

# The Temperature for Serving Wine

## The Difference between Victory and Disaster

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Serving temperature is one of the most decisive factors influencing how we would enjoy our investment in a bottle of wine and, first and foremost, enables us to evaluate the wine properly regarding aroma, taste and texture.

While indubitably, the matter of personal preference also plays a role, there is an optimal temperature for each and every wine at which the qualities of taste, aroma and texture are best expressed and a deviation of only a few degrees makes the difference between a good experience and an experience that one would want to experience only once.

Many factors affect the taste and texture of a wine – the variety of grapes, the blossoming time in the vineyard, the type of soil, the cultivation method, the vintage, the production procedure and, of course – the serving temperature. The optimal serving temperature is determined primarily by the body of the wine, the sugar level, acidity, stringency (henceforth: tannins)\*, the carbon dioxide levels and the alcohol.

Temperatures that are too low emphasize bitterness, and temperatures that are too high emphasize alcohol and sweetness. In fact, should you serve the exact same wine at two different temperatures, you would obtain two totally different wines. For example, if the same red wine is poured from the same bottle at different temperature levels, it is highly likely that the higher temperature will provide a "jammy" alcoholic Rosé. The wine served at a low temperature will have too high astringency and tannin levels, while that served at the right temperature will be enjoyable and justify your investment in it (provided that you

bought a good wine of good vintage and that the wine was stored properly).

Our tongues can distinguish sweetness, acidity, saltiness and bitterness. The other tastes that we experience in wine originate in the aromatic vapors that make their way into the nasal passages, through the rear of the oral cavity. The lower the temperature, the ability to evaporate those aromatic elements decreases and, accordingly, our ability to distinguish aromas and, visa versa – the higher the temperature, the more the evaporation ability increases and, accordingly, our ability to distinguish aromas. For example, richly aromatic wine (wines made from aromatic grapes such as Gewürztraminer, Muscat and others) can be served at lower temperatures and still preserve excellent aromas.

Applying these insights can make distinguishing aromas a refined pleasure. Our ability to distinguish the aroma of a wine disappears when the serving temperature is under 8°C (with the exception of especially aromatic wines). Serving a wine at a lower temperature than this is a distinct invitation to ignore any possible aroma – both positive and negative. A temperature higher than 20°C will result in increasing both the intensity of the aromas (both pleasant and negative) and our ability to distinguish them. This would result in the wine being less attractive and coarser, with the primary aroma being that of alcohol. We would not be able to distinguish the bouquet and the refinement of the wine. Therefore, the correct serving temperature, the factor which enables distinguishing the development of the good aromas properly, will usually be between 8°C and 18°C, with each wine having its own optimal temperature.



\* **Astringents/tannins** – A sense of dryness or rustication in the mouth, caused by eating tannin – a substance that originates in the grape seed shell. To be found in red wines and other alcoholic beverages.



## White Wines

Generally, white wines are more acidic than red wines and, in contrast to the latter, they contain very little tannin. Consequently these are not sensed. The preferred temperature for serving white wines is between 10°C and 14°C. Young, fresh and aromatic white wines with fresh fruity qualities can be served at around 10°C in order to emphasize these qualities, while less aromatic wines can be served at around 12°C. Serving white wines at higher temperatures than these will emphasize the sweetness, qualities and result in the fresh qualities so much desired in white wines to diminish.

## Rosé Wines

In general, these laws can be applied to rosé wines as well. However, the quantity of tannin found in rosé wines in various quantities must be taken into account in accordance with the style of the wine and the variety of the grapes (red grapes). A rosé with strong tannins should be served at a higher temperature, in order for the tannins to affect our palate. A young rosé wine with less tannins should be served between 10°C and 12°C and full rosé wines with an effectual tannin structure should be served at temperatures between 12°C and 14°C.

## The Effect of Cold Temperatures

The colder a wine, the fresher, fruitier and crispier it will feel, but it will lose its richness. Therefore, full-bodied wines such as heavy body Chardonnay, Vignon, Semion, Heron wines and massive wines from hot

climates will not "give" of themselves and will conceal their qualities if served at too cold a temperature.

## Red Wines

One of the reasons that red wines are served warmer than white wines is the fact that the taste ingredients in red wines have a higher molecular weight than the white wines, and thus are less volatile.

The lower temperatures increase the sense of astringency caused by the tannins in red wines and reduce the aggressiveness and the distinction of the presence of alcohol, while higher temperatures increase the sense. Serving temperatures of red wines depend on a number of factors, but since, generally, they contain much more tannins and the acidity level is lower than white wines, they are served at higher temperatures.

Young red wines with few tannins are served between 14°C and 16°C, while full-bodied wines with a high concentration of tannins or wines that have been aged for many years should be served at around 18°C and, in some cases, even at 20°C. For the most part, in temperatures exceeding 18°C the freshness is decreased, the fruit will lose some of its focus, the alcohol will be felt and the wine will be as if it is "disconnected". From the aromatic aspect, we would experience mainly alcohol vapors. The alcohol taste felt in the combination between acidity to alcohol will intensify when the wine is served at warm temperatures and will become vinegar if it is served at a temperature higher than 24°C.

At too low temperatures, the tannins will be rough ▶▶

and the acids tangy, but mild bodied red wines such as simple Pinot Noir, Beaujolais and Italian wines from northern Italy could be attractive and fresh to drink if served when chilled a little. Red wines can be served at low temperatures only in cases in which they do not have tannins and astringency – in cases of light red wines with light bodies and few tannins such as Beaujolais wines.

### Sparkling Wines

Carbon dioxide is another important ingredient present in wine influencing taste. There is relatively high concentration of carbon dioxide in sparkling wines which can be detected both by appearance and taste.

Temperature has an effect on the solubility of the carbon dioxide and it is more readily liberated at high temperatures. At low temperatures it liberates slowly and in small quantities.

The acidic taste of carbon dioxide becomes dominant and unpleasant in higher temperatures. Therefore, sparkling wines are served at low temperatures. However, serving them at temperatures lower than 8°C will result in a dominant stinging sensation, while the elegant tastes and pleasant aromas will be obscured.

Since there are different types of sparkling wines, it is difficult to determine a single serving temperature. Asti Spumante (sweet) wines can be served at a temperature of 8°C. Since these wines are very aromatic, they can remain at a low temperature without losing their aroma.

Sweet red sparkling wines can be kept at temperatures between 10°C and 12°C, while those that are more aromatic can be served around 8°C.

Sparkling wines with a higher tannin concentration should be served at a higher temperature, up to 14°C. Dry sparkling wines in which carbon dioxide is added artificially to the wine, can be served between 8°C and 10°C.

Special attention should be given to champagnes. These wines should usually be served at temperatures between 8°C and 10°C. Champagnes from a particular vintage can be served at a temperature of 12°C in order to encourage exposing the aromas and the





complexities that developed slowly while aging in the bottle.

### **Dessert Wines**

In sweet dessert wines, including liqueurs, the balance between acidity and sweetness will be expressed if served at a low temperature. However, it must be remembered that at 6°C the taste of the wine will not be felt.

Ursula Hermacinsky, in the past responsible for Christie's wine auctions, recommended the following: "Twenty minutes prior to drinking, it is worthwhile removing a white wine bottle from the refrigerator and inserting a red bottle in its place to chill it." It is most worthwhile to take the temperature of the glass in which the wine is served, into account. The temperature of the glass will be exactly the same temperature as the room in which the glasses are placed. Room temperature is usually higher than that desired and therefore at the time of pouring into class, the wine warms up and, within a very short time, the temperature of the wine rises by 2°C. Of course, the temperature of the wine will continue to rise while it is in the glass. Therefore, it is worthwhile pouring the wine into the glass from a bottle in which the temperature of the wine is lower than desired by 2°C. The temperature of the glass will bring the wine to the optimal serving temperature, fairly rapidly.

Wines that have been properly chilled and served at the proper temperature are tasty and more pleasant. White wines that are served at too high temperatures will receive an alcoholic taste and become shallow and heavy. White wines served too cold will become almost tasteless. Red wines at too high a temperature will receive soft alcoholic tastes and, sometimes, will receive an acidic taste, while if they are served at too low a temperature the tannins will be coarsely dominant and the remaining tastes will become obscured.

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