

Tasting Room Etiquette

Many small, boutique wineries are family-run. When visiting a wine tasting room consider yourself a guest. The owners and staff are proud of their facility and want everyone to enjoy their visit. Expectations in wine tasting rooms are different than at wine festivals or in busy bars. After visiting 100 wineries in the last six months and talking with numerous wine hosts and visitors, we have created a selection of ideas to keep in mind when visiting a winery tasting room.

The atmosphere in a winery tasting room is one of a subtle sophistication. While shorts and athletic shoes are acceptable so are semi-dress clothes. However, loud outside voices are not appropriate. Conversational tones are perfect and fit in well with talking about the wines you taste and meeting others who have common interests.

Tasting rooms can be crowded on weekends. Weekdays are generally slower and wine hosts have more time to talk about the wines you taste. In either case, if the tasting room is busy, do not elbow your way to the tasting bar. On busy days, some wineries will set up tasting tables or bars outside the tasting room. Give yourself plenty of time at a winery. Relax and enjoy the wine tasting and the ambiance of the tasting room.



Tasting room at The Winery at LaGrange, Virginia

If the tasting room is busy, consider stepping back to discuss your wine and enjoy the tasting with other like-minded people. This gives others room to step up for a tasting. Many wineries have gift selections to browse while tasting wines. Take your time tasting and browse the shelves.

The wines for a tasting are presented in a particular order based upon the style of wine. If you choose not to drink a particular wine that's fine. Gently cover your wine glass with your fingers to indicate you do not want to taste a wine. It is so much more subtle than declaring, "I don't like that wine." Not all wine drinkers like all wines and wine hosts understand. Visitors do not need to announce to everyone that they dislike a particular wine.

What should you do with the wine in your glass you have tasted? If you do not want the rest of the wine in your glass, you can pour it into a spit bucket. It is really okay. In addition, it is a good idea to spit your wine into the bucket. Even though tastings are small, they do add up after a number of tastings.

Do you think wineries are being stingy when they set out tiny crackers or tiny bites of cheese? Remember this is not your lunch. The purpose of the crackers, dips or cheese is to cleanse the palate and to help one decide how the wine pairs with food. Some wineries have restaurants, so if you want lunch check out the restaurant.

Picnic lunch? Many wineries encourage visitors to bring a picnic lunch. Frequently picnic tables or patio tables are available. Ask in advance if it is okay to bring a picnic lunch and where to picnic on the grounds. Do not bring wine from another winery or any other kind of alcohol. Laws restrict wineries and many are only allowed



Tasting room at Clover Hill Vineyards & Winery, Pennsylvania

to have their own alcohol on their premises. Besides, if you were going to someone's home for dinner, it would be tasteless to bring your own entrée.

Staff and visitors always appreciate good manners. If you have the opportunity to visit a vineyard, do not pick the grapes. If you would like to taste a wine grape at harvest time, be sure to ask a staff member. One winery we visited this summer mentioned how they don't mind visitors walking through the vineyards and taking pictures, but one day a visitor walked out of the vineyard with several bunches of grapes to ask what they were. It did not dawn on him until an owner reminded him that the grapes would have made wine. The visitor

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In This Issue

With the onset of August, many wineries will experience an increase in visitors through harvest sometime in October and early November. This issue of Wine Trail Traveler Newsletter focuses on the tasting room experience for the visitor.

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Tasting Room Tips

Dos

1. Let your wine host pour the wine.
2. Remember the crackers or cheese bites are for tastings – not lunch.
3. Use the spit/dump bucket.
4. Call in advance for groups of six or more.
5. Drink water.
6. Eat before you begin your wine tasting.
7. Do use a conversational voice.
8. Show an interest in wine by asking questions.

Don'ts

1. Don't elbow your way past others.
2. Don't be a wine snob. No one knows everything there is to know about wine.
3. Don't bring wine from another winery for a picnic.
4. Don't arrive tipsy. No one enjoys being around those with too much to drink. (Wineries may refuse entrance to those who are rowdy.)



Wine tasting at Linganore Winecellars/Berrywine Plantations, Maryland

Enhancing Your Winery Visit

Advance planning is the key to a successful winery visit. The majority of wineries in the United States have websites. A google search by state makes it easy to locate the website. Websites may include hours, types of wines, tour availability and directions.

Call in advance if your group will be larger than five. Some wineries do not have room for buses or limousines. Other wineries like to know in advance if large groups will be arriving so they can provide enough staff.

Tasting or drinking wine on an empty stomach is not a good idea. Eat well before you go to the winery. The more food in your stomach the less alcohol will affect you. Take bottled water and be sure to drink it especially if you will be visiting another winery. Plan on drinking as much water as you do wine. This is also vitally important when the weather is hot.

If a tour is available, go ahead and participate in it. Each winery tour focuses on what is important to their winery. However, most wineries include a visit to the press pad where the grapes arrive from the vineyard. Also included will be the tank room and barrel room. Most wineries like to include the history behind their winery. Some of these histories include winemakers who have come to the new world to start a winery and others are entrepreneurs who are fascinated with winemaking. Tours add to

the experience and can provide great photo opportunities.

Ask questions. The winery staff is usually very knowledgeable about the wine, winery and vineyards. In some cases, the staff will have a notebook behind the counter where they can check for information. Remember not everyone knows everything about wine. The wine culture can be a fun learning experience for everyone.

Enjoy browsing the shelves of wine accessories and gifts available in many tasting rooms. Almost all tasting areas have wine accessories and/or gifts available. At some wineries, the owner and winemaker want to focus on the wine and deliberately limit the number of items for sale. Other wineries tap into the potential market and have large, special selections for their visitors. You may want to start your holiday shopping early.

Talk to other visitors in the tasting room. Many times, there is more in common than just the wine, whether it is children, education, or work. Visitors like to share their experiences of visiting other wineries. Frequently they will suggest a particular winery to visit. Other wine tasters enjoy talking about the nuances of the wines at the winery.

Keep these tips in mind and more than likely you will have an experience you will remember for years to come.

K.S.

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tried to give them to the owner who replied, "They aren't good now. They aren't ready for making wine." Another major faux pas is to pick up a bottle and pour your own tasting. Let the wine consultant pour the wine.

The best motto to follow in a winery or vineyard would be the National Parks motto, "Take only pictures and leave only footprints."

When you visit a winery, if you like the wine and want to buy it that is great, but you do not need to purchase a bottle of wine. Do not buy a bottle of wine unless you like it. Participating in a winery tasting room can be a delightful experience for everyone.

K.S.

Expectations in a Winery Tasting Room

Most tasting rooms are similar in the way they operate. When entering the tasting room, a tasting room staff member will greet you. Walk up to the tasting bar and say you would like to taste some of the wines. Some wineries charge for tastings and others do not. Occasionally a glass is included when you pay a tasting fee. You may have a choice to taste all the wines you'd like on their list, or to choose a certain number of wines to taste, such as five wines.

Let the winery consultant guide your tasting. We've experienced consultants who pour the wine and tell us what we are about to smell and taste. Others will ask us what we observe about the wines. However, the latter is less frequent. There is a certain risk that winery staff takes if they ask your opinion. I recall a look of disappointment when one tasting consultant asked me what I thought a wine tasted like and I replied, "Leather." The consultant thought it tasted like coffee. I do not drink coffee and now I have a sneaky feeling that it must taste like leather.

If you go to a tasting room on a less busy day (usually in the middle of the week), you will enjoy the opportunity to talk about the wine, winery and vineyards. Most tasting room staff members are knowledgeable about the wines they are pouring. A mere one percent of the wineries we have visited had a staff member who admitted that he just helps on the weekend and pours the wine. He told us he didn't know anything about the wines he was pouring.

Most of the time, you'll stand at the tasting bar. Some tasting rooms have bar stools next to the tasting bar. This is a very welcome addition if you are tasting at your third winery of the day. Some wineries use tables for wine tastings. At McGregor Vineyard and Winery along Keuka Lake in New York, you will sit at a table. The wine consultant will bring a plate of bite-sized food and will discuss the wine list with you. We also had a "sit down and be served" experience at Gloria Ferrer in California.



Table setting at Gloria Ferrer in California

The "sit down at a table" theme continued at Schramsberg in California. After a tour of the caves at Schramsberg, the tour group gathered in a small dining room that had three tables set for a number of people. Our group filled two of the tables. The wine consultant talked about the sparkling wines and then served us at the table. This afforded a great opportunity to talk about the wine with the other people at your table. This intimate approach occurred after group tours at Pine Ridge Winery and Quintessa in California.

Occasionally the winemaker will be on hand and may give a tour and conduct your tasting. Our most memorable tour was at The Lenz Winery on Long Island in New York. The winemaker had us taste his wines from the stainless steel tanks. He asked us what we thought and more often than not agreed with us. His tour proceeded to the barrel room and with thief in hand had us taste the wine from some of the barrels. Tasting wine from the barrels or tanks can give you an idea if the wine is ready or what more aging will do to it. The winemaker at Prince Michel Vineyards and Winery in Virginia has special barrel tastings. He discusses his wines and the stage they are at when you taste them.

One of our favorite tastings was during the tour at Del Dotto Winery in California. The tour led our group through the over one hundred year old candle-lit tunnels. Our guide stopped along the way and had us taste wines from the barrels. If we

liked the wine, we were instructed to take a ticket attached to the barrel. After the tour, we could order any of the wines we tasted. The wine would be bottled and shipped to your address.

Visiting winery tasting rooms is a great activity. Try to limit the number of tasting rooms you visit in one day. We try to visit two or three in a day. Tasting rooms are less crowded on the weekdays. Call ahead or check their times on the Internet before you start your adventure.

TS

FAQ

Is it okay to dump or spit your wine in a tasting room?

Yes, definitely. Taste your wine and then pour the wine into the dump bucket. It is okay to spit your wine. If you are not comfortable spitting into the bucket, ask for a glass to spit into more discretely.



Recipes with Wine

Wine Trail Traveler continues to add recipes to the website. Recently we have received six recipes from a winery in North Carolina as well as recipes from wineries in Pennsylvania. At the end of each recipe, the contributing winery is acknowledged. Many of our readers are checking out the recipes. If you haven't taken a look at the recipe section, please take a moment to do so. Here are a couple of recipes that may just wet your appetite a little bit more. Do you have a recipe that uses wine as an ingredient, then why not submit it to Wine Trail Traveler?

Concordian Meatballs by Debbie Reinhard

A sweet and tangy sauce for some terrific meatballs.

Ingredients

9 oz. Concord Grape Jelly
6 oz. Chili Sauce
½ c Ketchup
2 -3 t Lemon Juice
Several Generous Splashes of Clover Hill Concord Wine

Directions

Combine all ingredients. Heat and cook meatballs in the sauce.

Contributed by Clover Hill Winery, Pennsylvania

Rose Chiffon Pie

2 c blanched almonds, ground
2 T butter or oleo
3 T sugar

Filling:

1 envelope Unflavored gelatin
¾ c sugar
4 eggs, separated
½ c Duplin Bald Head Red wine
¼ c water
¼ t cream of tartar
1 c whipping cream
5 drops red food color

Directions

Crust: Blend ground almonds, softened butter, and sugar. Press into a 9 inch pie pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes.

Filling: Mix gelatin and ½ cup of the sugar into top of a double boiler; beat in egg yolks until light and fluffy. Blend in wine and water; place over simmering water. Cook, stirring constantly, until gelatin dissolves and mixture coats a spoon. Pour into a large bowl. Set bowl in a pan of ice water to speed setting. Chill at room temperature, stirring often, just until as thick as unbeaten egg white. While mixture chills, beat egg whites with cream of tartar until foamy white and double in volume in a medium size bowl; beat in remaining ¼ cup sugar, 1 tbsp. at a time, until meringue stands in stiff peaks.

Beat cream until stiff in a second medium size bowl. Fold meringue, then whipped cream into thickened gelatin mixture until no streaks of white remain. Fold in about 5 drops of food coloring to tint pink. Chill again, if necessary, until thick enough to mound when spooned. Spoon into cooled crust. Chill at least 4 hours or until firm. Just before serving, garnish with whipped cream and toasted almond slices.

Contributed by Duplin Winery, North Carolina

Our Partners

Stop by these wineries that list with Wine Trail Traveler. Be sure to check the [winery ads](#) for more detailed and updated information.

Basignani Winery

15722 Falls Road,
Sparks, MD 21152

Fiore Winery

3026 Whiteford Road
Pylesville, MD 21132

King Ferry Winery

658 Lake Road
King Ferry, New York 13081

Kluge Estate Winery & Vineyards

100 Grand Cru Drive
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902

Pearmund Cellars

6190 Georgetown Road
Broad Run, VA 20137

Veritas Vineyard & Winery

145 Saddleback Farm
Afton, Virginia 22920

The Winery at La Grange

4970 Antioch Road
Haymarket, VA 20169

Have a recipe that uses wines as an ingredient? If you'd like it published on Wine Trail Traveler send it to newsletter@winetrailtraveler.com.