also good with oysters), 2 bottles of a nice Sauvignon Blanc to start with and then 3 bottles of good Chardonnay (fresh and vibrant, no oak involved!) to be

served with salmon canapes and dishes. On the red front you get 2 bottle of plummy and brambly Malbec, and 3 bottles of Rioja Reserva 2010 CVNE – a great intensity Rioja, so typical with strawberries and vanilla flavours.

Is it more of a Sunday roast thing, where you have a large piece of meat and loads of veg and gravy?

Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Is it just another comfort food example? Well, yes and no – it is incredibly satisfying, but also prepared with a lot of herbs, spices and of course the show-stopper, gravy! One of my favourite Spanish reds that always deliver on flavour intensity (to match the gravy in this case) is [Muga Rioja Seleccion Especial](#). It is now sold in a wood box and 6 bottles of this matured wonder costs £137, but there is a reason behind the price and the unique taste. Imagine carefully selected grapes turned into a wine must and then matured 6 months in stainless steel vats, then 30 months in small oak barrels and then further on a year in bottle? It is a truly remarkable job!

Again, if you are not sure about getting a case of 6 same bottles (even though so unique in flavour!), you can opt-in for a [12 bottle mixed red wine case](#) that will cost you £80 (£40 off already applied) and feature some popular BBQ reds that will go as a treat for your roast lunch – 2 different kinds of Malbec (3 bottles each), 3 bottles of rich and spicy Cote du Rhone and extremely powerful, but fruity Australian Shiraz. [Majestic Wine](#) offers this case, as they put it, for food lovers who like powerful, but spicy reds. I cannot agree more.

Ok, maybe not a menu in sight yet, but have you thought about a *cuisine*?

Spanish

I have suggested a few Spanish mixed, red and white cases, but I remember my recent journey to discover good Spanish wines actually started with [Laithwaite's](#): their [Mature Reds](#) of Spain case, which features 5 Gran Reservas and a very smooth red from Valencia, which was a hit with my friends. They were expecting something heavy, but instead got a burst of strawberry-plum flavours, bits of vanilla, yet it is so juicy and round, it can be drank on its own. If you are thinking of a summery garden party with white wines, opt-in for their [Fresh Spanish Whites](#) case, which has it all the popular Spanish whites – Albarino, Rueda, Verdejo.

British

Want to try what Britain has to offer? You will not be disappointed! This case of [6 delicious English wines is on sale at £69](#) and contains 1 bottle of sparkling wine, 1 bottle of rose, 2 bottles of white and 2 bottles of red wines.

Apart from drinking local, you would be also drinking lighter wines – only one is at 13% abv and majority is actually as low in alcoholic strength as 11%! Have a look at [Waitrose Cellar](#).

Portuguese

Portuguese cuisine is very diverse – you can find fish dishes, simply grilled or with a robust sauce; but also flavourful meaty ones, that would be close to what you expect from Spain, but not just. I did try salt cod, a selection of seafood and a few different pieces of cured meat, so if you are planning something along the same lines, you should opt-in for both red and white case, for example this [Laithwaite's Portugal Mix](#), which features pale and refreshing whites, dark ruby robust reds. The wines are made from both International varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, but also from indigenous grape varieties like Touriga Nacional. It is a powerful gem of Portugal – if you are a fan of red powerhouses, you should try it!

French

Nothing screams French more than Burgundy – it is elegant, flavourful, light, and has this little 'something'. This mixed case presents 6 different bottles (3 whites, 3 reds) that represent both the diversity of Burgundy, but its style as well. At £71 it is well priced ([Waitrose Cellar](#)).

Italian

My suggestion is to opt for the moderately priced at [£79 for 6 bottles of Italian red wine](#) (Tuscany, Veneto and Piedmont) from [WaitroseCellar](#) – it offers elegance, fruit and also powerful character respectively, so you can start with Veneto and finish your main course with the one from Piedmont.

Are you expecting guests with very *different tastes*?

Get this case of [6 reds](#) – you get light styles together with bold and rich ones, so everyone can get to drink wine they love. For £55 you get a bottle from Puglia, bold Cabernet Shiraz from Western Australia, Carmenere from Chile, French Roussillon Villages, Pinot Noir from Germany and French Carignan. Available from [Waitrose Cellar](#).

Or is it a *special occasion* and you need a lot of bubbles to complement your exquisite menu?

A unique selection from [Waitrose Cellar with 12 bottles priced at £150](#) consisting of two bottles of Champagne, two bottles of top-notch of Spanish outstanding red from Priorat, also Chateauneuf-du-Pape, and award-winning Lebanese Chateaux Musar. Whites will not disappoint much – two bottles of

a Kiwi classic, Sauvignon Blanc; and two bottles of South African Chardonnay. A truly amazing selection with an included saving of £52 will be a good match for a top class balanced dinner party.

Sparkling wine cases

It can be as simple as buying 6 bottles of Prosecco (why to carry it when you can order it online?), or more extravagant as Veuve Clicquot and Moet and Chandon – [Majestic Wine](#) has it all on one simple page, [visit it](#) to check the offers out.

I hope now you can find a suitable case of wine for your party. Enjoy!

Basic matches: wine and food

Wine and Food pairing is a fruitful topic for many writers, chefs and sommeliers. Let's explore some basic food and wine combinations and how the food affecting the taste of a wine.

Whereas the theory is useful, I am matching these foods (apples, cheese, oat and gluten free biscuits, nuts, cold cuts) with a high in fruit, acidity and round red to illustrate what happens (I am having a glass of Spanish red wine from DO Bierzo).

Apple, will decrease the fruitiness and acidity; make the wine taste more round. Braeburn is the medium sweet and medium in acid, so just be careful with sweeter or more acidic varieties.

If you choose Granny Smith or, dare I say, Bramley apples, they will decrease acidity in wine (may even start to taste slightly flabby), and increase richness, sweetness and fruitiness. You can see that this is the reason you add a squeeze of lemon juice to some of your dishes and salad dressings.

Sweeter apples on contrary will increase bitterness, acidity and make the wine feel more aggressive and astringent; at the same time decreasing its richness, fruitiness and overall mouthfeel. As you can see, sweetness is an unwanted guest here. In most cases sweetness in food and table wines are not a great match, except some Asian inspired dishes, where spices like ginger and hotter chillies are a good counterbalance to sweetness and could be

matched to off-dry wines (think Riesling or Gewürztraminer).

Brie cheese will decrease acidity and increase roundness, leaving the fruit content pretty much how it is; yet because of its complexity, it will make the wine taste more simple. Try milder cheese like soft goats cheese with lighter reds and harder, flavoursome cheeses with more pronounced reds.

Cheese is quite fatty, so you should consider matching it with quite acidic wines, as in general those acidic wines cut through oily and fatty foods well, and the wine becomes richer, slightly sweeter and fruitier.

Gluten free biscuit increases the perception of fruitiness, leaving acidity and roundness as they are. One of my best choices here. If you want to switch from one wine to another it is also a very mild, but effective way to do so.

Walnuts (and other popular nuts) are a wonderful match. Get unsalted nuts to ensure there is no effect of saltiness to your wine. You will feel that the wine started to taste fruitier, slightly more acidic and powerful. Experiment with different nuts to check which ones are your favourite. Almonds are generally very good too.

What does this saltiness you may ask. In terms of wine flavours it actually quite a favourable match as it increases the roundness of the wine and decreases acidity and possible astringency. I personally cut the salt from my cooking as it delivers some amazing health benefits, so just see whether your diet allows salt or not.

Salami and other cold cuts (charcuterie) is a popular choice of protein to match with wines, its main advantage is that it smoothes the tannins, so even a very young wine with astringent tannins will taste nicer. It doesn't affect the fruitiness, but increases roundness, decreases the feel of acid and leaves everything else at its place. These foods contain some salt (sometimes quite a substantial amount, so always ensure to read the label). Proteins in red meats soften the tannins and that is why rare steak will be making very tannic reds as smooth as no other food can do.

What about other types of protein?

Poultry is incredibly versatile. You can start with full bodied whites (think naked Chardonnays or Pinot Gris), rose and light and medium bodied reds, served slightly chilled as well. Same applies to pork.

Fish is normally the food that sparks debates in terms of wine pairing. The only no-go rule for the fish is sweeter tasting and/or very tannic reds - the combination will create quite noticeable metallic taste, and nobody wants that!

Final remark about *sauces*. From simple dressings to rich and substantial emulsions, they are interacting with both - your main food ingredients and the wine. Remember about the weight rule and do not serve light wines with rich sauces - you will not taste the wines

These guidelines will help you to decide how to cook your dishes if you know what you are going to serve as your wines; and at the same time provide guidance for your wine shopping, when you decided what to cook for your party. You can only improve by actually experimenting. My advice is to start with a balancing act, where you try to match the richness of your food with the weight and mouthfeel of the wine. In example, for your light starters search for lighter or medium bodied reds, so neither will overpower, but complement each other. When you feel confident about your skills, you can experiment with contrasting flavours - will your fish supper be matched with slightly chilled medium bodied red wine? Explore, it will be an exciting journey!

Final notes

How to make your wine tasting evening more fun, memorable and exciting?

Wine games can provide you with the answer, be it just for sheer fun, or some learning about wine.

How to start with wine tasting. IBlameTheWine.com



IBlameTheWine.com and Eat.Wine.Play present Wine Wars, our first wine game, based on the popular role-playing game 'Mafia'. It is free, you just need to download the file, print it out and follow the most simple instructions! Have fun.



On the other note, please have a look at The Best Organic Wines, search through All Organic Wines database and find out where to buy organic wines.

Connect with IBlameTheWine.com via Twitter @iblamethewine or join our Facebook or Google+ pages.