

The Wine Country Experience

Tasting Room Etiquette: *What to Expect in the Tasting Room*

To get the most out of a day of tasting wine, choose a reasonable number of tasting rooms to visit. Three or four is usually plenty—it is better to have a good day visiting three wineries than a bad one trying to visit seven.

Taking a break to picnic really makes the most of a day in wine country. If you choose to picnic at the winery and enjoy some wine, make sure the wine is not from another winery. *Always* ask first, and *never* bring other alcoholic beverages to drink at a winery. If you forgot to bring wine glasses, most tasting rooms will lend you wine glasses for your picnic.

When you enter a tasting room, a host will greet you, usually at a tasting bar, and get you started with wine glasses and explain what wines are available for tasting and let you know about any tasting fees. If the bar is crowded, it is polite to step away to savor your taste, to allow others to progress in their tasting order.

Tasting rooms vary from luxurious chambers with elaborate gift selections, to caves, to a simple table in the winemaking area.

Follow the wineries advice on tasting order. Winemakers spend a great deal of time making their wines and they know what's best. Just because you typically taste a Cabernet after a Merlot doesn't apply everywhere. Understand, winemaker's styles are different everywhere—they may very well have made their Merlot heavier than their Cab. so trust the progression they've designed.

It's all right to skip any of the wines on the tasting list. Some people just want to taste the reds. Some may be interested in tasting only certain varietals.

Normally you would not ask for a second taste of one particular wine unless you indicate that you are interested in purchasing the wine.

You do not have to drink all the wine in your glass. Toss the unwanted wine in your glass into the dump bucket provided for this purpose. For maximum tasting benefit, limit yourself to no more than 4 tastes per winery.

If water is provided, use it to clear your palate or to rinse your glass. Rinsing the glass is a good idea when the tasting moves from whites to reds or to dessert wines.

Sometimes a neutral food will be provided, such as plain crackers. The purpose of the food is to clear the palate after tasting each particular wine.

Some tasting rooms will require that you pay a fee to taste the wine. Some wineries apply this fee to a purchase. Others might include a souvenir glass with the fee.

When a fee is charged, it is usually okay for two people to share one glass and pay only one tasting fee.

If you are visiting a winery with friends or a group, try not to be loud or noisy. It ruins the atmosphere of the tasting room.

Since they won't be allowed to taste wines, children may find the tasting-room experience tedious. For this reason, some wineries discourage (but usually don't prohibit) kids.

Some people feel guilty if they don't buy at least one bottle of wine. Never feel you must purchase any wine. Buy the wine if you like it.

Insiders' Guide to Wine Tasting

Wine Tasting Steps:

Developing the skill of wine tasting takes practice. The more wines you taste, the better you will become, and the more you will appreciate this traditional sensual experience.

Most wineries will have a sheet of tasting notes. Read the tasting notes as you taste and see if you identify any of the aromas or flavors listed in the notes.

Look at the wine

Take a look at the color of the wine. Look for the clarity of the wine and the brilliance of the color. The wines will vary in their intensity of color.

Smell the wine

Swirl the wine in your glass by rotating your wrist. This takes a little practice. Most people have trouble at first because they are moving their entire arm to swirl the glass. The key is in the wrist while holding the rest of the arm still. The swirling of the glass releases the wine's aromas to the top edge of the glass.

Place your nose just over and the edge of the wine glass. The aromas should bounce off this edge straight up the nostrils. Take a very deep sniff. Identify any familiar smells. Repeat, but rest your sense of smell a few seconds before you smell again.

Taste the wine

After smelling the wine it is time to take a sip. Roll it over your tongue for several seconds before swallowing. Exhale through your nose as you swallow. Your taste buds and sense of smell will work together.

On the second sip, try swishing the wine around in the mouth and then swallow and exhale through your nose. Some tasters “chew” the wine in the mouth. Try each and see what works best for you.

A Wine Country Picnic

A charming picnic lunch and a glass of wine in a beautiful vineyard setting is one of life's greatest pleasures. Insiders consider a trip to the wine country to be incomplete without a picnic.

It is a good idea to have a picnic basket with essential items handy. These include plates, eating utensils, wine glasses, small cutting board, a table cloth, napkins, and a corkscrew. A small ice chest is ideal if you plan to pick up a lunch along the way. It is a must if you are transporting food for any length of time.

Of course, when you tour in a Big Red Engine your French Picnic and all accoutrements will be provided for you!

When you picnic at a winery, it is customary that you drink the winery's wine. It is *at best* discourteous to take up a picnic space at a winery while drinking a wine from another winery.

If you don't have your own wine glasses, most wineries will lend you some. Ask the winery to borrow the glasses when you buy the wine for your picnic. Make sure you ask for a chilled bottle if choosing a white wine. You can also ask them to open the bottle for you.