

# Running a great Wine Event



A guide from



## Taste Of The Grape

Entertaining & informative wine tastings

to running a successful corporate  
wine tasting

A wine tasting event is a great way to reward and motivate employees, entertain clients, support team building and create networking opportunities.

To make sure your event goes well, Taste of the Grape has prepared this guide – follow the steps, work with a good wine event company, and your company will entertain and reward employees and clients with a relaxed, interesting and enjoyable event.

## Step 1

### Make sure the event format fits your business objectives.

What could be simpler – some bottles of wine, glasses and a group of keen attendees? Well of course it isn't that simple. While most wine event companies have a 'standard' wine tasting format, the good ones will also offer events tailored to specific business purposes.

You should discuss with the manager(s) sponsoring the event what they want to achieve from the event, share this information with your chosen wine event organiser, and agree the format for the event with the sponsor.



#### Business objective    Event format

Socialising – a reward or celebration, or an ice breaker.    Wine tasting guided by a professional wine expert covering a specific topic (eg country or region) relevant to the business, for example, wines of a specific country or region. Educational and enjoyable, and a chance to try some expensive wines.

Team building - existing or new teams.    Team tasting challenge – groups compete with each other identifying the grape variety, country and price of a number of wines. Run by an expert facilitator, these events are great fun, and any lack of wine knowledge is no disadvantage.

Networking - internal or external.    Taste of the Grape run the Wine Network - an organised approach to getting people to mingle, and give senior managers an opportunity to meet everyone in the room. Here the wine serves as an ice breaker rather than being centre stage, but our expert facilitators ensure that people move around a number of wine stations and connect with lots of people.

## Step 2

### Agree timing and budget

It's best to allow 90 minutes to two hours for most wine oriented events. At Taste of the Grape we can do a great tasting in under an hour with smaller groups, but ideally more time is allowed to ensure a relaxed atmosphere. More than two hours is too much for any but the most committed wine enthusiasts. Arrival time should be advised as 30 minutes before the official start time, to allow for some guests' habit of arriving late (even for tastings that are part of bigger residential events).



Avoid Fridays for corporate events if possible - for obvious reasons!



The key determinants of budget are numbers of attendees and costs of venue hire. The wines chosen will also have an impact.

A good event company, with experienced wine speakers who can command the attention of a room full of people and entertain them will charge from £35-50/head (plus VAT), for a minimum of 15 people, excluding venue costs.

This should cover at least six wines in the organised tasting, including some more expensive wines such as Champagne.

Venue costs are much more variable. Most event companies will be able to recommend venues to suit a particular event, and location, time of day and day of week will all have an impact – as will corkage which many hotels and restaurants charge as standard (but may be prepared to negotiate over).

## Step 3

### Choose your venue and room

#### In house?

Pro's	Con's
Free?	People who aren't invited might feel left out?
Convenient?	

It is possible to run a successful wine event in a meeting room, canteen or common area of an office. This has a dramatic impact on cost, and for an employee event has the advantage of being 'on site'. A good event company will work hard to make any space work, but there are some things that need to be considered:

The space should be self contained, or away from people who are not attending the event .

A regular, rectangular space works better than an L shape, or adjoining rooms – it helps the wine speaker gain and keep people's attention.

Depending on the type of event, there needs to be sufficient space for people to be seated. Wine tastings and team challenges work best with people seated around circular tables of 8-10. Networking events are more likely to be conducted with people standing and circulating – but tables for wine stations will be needed, and some people will want to sit down at points during the event.

Acoustics are quite important – most rooms are fine up to about 50 people, but in larger rooms, or ones with high ceilings or lots of hard surfaces that create echoes, your wine event company may recommend using a PA system.

Lighting is summed up in two words: adequate and appropriate. Glaring bright lights don't lend themselves to a convivial atmosphere, but if the lighting is too dim, people won't be able to see what they are drinking!

#### External venue?

If you hold the event in an external venue, things to consider are:

Access to public transport – you shouldn't expect people to drive home from a wine event!

Attractiveness of venue – particularly if you are inviting clients or potential clients. Consider the impression given by different styles of venue - some events need a more 'formal' setting such as a room in a hotel or even a London club, others are far more suited to function rooms in wine bars or pubs.

Size/shape of room – all the same considerations as above.

Flexibility and friendliness of the venue's staff – it sounds obvious but having pleasant staff prepared to go the extra mile makes all the difference to an event!

Talk to your event company about venues that they have used – they should be able to recommend something that works well for your requirements.

Pro's	Con's
Prestige	Cost?
No clearing up!	Travel time?

## Step 4

### Invite your guests.

The more notice you give guests, the better chance you have of a good turnout. A month before the event is about right.

Even if the event is for employees after work or during or after a meeting or conference, announcing it in advance builds 'buzz', allows people who might have questions to get answers, and ensures managers are aware of how many people plan to attend.

If the event is for clients or potential clients, or other non-company people such as suppliers or journalists, a well-designed invitation will add to the perception of value.

Clearly the tone of the invitation depends on the company culture, and the objective of the event, but there is some key information that needs to be imparted.

Here's a couple of examples of invitations setting slightly different tones:



<Company logo>

Save the date: 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014

ABC Ltd invite you to join us at our offices, for two hours of light-hearted wine appreciation. No wine knowledge is required, but during the evening we will be tasting some rather fine wines and of course, having some fun.

Arrive: 6.30pm  
Finish: 8.30pm  
Location: address, address, address

Please reply to John Jones  
[johnjones@abc.net](mailto:johnjones@abc.net)  
01234 567890  
by 31<sup>st</sup> May

The Directors of XYZ Ltd request the pleasure of your company at an evening of

### Fine Wine Tasting

During the evening we will be sampling some superb wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy, comparing Champagne with the one of the finest sparkling wines of the New World, and enjoying some vintage Port.

Date: Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June  
Venue: Very Posh Hotel, Very Posh Street, London VP1 2VP  
Arrival drinks from 6.30pm  
Wine tasting from 7-8.30pm  
Networking to 9pm

Your presence is very much hoped for – we will be in touch in the coming days to confirm your attendance, or you may confirm directly with John Jones ([john.jones@xyz.com](mailto:john.jones@xyz.com) /01987 654321)

Taste of the Grape always recommend that our clients follow up invitations, ideally by phone. Firstly because it generally results in higher levels of attendance, as people are more likely to consider the invitation and commit if they are approached directly.

And secondly, people are just rather bad at replying, even if they intend coming, and it is really difficult to finalise plans without knowing how many people are going to turn up a couple of days before the event.

Ask the sponsoring manager(s) to encourage their staff and clients to attend – this is much more powerful than an impersonal invitation alone.

## Step 5

### Plan your equipment and extras

Any good event company will bring everything you need for a wine tasting.....

If the event happens at your office, you will need to arrange for suitable tables and chairs, and for the room to be available a couple of hours before people arrive, so the wine speaker can set up.

- Professional wine tasting glasses
- Information/Quiz sheets, clipboards, pens
- Prizes if appropriate
- Food, e.g. cheese for pairing with wine, plus plates, knives etc.—if part of event
- Wine!

If the event is seated, round tables seating 8-10 are perfect, but most table shapes will work, provided there is room for people to move around them! Table coverings make it easier to clear up after the event. If you have them, white tablecloths add ambience, but banqueting roll is fine.

If you want to provide some nibbles, sparkling water, juice etc on arrival, it is probably most cost effective to do this yourself, but your wine event company can of course provide everything if you prefer. Don't make catering too complex and avoid serving hot food during the tasting – making sure it is served at the right moment can be awkward, and the aromas of the food may distract people from focusing on the wine.



All the above can be agreed with an external venue in advance.

If the event is for external clients, some corporate dressing of the room is a good idea, to ensure the event works to build your brand. If there is room, you could place a couple of stands with your corporate logo (most companies have these for exhibitions and fairs). And some corporate material – leaflets or even some business cards, maybe the most recent edition of your in house journal – placed in the room this gives people something to glance if they arrive early. You may want to put a pack together for guests to take away after the event.

If appropriate arrange for a photographer and post pictures onto your company Facebook or LinkedIn pages, or intranet. You could send photos out to guests after the event to remind them what a great evening they had, and so continue to build your brand image.

You may need to make some arrangements for what happens after the event, particularly if it happens at your offices. Ensuring the security team are aware of the event, and that guests and organisers will be able to exit the building easily is a must, and agreeing how any rubbish will be disposed of is a good idea so your cleaners are not faced with an unexpected collection of bin sacks and empty wine bottles.

## Step 6

### The Day Before

Make sure you know the status of everyone invited to the event, whether they are a firm yes, a maybe or have declined.

Calling any guests about whom there is any doubt, on the day before or even day of the event to remind them again ensures the best possible attendance - and a professional briefing about who is attending to sponsoring management on the night.

Do your best to encourage any uncertain to become firm yeses – emphasise how many other (important/influential) people will be there, and of course what fun it will be, and explain you need to firm up on numbers.

Your event company will probably have arranged a call with you to confirm your best idea of numbers (it's amazing how often at this stage our clients still have no idea!). This means they will arrive on the day with the right number of bottles of wine! They will also need to know specific details of where to park, how to access the building and the room, and who they need to contact on arrival.



## Step 7

### On the Day

Call everyone you didn't speak to yesterday who is due to attend (including the firm yeses!), to remind them. It sounds over the top, but a polite reminder will often make the difference to whether someone's best intentions turn into action!

Give the manager(s) sponsoring the event a list of attendees (including your view of how likely they are to come based on your conversations), and a short document outlining the plan for the evening – your wine event company can help you prepare this in advance.

If the event is in house, make sure the room is ready at the agreed time, and that there is someone to meet (and assist) the wine speaker when they arrive and need to unload their equipment.

If the event is at an external venue, meet your wine consultant there well in advance to go through arrangements with the venue staff (and supervise any last minute changes to the room layout that might be required based on numbers attending etc). This would also be your opportunity to dress the room with corporate materials.

Make sure there are people from your company on hand to greet any early arrivals – at least half an hour before the specified arrival time.

## Step 8

### The Event itself

Relax and enjoy yourself. If you have followed the steps in this guide your event will run like a dream, and you will have happy guests and happy managers.



# Taste Of The Grape

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# Running a great Wine Party



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# Running a wine tasting party at home

Taste of the Grape has many years of experience of running wine tasting events and parties for corporate and private clients.

We realise that not every occasion requires a professional wine event company, and we have produced this guide for people who would like to host a simple wine tasting themselves.

The world of wine is a fascinating place, with so much to explore. We hope you find our ideas and guidance useful and wish you the very best for your wine tasting adventures.

## What kind of wine tasting?

A great wine tasting party should be above all else fun. Unless your guests are dedicated 'oenophiles' with cellars full of old vintages, the emphasis should be on discovering some lovely wines, learning something about them, and enjoying them in pleasant company.

The topics you can choose for your tasting are endless – exploring the wines of a specific country or region, or from a specific grape variety. Selecting a theme is helpful – it reduces the number of wines you might need to choose from, and it can be linked to a topic of personal relevance such as a holiday destination. Any part of the wine world will have plenty of wines to choose from, so choosing a topic will not constrain you.

Examples of topics you might choose:

New Zealand wines

Wines made from the Pinot Noir grape

Sparkling wines

Matching wines with cheese



## How much time should you allow?

Whether the wine tasting is central to your event, or part of a bigger event or party, you should plan on taking no more than an hour to do 'the tasting'. This could be broken up into three twenty minute sessions, interspersed with courses at a dinner party.

## How many people?

A group of four could enjoy a great wine tasting party, provided they restricted themselves to tasting quantities (see Glossary) as they explore the chosen wines. This would leave more than half a bottle of each wine, some of which could be drunk with food later, or taken home – or kept by the host for later consumption!

The maximum number of guests is really governed by the size of the room. We suggest you plan on people wanting to sit – this is an informal party, and people will want to be able to relax, put their wine glasses down, and even write some notes at times. We suggest for do-it-yourself, twelve is the maximum number – allowing a decent tasting quantity from each bottle, and giving the host a good chance of remaining in control as the tasting progresses.

## How many wines?

We suggest no more than six wines to be 'formally' tasted. Depending on the overall event and number of guests, you could serve other wine or wines on arrival and after the tasting. One bottle of each wine tasted will be plenty for 12 guests.

## Which wines to choose?

Well, recommending specific wines is beyond the scope of this short guide.

In terms of 'types' of wine, we suggest you go to your local wine merchant, explain what you are doing and agree a line-up that suits your topic and budget based along the following lines:

- \* A light fruity white
- \* An aromatic white or an oaky white
- \* A sparkling wine (to be tasted 'blind' - see Glossary)
- \* A light fruity red
- \* A heavier full bodied red
- \* A sweet wine or fortified wine

Provided the total cost is within your budget we suggest at least one of the wines should be relatively expensive (£20 or more) – so that your guests have a chance to try something they might otherwise never dare to pick off the shelves!

A good wine merchant will provide tasting notes for the wines, which will be interesting to compare with what people identify at your wine tasting party.

If you want to include food, ask your wine merchant for suggestions on good matches—for example the classic match of Sancerre with Crottin de Chavignol goat's cheese.

## What kind of wine glass?



Ideally each guest should have two wine glasses and a water tumbler.

Professional wine event companies use ISO wine tasting glasses, which are recognised internationally as the standard design for wine tasting. These are made of clear glass, so the wine's colour and clarity can be examined. The rounded bowl and narrow sides allow the wine to be swirled, which releases aromas, while the rim which is narrower than the bowl helps contain all the aromas, making 'nosing' (or sniffing) the wine easier. Their size discourages pouring too much, so people focus on sipping smaller quantities and keeping them in the mouth for longer so all the flavours can be tasted.

It should be easy to hire ISO glasses from a local merchant, or if you have enough glasses of a similar shape then those would be fine – just be careful about how much you pour!

## Any other equipment?

- \* A table cloth or banquetting roll makes clearing up afterwards easier – a few drops spilt here or there are inevitable.
- \* A corkscrew may be needed (although more and more quality wines are using screw caps, which are much less prone to variability and risks of wine taint). See the Glossary on how to open a bottle of Champagne.
- \* Silver foil to cover any bottles of wine you want to taste 'blind' (see Glossary).
- \* Pens or pencils, and paper for tasting notes (a sample tasting sheet is appended to this guide, along with the Glossary of wine descriptors).
- \* Water – you should encourage your guests to drink plenty of water during the tasting, both to clear their palates and to balance the alcohol consumption!
- \* A container to tip dregs into.
- \* Bread or crackers – don't serve nibbles during the tasting. Spicy tastes or messy fingers will distract from wine appreciation!
- \* A small prize.

## How to run the tasting

The focus is on enjoyment and so the host needs to explain what is happening, keep things moving, and keep the emphasis on fun. This is probably the biggest challenge for a d-i-y tasting, and why many people prefer to bring in the professionals. However, the following hints should help...



- ◆ Make sure people realize the wine tasting has started. Get their attention, make any introductions necessary and explain how things are going to work.
- ◆ Explain wine tasting technique (see Glossary), demonstrating it, or using the You Tube video referenced in the Glossary.
- ◆ Pour Wine 1 and get people to practice their technique and discuss the appearance, aromas and tastes of the wine.
- ◆ Encourage people to talk about what they are seeing, smelling and tasting – and make sure they know there are no 'right' answers. Wine appreciation is a very individual experience, and different people will identify different aromas in the same wine, and will prefer the tastes of different wines.

*If you would like to have a competitive element, ask everyone to write down on their sheet (or choose from multiple options) what they think the wine would cost in a shop. Or keep the bottle covered up and ask them to write down (or choose) what grape variety it is made from or what country it is from (depending on the topic of your tasting), and what they think it would cost.*

- ◆ Ask people to keep Wine 1 in their first glass, and pour Wine 2 into their second glass. The same approach to tasting and note taking – but encourage people to compare the wines and identify what the differences between them.
- ◆ And so on. If Wine 3 is a fizz, you could challenge people to identify whether it is champagne or not. Ask them to compare Wines 4 and 5. And let them relax with Wine 6 – they can exchange their tasting papers with their neighbour, and mark each other as you read out the answers.
- ◆ Award a small prize to the winner.



And that's it! Remember to keep the mood light, and non-judgemental. We hope that if you follow this guidance, you and your guests will learn something new about wine, drink some wines you may not otherwise try, and have a lot of fun.

## Glossary

### Wine tasting quantity

At most wine tastings you would expect to get at least 15 tasting quantities out of a 75cl bottle of wine, ie 50ml/glass.

If you don't have 15 guests, don't be tempted to pour a lot more into everyone's glass, as you don't need that much to go through tasting technique (see below), and you don't want people's palates overcome too soon – or too much wine being tipped away!

### Wine tasting technique

There are four stages to appreciating a wine, which you should go through before you conclude on whether you think it is well made, good value – and whether you like it!

Its Appearance

Its 'Nose', ie its aroma or smell.

Its Taste

Its Finish

More information on each of the stages of tasting is included in Wine Descriptors on the back of the sample tasting/quiz sheet at the end of this guide.



### Tasting a wine 'blind'

Definitely something to be approached with the intention of having fun rather than being tested. However, tasting blind allows for some fun competition – identifying (or guessing) what is the grape variety, what country it is from, even how old the wine is. Covering the bottle with silver foil is the easiest way of disguising it, though you could blindfold your guests. The latter option has the potential for some mess, though it is fun to see people swear the red wine they are drinking is really white!

### Opening a bottle of Champagne

No sabres here. The secret of opening a bottle of Champagne (or any wine where the cork is under pressure), is to do it slowly, gently and firmly.

Remove the wire and foil over the cork. Hold the bottom of the bottle firmly with your right hand and the cork with your left. Turn the bottle by quarter turns, until you feel the cork start to move. Reduce the amount you turn as the cork starts to come out, and keep the cork in your left hand as it gently exits with a fizz rather than a pop.

### Wine Descriptors

See the reverse of the sample tasting notes/quiz sheet at the end of this guide.





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# Sample Tasting Notes/Quiz Sheet

Wine	Tasting notes				Quiz questions 2 marks/right answer				In conclusion	
	Appearance	Aroma	Taste	Do you like it?	Is this wine made from	Is this wine from	How much is this wine worth	Marks gained	Other notes	
1					Sauvignon Blanc Pinot Gris	New Zealand Italy	£12.50 £7.50			
2					Riesling Viognier	France Australia	£10 £15			
3						Champagne New World	£30 £18			
4					Pinot Noir Gamay	California France	£9 £25			
5					Shiraz Malbec	South Africa Argentina	£12 £18			
6					Chenin Blanc Semillon	South Africa Chile	£15/half £25			
Total Marks										

## Wine Descriptors

It sometimes seems that there is a weird vocabulary used by wine connoisseurs. In reality, it is much more simple, and most wines can readily be described by in the following way.

### Appearance

Hold the glass up in front of you to look at the glass in profile, and then gaze down on it tilted so you can see the surface of the wine. Ideally have a white surface of piece of paper behind the glass as you examine it.

Any wine in good condition should be clear and 'bright', not cloudy or dull.

White wines can range in colour from the palest lemon to almost russet. The darker the colour, the more likely it is that the wine is older – and while some white wines age beautifully, in general a 'darker' colour in a white wine is an indication that it may be past its best.

Red wines can range in intensity of red, russet and purple colours. Generally more intense colour denotes greater youth. As a wine ages, it starts to fade towards the rim.

### Aroma

The most important thing to remember about aromas is that people's perception of them are subjective, their noses are different and the words they use to describe what they are smelling will be different. So there is NO RIGHT ANSWER. We give some simple examples below, intended to start people off on their exploration – it's not an exhaustive list by any means, and imagination should be encouraged!

Swirling the wine in the glass releases aromas, and cupping the glass in your hand will help to warm up a very cold wine, which will encourage more aromas to emerge.

A wine should smell clean – no musty or unpleasant smells that might suggest the wine is faulty. Very few wines are faulty, so this would really be an exception.

Then you look for words that describe what you are smelling. Some common ones are:

#### Flower/Fruit

Elderflower, gooseberry, apple, citrus, pineapple, lychee for white wines

Blackcurrant, blackberry, cherry, strawberry, plum for red wines.

#### Herbaceous/Vegetal

Freshly mown grass for white wines and the infamous 'cat's pee' for New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.

Farmyardy aromas are a particular characteristic of good Pinot Noirs!

#### Spice/Earthy/Mineral

Cloves, cardamons, pepper (white or black)

Flinty, Leathery, Sandy/Salty

Because people's noses and vocabularies are so different it's very unlikely that everyone will agree on what a wine smells of, and this really doesn't matter. What matters is that people find what they smell attractive – and then it's interesting whether they get the same sensations when they taste the wine.

### Taste

Most of the 'flavours' tasted in a wine are actually the wine's aromas experienced in your nose.

You will get more taste from the wine by giving it a good 'sluicing' around your mouth. Don't just sip it straight down, leave your inhibitions behind and pretend you are using a mouth wash. But keep your mouth closed!

The specific sensations experienced in the mouth are:

Acidity – a sensation felt on the sides of the tongue (try a sip of weak lemon juice).

Sweetness – felt on the tip of the tongue.

Tannins – a drying sensation felt on the insides of your cheeks.

Mouthfeel – an overall sensation (hopefully pleasant) of richness and viscosity.

Finish – how long the taste of the wine lingers pleasantly on the palate.