

Five Common Wine Myths Debunked

Wine has become more and more demystified and accessible to American consumers over the past several years – we now out-rank France for total wine consumption! - but there are still a few lingering myths out there.

Here are five of my favorite wine myths that I want to debunk.

Wine Myth Number 5:

Red wines cause more headaches than white wines due to higher sulfites content

It's usually not sulfites that cause a wine headache. White wines, and a variety of other foods - like dried fruits - often contain more sulfites than red wine, yet they generally don't cause a reaction. In fact, our bodies produce 1,000 mg of sulfites each day.

Tannins (antioxidant-rich compounds in the skins and seeds of grapes and oak barrels) are more likely to blame. Older wines tend to be less tannic, so look for older vintages if you're prone to headaches.

Remember – the most important way to avoid a headache is to keep well-hydrated and enjoy wine in moderation.

Wine Myth Number 4:

White wine goes with fish, red wine goes with meat

As guidelines go, this one isn't actually too bad, but it's a guideline, not a rule. I am fanatical about wine pairings and I am always looking for the ideal food and wine combination, but I have learned that there are many exceptions to this "rule" including, if it feels good, do it! A good example of this is grilled or roasted salmon. I think Pinot Noir and Barbaresco pair better with this fish dish than traditional white wines. And if you're enjoying a veal or pork cutlet, try a nice fat White Rhone – think Viognier or Roussanne – with it.

Wine Myth Number 3:

Opening a bottle of wine early is the best way to let it breathe

The vast majority of red wines do not need to be opened to "breathe" or decanted to show their best. In fact, only about 20 percent of all wine produced today should be given air before serving. However, if you are going to uncork a bottle of wine and let it breathe, don't just open the bottle and let it sit there for an hour or two. The narrow bottleneck prevents air from getting to and opening up the wine effectively. Pouring the wine into a decanter or a big wine glass is the most effective way to give the wine maximum exposure to air. I have a friend who uses an old water pitcher. But be careful – too much exposure to air can be a bad thing, particularly for older wines that need to breathe a little but not too much.

Wine Myth Number 2:

White wines don't age well

To the contrary, white wines – including Champagne - can age very well. Depending on the particular vintage, certain white wines actually benefit from aging. The key is to store the wine in a cool, dark, humid place. Some vintage white Rhone Valley wines and White Burgundy wines can easily improve over a five to ten year period and certain vintage Champagnes can age for decades (although the latter do lose some effervescence but take on a nutty complexity). One rule of thumb to heed: wines in magnum bottles (1.5 liters) generally fair better than those in regular size (750 milliliters) bottles.

And the Number One Wine Myth Is:

A screw-cap closures indicates lower-quality wine

Not all that long ago, this statement might have been true, but not today! Screw-caps closures have come a long way, thanks in part to the innovative and trendsetting winemakers in Australia and New Zealand. Today, many bottles of fine wine, especially white wines, from all over the world have turned to screw-caps as a less expensive and more reliable closure. Best of all, it eliminates the possibility of "Cork Taint" - a term referring to a set of undesirable smells or tastes found in a bottle of wine, that can only be detected after opening. This condition is generally caused by a cork found to be tainted by the presence of the chemical compound 2,4,6-trichloroanisole (TCA). When it comes into contact with the wine, it causes the wine to have odd aromas associated with a musty basement. The wine has a distinct flavor of wet cardboard. Make mine a screw cap!