

Wine lesson for Northern Iowa University

The wine tasting is an experience of 3 main senses:

The first sense involved is the **sight**. Once we serve wine we can analyse the colours: yellow, red, pink and their shades, in relation to the wine grape.

The different intensity of colour is given by grape skin. In fact the juice usually is white and when the skins are soaked in it, they release anthocyanin (colour pigment), staining the wine as a result. The different graduation colours of skin (white/ red) gives the wine different shades of colour but also the contact time between juice and skins is fundamental, above all for obtaining rosé and orange wines.

During the phase of maceration of wine, more time the skins stay in touch with the most, more intense will be the colours of the wine. For that reason, we can have such things as rosé wines (limited red skin contacts) and orange wines (a darker and more flavoured kind of white wine. The modern white wines are usually obtained only from juice).

A funny wine is the white wine from red grape. In fact there is a machine that peels the grapes so we can have a white wine only with some very soft pink shades.



For a better evaluation of the colour of a wine, a white sheet of paper can be placed under the glass, slightly inclined, to have a neutral background.

Other aspects evaluated in the visual phase of the tasting are the transparency of the wine, the viscosity, the presence of sediments or other opacities which, in some cases, could reveal a bad state of conservation of the wine bottle.

In the case of sparkling wines, we will also evaluate the foam and the bubbles (perlage), their fineness, quantity and duration.

After visual examination, the second sense involved is the **smell** of wine. In this phase we experience multiple sensations, the memory of our experience lived and through this feeling, our brain collects information, so we can connect a flavour to a specific flower, spice or fruit.

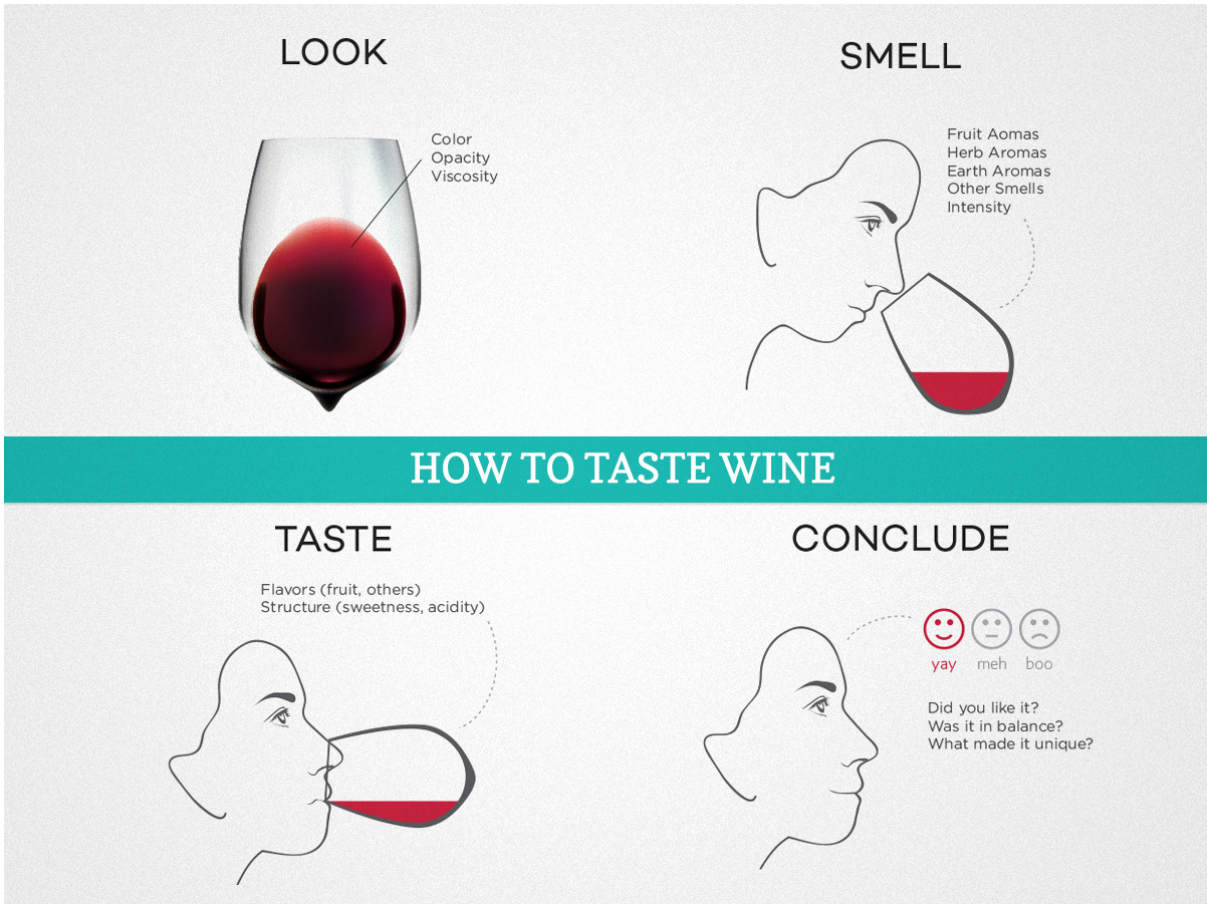
It can be a long phase of our tasting, in which we can appreciate different nuances every time we bring the glass to the nose. One way to better release the aromas of wine is swirling the glass. The movement created, a small vortex in the glass, increases the surface of the wine in contact with air and allows a more intense release of olfactory molecules.

There are some tricks to allow a better olfactory analysis. In case the white wine is too cold we may have difficulty in perceiving the aromas, so it would be ideal to put the hand under the glass to warm it a little.

If we taste a not very young red wine, it may be necessary using a decanter, where the wine can be poured even one or two hours before, to allow the wine to “breathe” and release the flavours. Even with young red wines it would be ideal waiting a few minutes before proceeding to the olfactory and then gustatory examination, to better appreciate the sensory pattern.

Typical of white wines are the aromas of flowers, aromatic herbs and white fruits, even exotic ones. In red wines we could appreciate red fruits but also spicy and woody hints, given by the aging in the barrel.

Then we have the last phase: **Sense of tasting** for appreciating more flavours and the structure of wine. In this phase we could find the same scents previously perceived by the nose and appreciate new hints, even unexpected ones, such as salinity or minerality. We will also appreciate the body of wine (in the white ones), the finesse of tannins (in the red ones) and the persistence of all these sensations. After all these feelings through smelling and tasting we decide if we appreciated or not the wine.



After this little introduction about wine, we talk about the **Terroir**

The Terroir is defined by the cultivation soil and all its nutritional elements, by the climate and the microclimate of the cultivation area, by the topography and by the other plants, spontaneous and not, present in the vineyards, as you can see in the picture below. The wine is therefore the results not only of the grape used and the vinification processes but also the expression of a terroir in which the grape was grown , expressing its best qualities and characteristics. There are grapes that are able to give their best only in particular territories (usually they are the native grapes) but there are international varieties able to always reveal different qualities based on the different terroir in which they were grown.



A particular example about terroir is given from Etna Vulcan.

On this volcano, which is the highest and biggest one in Europe, we can find different kinds of land and also different kinds of weather... for example in the eastern part it's more raining than the others. Etna is an interesting example because we have the latitude of Africa but an extreme altitude for growing grapes.

Here we can register the lowest temperature in winter time of all Sicily, and a big excursion of degrees between morning and night in summertime.

Furthermore during the volcanic eruptions the different lava flows and lapillus of lava create , in the years, different kinds of land with different geological properties in the same volcano. Also considering where the most recent lava and lapillus arrived, there are still areas that cannot be cultivated because the soil is not yet fragmented sufficiently to allow the insertion of plants. For this reason today many wine companies are producing wine only in little areas of the volcano, where there are different kinds of soil and different weather conditions that

we can call “microzone”... or “Contrade”. This is the perfect place for people who like to drink wine and enjoy the special different expressions of the same place.

On **Etna** vulcan the irrigation is prohibited because the grapes are able to find the water in the soil and, being a difficult soil, the radical development of the vines is favored. Etna is a vulcan with a wonderful variety of nature aspects, with rivers underground that give fertility to the grapes. The irrigation is prohibited because giving too much water to the plants can lose the flavours and the taste of the grape. Grape plants used to suffer to search for water by roots. Thanks to this habit of adversity, the grapes of Etna resisted a very invasive threat of Phylloxera, an insect that destroyed many grapes in Europe in the last century. For this reason, today, we can admire examples of very old grape plants (more than 100 years old) that give us a lower quantity but a better quality of grape.

Many companies are investing on Etna because of the better quality of wine, many differences of land and weather, so a very varied terroir that can make the difference in the market and can allow them to sell wine at premium price.



Yesterday and today

About premium price in the last 2 decades in Sicily they understood the new philosophy of a production more focused on quality than quantity. In fact 2-3 decades ago all the grapes harvested were mixed to do blends or were exported to North Italy to be mixed with other grapes.

In the past the only important thing was to produce more at the lowest price, without giving importance to quality. Marco De Bartoli, a local wine producer, realized that some grapes as Grillo and Inzolia, used once only to produce Marsala wine or Passito dessert wine, could be also vinified in a dry version and good to produce wine suitable for the whole meal, from aperitifs to the main fish and meat courses. So all the producers started to focus more attention on quality and by now there are many local companies who are more focused on searching new ancient grapes which were abandoned. So by now there is more attention to autoctone grapes.

We have an example at Trapani with Perricone grape. It is the only autoctone red grape that grows only at Trapani and Palermo areas. It's a "new" grape, rediscovered in the last decade by a local company.

Perricone is also called "Pignatello" in Sicily for a special reason. Pignatello derives from the sicilian word "pignata" a "pot" used for cooking. This grape can grow better on the red soil rich in clay typical of Trapani area. This red dirt was used once to produce pots and for this reason ancestors called this grape Pignatello, today Perricone.

Perricone grape was mixed with other grapes ... it wasn't considered good enough alone. But today we understood that this grape is very good but just very difficult to cultivate. In fact, considering the other grapes cultivated in the same area, Perricone is the first one to flourish but the last one to be harvested, so it needs to stay more on the plant to get mature.

The area of Trapani is characterised by the presence of sea and wind...

Trapani is in the north-west corner of Sicily, an area hit everyday by different winds. We always have problems with water... some years we have little rainy winters but luckily grapes are very strong plants. We have many vineyards that are very close to the coast and also the presence of wind, get dry the land and the plants. There are many varieties of grape and not all can grow at Trapani. Our area, for example, is more vocated to cultivation of white grapes which are **Grillo, Cataratto, Inzolia and Zibibbo**.

Grillo is the perfect example of plant used to suffer that can grow only in Sicily. We have a wonderful example of Grillo in Mozia island, a little island, very close to the coast of Trapani, with a perimeter of 4 km. It's an area with a constant presence of strong wind and the saltiness from sea, thanks to the action of wind, arrives to the plants and fruits giving sapid flavours that we can enjoy once we taste wine. The production of "Grillo di Mozia" is just about 5000 bottles so considering the new sicilian more oriented quality production, we can find "Grillo di Mozia" in the wine bar at 22 € per bottle, (premium price) rather than other Grillo wines which cost from 8 to 12 €.



Zibibbo is another white grape that grows around Trapani. The best area for its cultivation is Pantelleria island, very close to Africa where hot weather and dry soil allow the production of this grape.

From Zibibbo grape, for example, we can have 2 different productions:

It's used to produce a dry wine, very aromatic, ideal for aperitifs, crudité, sushi

and to make Passito, a meditation straw wine, good for dessert. Passito wine

is produced with grapes dried naturally under the sun or artificially inside a big room with a particular condition of humidity and temperature.



An example of grape that grows in all Sicily, except on Etna, is the Nero d'Avola (red grape). This grape can find in every part of island good condition for growing, expressing in different ways:

- 1) Around Trapani, because of the hot weather, Nero d'Avola is rude, aggressive;
- 2) In the center of Sicily it's a medium body wine, fresher and aromatic, because the grape is cultivated at 600-900 metres above sea level.
- 3) In South east Sicily, Nero d'Avola grape gives a lighter and more aromatic wine.

Italians relationship with food and wine

The difference between Italian people who live in the North or South has a strong connection to their habits, lifestyle, and consumption.

People who live in North Italy, also considering their stressed life for a long distance in big cities, are used to having fast lunches eating a sandwich, a salad. They start working very early in the morning and go back home late in the evening. People who live in North Italy give more importance on their aspect, on wellness, going to beauty centres and the gym .

People who live in South Italy, above all in the little towns, are very relaxed!

So for example they start their day at 9 a.m. up to 1 p.m.. So they have a stop for lunch, a rest (the popular siesta) and then back to work from 4.30 p.m. up to 8 p.m.! This is the stereotype of italian life. Anyway in some parts of Italy this big difference between South and North is real.

If we consider for example Christmas time, Easter, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day in southern Italy we have more attention to eat good food. Above all people take more attention to buying good fish to cook in different ways, more attention to wine combination with fish.

The most typical example of relaxing cooking is at Napoli, for the preparation of tomato sauce.

Women wake up very early in the morning, at 6 a.m., they cook tomato sauce on low heat and they come back to sleep. If you cook food at low heat, cooking is better and give a better tasting. So the focus is on slowness, not being in a hurry and enjoying what we are eating.

In this focus, about 20 years ago, Slow Food Association was born.

It's aim is encouraging little farmers to valorize typical autoctone food who could disappear because the big industries who have more financial power can beat with mass food.

So thanks to Slow Food association, little farmers are valued and we can appreciate typical food that could disappear.

At Trapani's province we have some slow food products:

Vastedda Cheese

Sea salt

Red Garlic

Melon of Paceco

Capers of Pantelleria

Thanks to Slow Food philosophy we can guarantee a different concept of life style, more focused to quality and 3 concepts of sustainability:

- **Social:** we let small company to be important, continuing to maintain tradition, the history of our ancestors and transmitting it to our next generation
- **Economic:** It let family-run businesses to have earnings
- **Environment:** If we focus attention on quality, all these little farms will have to maintain quality using only natural fertilizers and giving a better world for our next generation.