*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Wine tasting 102: Grading the wines you taste**

So, have you started your own wine tasting club? It is a good hobby, it is enjoyable, and you always learn something new down the road.

There are so many different varietal wines to choose from, and the various regions from which they are harvested. And don’t forget, same grapes do taste differently from one country to another.

So, just how do we judge the wines we tasted? Furthermore, how do we pick our favorite wines?

As I mentioned earlier, let your taste buds make the decisions. Don’t let anyone influence you with all the fancy talk, everyone is entitled to their own opinions. And picking your favorite wines is solely your choice.

How do you pick your favorite wines? Start small, but think big.

Pick a certain wine first, like cabernet sauvignon, find out what you like or don’t like about it. And then taste the same wine grown in different countries all over the world. There are cabernet sauvignon wines that are made in the U.S., France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile and even China!

I personally like cabernet sauvignon as I like that rich, full flavor; but you might prefer something light like Pinot noir. But, you will never know till you have actually tasted them yourself.

It took me many years to learn about the fine art of drinking tea, and I have just begun to learn about the fine art of wine drinking, so bear with me.

You can use a wine grading chart to record each wine that you have tasted. As the chart grows, so will be your knowledge of different wines. And you will become a wine expert in no time flat.

How do we decide if the wine is good, or well, not so good? Very simple, just follow your eyes (color), nose (bouquet), and taste buds (senses), and grade your wines accordingly.

**Appearance** – How does it look to you? Is the color rich and attractive?

**Aroma** – What kind of bouquet do you notice? What does it remind you … your favorite fruits or flowers?

**Body** – Is it heavy with substance, or thin and watery?

**Taste** – How does it feel around your palate? Is it pleasing and delightful? Or is it harsh?

**Finish** – How does it feel? Does it leave you a sensation that lingers? Is the impression memorable?

There are many terms that are used to describe wines. Don’t try to learn them all unless you want to become a wine expert. Know the descriptions so you can relate to others about your experience and can express your impressions easily.

There is no point getting into a heated discussion about the terms used, as everyone is entitled to his/her opinion. You might think that particular wine is fruity, while another might think that it is flinty. As long as you are having fun, does it really matter?

**Appearance**

* Ruby red – Deep and dark in color.
* Clear – Nice transparent color, no sign of any residuals.
* Cloudy – Hmmm, don’t drink it.
* Purplish – Getting there (maturity) but not quite yet.

**Aroma**

* Pleasing – We can also use the term “agreeable.” It is nice and pleasant.
* Bouquet – You smell flowers, fruits, chocolate? What does it remind you of?
* Complex – A combination of different sensations – roses and green apples? Fresh mowed lawn? Peaches?
* Corky/Musty – Don’t drink it. The cork is moldy, and it affects the whole bottle. That’s why most vineries these days have switched to twist tops.
* Lively – Young and fresh, hasn’t aged for very long, yet very pleasant.
* Spicy – It has a pleasant kick, a slight bite to it.

**Body**

* Full – Rich and dense, it leaves a ring in your glass.
* Light – Thin yet quite pleasant.
* Balanced – Not too heavy nor light, medium, compared to being full or light.

**Taste**

* Acidic – Sign of a new wine – fresh with new harvested fruits.
* Fruity – What do you detect? Strawberries, apples, berries?
* Flinty – Dry, clean, sharp. It is pleasant, but is it memorable?
* Smooth – Perfectly aged.
* Sweet – The sugar content is coming through (mostly in Gewurztraminer, Moscato, etc.).
* Dry/Crisp – Kind of crisp and puckery, like biting a fresh-picked green apple.
* Elegant/Friendly – Distinguishable and yet agreeable.
* Balanced – Not too dry or too sweet, just right!
* Character – Has the qualities that you will always remember.
* Friendly – Can go with any dish. And can be consumed any time – before, during and after dinner.
* Pleasant – It pleases all senses.
* Flavors commingling – You can taste different fruits and spices at the same time.
* Bold – Strong and unforgettable.
* Warm and Spicy – Let your imagination ride.
* Zesty – Refreshing, keep you happy.
* Abundance – Has plenty more than expected.
* Hint of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ amongst \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blanks).
* Leaves flavor of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (aftertaste – the finish).
* Developing – You can feel the aging process.
* Corpulent – Rich, round and full (maturity).
* Dense – Heavy and satisfying (not the same in describing a person).

**Finish**

* Velvety – Nice and smooth, leaving a mellow aftertaste.
* Full-bodied – Takes a while to settle in. Heavy and lingers.
* Thin – So-so. Not impressive, not worth trying.
* Rewarding – A memorable experience. It completes your requirement in pleasing all senses.

Now you have it. Just remember, there’s no right or wrong descriptions about all the wines you tasted. It is what you think and how you feel about the wine that matters. No one can tell you what you should think or what you should like. You make that decision. There are many different factors to consider before you become an expert, it will take a while.

But meanwhile, just have fun with your journey.

Try wines from different vintage years. Try wines from different vintners, same region. Try wines from different countries, same varietal. Learn about wine pairing with foods. Try different varietal red and white wines.

Salute, cheers, and gan bay!

***Go to phkwong.com for more columns and to purchase his book, "Wok & Roll."***