

Holiday Parties & Wine

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You've decked the halls, trimmed the tree and written out the guest list. Now it's time to plan the wine list for your holiday gathering. I'm often asked lots of wine questions, particularly at this time of the year when parties reach their peak, from selecting to serving to saving wine. So, to help take the wine stress out of your holiday festivities, here are a few tips and guidelines.

Choosing Wine:

The first thing to consider is what type of party you are throwing, meaning is it a seated dinner party or a casual reception. This will help to determine your budget, quantity and type of wine you will need. Unless your guests are particularly wine savvy, it's best to go mainstream in your choices, as you are trying to please many different palates. Starting with a cocktail, Champagne or sparkling wine is always a good choice. I suggest Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc for your starter courses and depending upon your entree, either Pinot Noir for lighter cuisine and Zinfandel or Cabernet Sauvignon for a more robust dish. A general rule of thumb is to serve dry before sweet, light before full, white before red and young before old.

To determine quantity, you'll need to consider time and length of your party, if you will have a full bar and your guests. In general, you will get five glasses of wine per bottle, so prepare to have one bottle per person for a two-hour gathering or dinner party. At most parties, white and red wine consumption is about equal (30-50%) with 10 to 20% drinking white zinfandel.

Serving wine:

Temperature plays a vital role in the enjoyment of wine as it has an impact on the bouquet and the taste. When wine is served too cold, imperfections are masked, but so are aromas and flavors. Whites and rosés are best when served 45-55°, with Champagne closer to 45°, which can be achieved by chilling in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours. Red wines taste best when served between 55-65°. If you have a chilling crisis, you can get a quick

chill by placing the bottle in water with ice for about 30 minutes.

Decanting:

Decanting, is recommended when serving older wines or vintage port to remove any unwanted sediment, which is simply a solid that settles at the bottom of the bottle. However, I believe that some wines, particularly young reds, benefit from decanting as it helps the wine to breathe. As wine is poured into the decanter and left to sit for about thirty minutes, oxygen softens the tannins and pushes the fruit forward to intensify the bouquet and flavors.

Glassware:

Wine glasses are designed to accentuate a particular wine's characteristics, but few of us have glasses for each specific varietal. You should have flutes for Champagne and preferably smaller glasses for white wine and a slightly larger one for reds. However, using a multi-purpose 10oz. glass for whites and reds is perfectly acceptable.

Pouring:

Wine glasses should be filled slightly less than half way (to the roundest part of the glass) to allow room for the wine to breathe and for swirling. When you are pouring wine, avoid messy drips by twisting the bottle slightly as you pull it up and away from the glass.

Leftovers:

An open bottle of wine can be stored in the refrigerator for 3-5 days and will be fine, but it will lose some of its' freshness. Investing in a simple, affordable device called a Vacu Vin, which pumps air out of the open bottle, will help prolong the wines' life.

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