

RAISE THE BAR

# Fine wine

Everyone's enjoying it. Truly, the wine drinking craze has gotten us all tipsy. Here's a beginner's guide to wine appreciation

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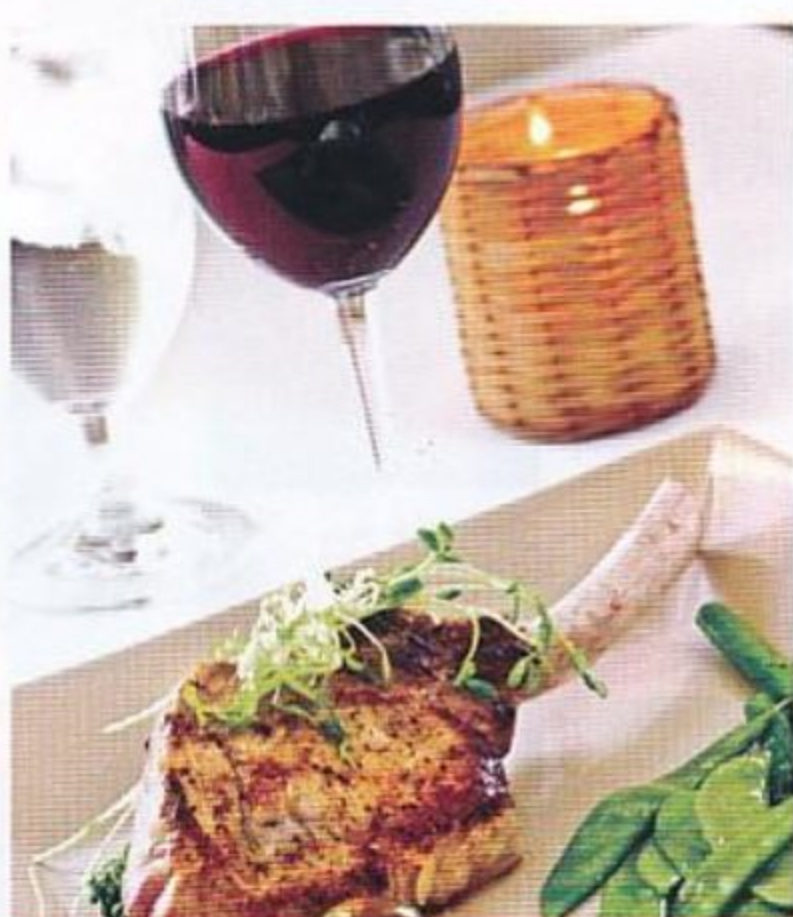
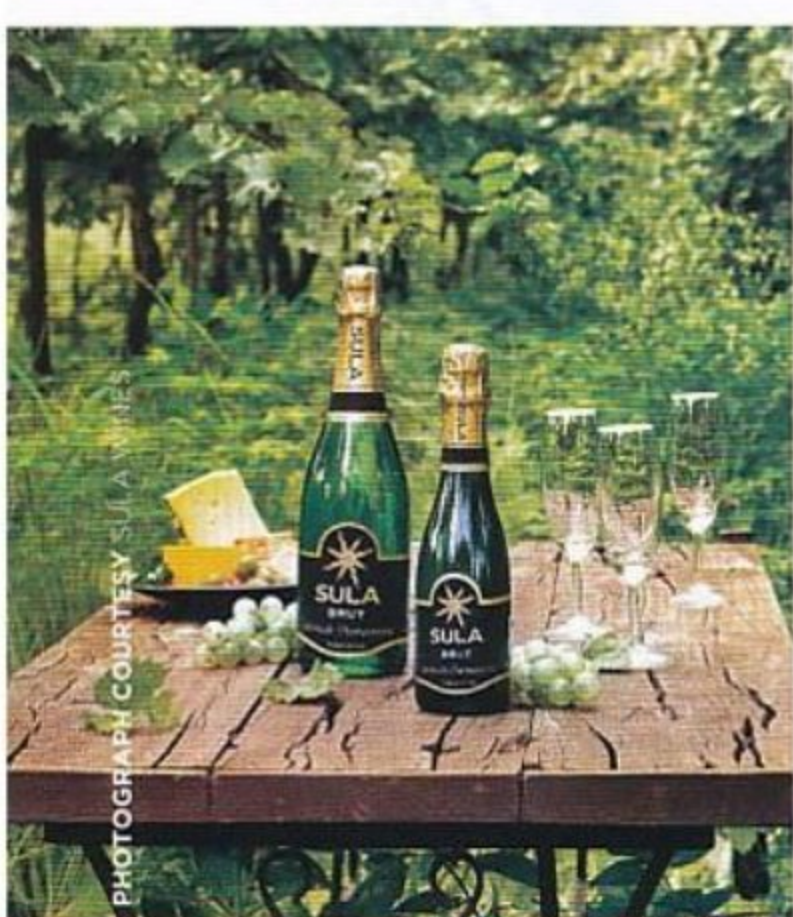
**T**hink about it...until a few years ago, the Indian palate for alcohol was largely restricted to Patiala pegs, beer and white spirits. Wine drinkers were rare and asking for a glass of wine drew gasps of surprise or simply categorised the drinker as a snob.

But all that has changed and we can now discuss Port and Pinot Noir with great authority. So how does one get on to the bandwagon of wine drinking and appreciation? Here's a basic guide that will help you choose and appreciate wine. Santé! Fully harvested grapes are treated differently depending on whether they are to make red, white or rose wine. Red wine is made from black grapes with much of its character coming from tannins. The grapes are crushed (in the olden days by human feet!) now in a machine and then placed in fermentation vats for about 10 to 30 days. Red wine gets its colour from the skin of black grapes as the pigments act as a tinting agent. After this, the fermented wine goes into barrels.

After fermentation the free wine is drained off and solids squeezed to release press wines. A portion of this more tannic liquid may be used at a later stage to balance the finished wine. Some ▶

SPARKLING WINE CONTAINS CARBON DIOXIDE BUBBLES WHICH ARE RELEASED ON OPENING.

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### Served best in...

**Glass is best.** It is odourless, taking away nothing from the aroma and the bouquet of the wine. Glass also being clear, allows us to properly determine the true colour of the wine. Most wine glasses require a long stem so that you can twirl the liquid. The twirling movement excites the wine, opening up its bouquet revealing its personality. Always hold the glass from the base or the stem. At the moment, Riedel is considered the best glass available for wine drinking in the world. Some experts disagree and add that the shape of the glass is more important and that there is no significant difference in the wine by using an expensive brand such as Riedel.

USE ALL WINE, BE IT STILL, SPARKLING, FORTIFIED OR AROMATISED, IS NOTHING BUT FERMENTED GRAPE JUICE. IT MAY BE RED, WHITE OR PINK (ROSE), AND DRY, MEDIUM OR SWEET IN STYLE, WITH AN ALCOHOL CONTENT OF 5.5 TO 14 PER CENT

inexpensive wines may be bottled right away but most are kept to age. White wine comes from white grapes, although black grapes are also used occasionally (without skins). For rose, the black grape skins are removed after 12 to 36 hours—just long enough to impart colour.

### GRAPPA

An aquavit or "water of life", grappa is a fragrant grape brandy that traces its origins to the town of Bassano del Grappa in Italy.

Though the grappa tradition is centuries old, it has recently attained status equivalent to that of single malt whisky or exquisite cognac. While some Italians like to sip it for breakfast, it can also be added to coffee or taken as a digestive after meals. In recent years, grappa makers have reinvented the whole concept of the spirit, turning it into a rare, artisanal luxury.

"Grappa is a great way to end a meal, taken either as a shot or added to an espresso—which the Italian call caffè coretto or 'corrected coffee.' On its own, it can be served on ice or straight in the original calice glass," says Rohinton Mottahed, Executive Assistant Manager, Food & Beverage, Trident BKC, Mumbai.

### AROUND THE WORLD

The Americans came up with Merlot, Australians with Shiraz and the South Africans with the fruity white Chenin

Blanc, as well as aromatic Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and excellent reds from Chile. They started flooding the world markets with their easy to read labels and straightforward styles.

In Asia, it is a slightly different story. Wine is neither cheap, accessible nor part of our culture. Neither is whisky, brandy or beer, but we drink plenty of those. Thankfully today, the Japanese are welcoming Nouveau Beaujolais and the Singaporeans are tucking into chilly crab with champagne.

### FOOD AND WINE

"How do we pair food and wine? There are a number of factors to consider when methodically putting together a match. The most important thing is to consider the 5 tastes and how the components in each will affect the other," says Lindsay Groves, the sommelier at The Oberoi, Mumbai. The 5 major "tastes" are sweet, sour, bitter, salty and umami. Only sweetness/lack of sweetness and acidity are present in wines, whereas all five can be found in food items. Whenever different combinations come in contact with one another, the result can be positive or negative.

### Oriental essences

Cantonese food is most popular in India, which tends to have a bit of red chilli and black pepper spice and is best paired with a full-flavoured slightly off-dry (sweetish to offset the spice) white wine with crisp

acidity like a German or Alsatian Riesling. "Try Peking duck with vintage Champagne or a Puligny-Montrachet from Burgundy. If your preference is red, it could be a Rioja, a New Zealand Pinot Noir and ripe and juicy St.Emilion. Stir fry lovers can opt for whites in Albariño Spain or Pinot Blanc Alsace or a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. If you prefer red wine, a Cote Du Rhone would be a perfect choice," suggests Sommelier, Amit Chavan at Mumbai's Hakkasan Restaurant.

### North Indian tadka

"Contrary to popular belief, rather than toning down spice with sweet fizzy drinks or beer, I find it is more exciting to emphasise the heat with a tannic red (even a Barolo or Barbaresco can happily stand up to a raan). In fact most Italian reds, including the delicious Amarone from the Veneto region of Italy, most Shiraz, and even some Bordeaux are fabulous with our spices," says gourmet chef, Karen Anand.

### Flavours of Lebanon

"One can enjoy a full bodied Cabernet Sauvignon or a Shiraz with food that is high on flavour and proteins," suggests Chef Amit Bharadwaj, Executive Chef, Alila Diwa Goa. The proteins of the food will soften the tannins of these wines and make them easier to drink.

### THE RIGHT WAY

Altaf Shaikh, Restaurant Supervisor of San- Qi, Four Seasons Hotel, Mumbai ▶

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### Storage

Whether white, red, rose or even sparkling wine, always store a bottle lying down, horizontally. This ensures the wine stays in contact with the cork. Otherwise, air will penetrate the bottle and prematurely age or ruin the wine.

### Once opened...

The latest trend worldwide, initially started by brave wine makers in New Zealand and Australia, is screw caps on wine bottles. Studies have indicated that there is much less spoilage with screw caps than traditional corks. Once you open a screw capped wine bottle, you can fill it up with the same wine from another bottle and, as long as there is no air, the wine will last, I am reliably informed, for at least a couple of weeks. Alternatively, you can empty leftover wine into a well washed small glass bottle with a tight screw cap. With a traditional corked bottle, you will have to consume the wine very quickly after opening.



GRAPE SPIRIT IS ADDED TO FORTIFIED WINE, RAISING THE ALCOHOL LEVEL TO 15-22 PER CENT

suggests taking note of the temperature. Check whether it is satisfactory. White and rose wines are best slightly chilled, at 8-10 degrees. Better to be too cold than too warm for either red or white as the temperature increases gradually.

### SEE, SWIRL & SNIFF

Proper wine etiquette will dictate the sommelier/server will then look to pour a small amount of wine for the person ordering the wine. Check the wine first for presence of unwanted bodies. Gently swirl the wine in the glass to release the aroma, give it a sniff, and then taste it. If there is an objectionable or unexpected aroma, the sommelier should recommend further aerating the wine in which case the "off odour" will dissipate, or the bottle could be replaced. Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between unusual aromas that are inherent in certain wines and similar smells that are symptoms of a defect.

After you have taken a sip, the proper etiquette is to nod, say "thank you", "it's fine" or some signal for the sommelier to begin pouring. Wine etiquette dictates that the glass is filled about one third full to allow enough space to swirl the wine. It is not proper etiquette or an acceptable practice to return a wine simply because you do not like it as much as you thought you might.

### HOW GOOD IS 'GOOD'

Wine etiquette is important. But, the idea is to enjoy yourself, especially when in the company of friends. Cecilia Oldne, Head-International Business and Chief Sommelier, Sula Vineyards gives you a low-down on wine etiquette

### Must dos

- Store your wines in a dark room, away from any light source. Keeping them at a low temperature (pref. around 13 is ideal but that is a challenge in India.)
- Serve the wines at the right temperature. A good benchmark is 6 °C for sparkling, 8 °C for whites and 17 °C for reds.
- Serve wines with food (not only in prior!), as wine and food enhance flavours in each other.
- If any wine is left in the bottle, store the wines in the fridge and use the leftovers! Can be kept for up to four days.
- Look for guests in the eyes when raising a toast! 7 years of bad luck or sending a message of mistrust is the alternative!
- Enjoy!

### COMMON MISTAKES

- Hold the glass by its bowl. One must only hold it by its stem since the heat of ones hands will quickly warm the liquid.
- Serve red wine too warm
- Serve tannic wines with spicy food
- Judge the wine by its price tag. Let the taste speak which is the only real judgment!

- Run out of wines. Make sure you have a sufficient amount for the guest.
- Use strong perfumes when attending a wine tasting. Big no!
- Drink too much. Wine of course has a list of health benefits—but in moderation!
- Drink and drive...

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- A sparkling wine as a welcome drink awakens the tasted buds and will get your guests in a good mood. They say that a little sparkle is good for the soul! Try the effects of Hardys Stamp Sparkling or a glass of Piper-Hiedsiek Champagne.
- In India, some say we eat with our eyes. Sula Rose has a lovely colour and is the ideal wine to serve with a buffet. Goes well with everything from salads, to Goan fish as also with chicken tandoori.
- A Shiraz with a slightly peppery character is known to be a perfect marriage with lamb. Try The African Horizon Shiraz with lamb chops.
- A slightly refined Pinot Noir is one of the very few red wines that go well with spicy food. The best value for money available in India is the Cono Sur Pinot Noir from Chile.
- With a spicy dish, that almost burns your mouth, drink a wine with a higher residual sugar. Sweetness balances spices and heat. Try Dindori Viognier or Hardys Riesling Gewurstraminer. ☞