

# WeightWatchers®

## Simple Sipping: Wine 101

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Wine know-how for beginners and enthusiasts alike.

Do you order the same glass of wine every time you go out? Ready to expand your horizons but not sure where to start? Help is on the way.

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We've gathered the best advice on how to enjoy wine to the fullest – when you're dining out, pouring a bottle at home, or giving it as a gift – from wine expert Leslie Sbrocco, author of *Wine for Women* (William Morrow, 2003) and *The Simple & Savvy Wine Guide* (William Morrow, 2006), as well as our own WeightWatchers.com Message Board users.

### **At the Restaurant Decoding the Wine List**

The best way to find a wine that you and your table will enjoy is to speak with your server or sommelier [saw-mel-YAY]. Explain the kind of wines you like, and name some producers, suggests Sbrocco. This will convey your preference and price range. In a business situation, Sbrocco explains that you can discreetly clue your server in on the price range you're looking for by discussing the wines you like and *pointing* to an item on the list, saying, "I like something like this."

The key to learning about wine is having fun with it, and not being intimidated. The way that you learn is by drinking. It's very fun research.  
-Leslie Sbrocco

If everyone at the table has different tastes, it's perfectly fine to order by the glass – this will give you more room to try adventurous, fun wines. If the menu has an "alternatives" section, that's where you'll find the "funky stuff" that tends to be more affordable, says Sbrocco. Some great examples include Argentinean Malbec (medium-full bodied red that's vibrant and earthy) and crisp and spicy whites such as Gewürztraminer [geh-VEHRTZ-trah-mee-ner] and Grüner Veltliner [GROO-ner FELT-lih-ner].

Community Board user MM1970 is a big fan of Firestone Gewürztraminer. When in doubt, BLACKLISTER4 suggests picking the wine on the menu with the funniest name. "Wineries know that most people think wine is serious, so if they're sticking a funny name on the label, they're confident in the wine."

### **Smelling, Swirling, Sipping**

Your server or sommelier has arrived with the bottle you ordered – now what? "Number one, don't worry about smelling the cork," Sbrocco says. When the server opens the bottle and presents her with the cork, Sbrocco looks at it to make sure it's intact and moist, then puts the cork down. Swirl the wine in your glass to release the aromas and then smell it; that's the most important part, Sbrocco says. The wine should smell fresh, like lots of fruit. Take a sip and, if it tastes fine, say "thank you" and have the server pour it around.

### **Casual Wining and Dining Red, White and Pizza**

Beer isn't the only drink that goes with pizza. "When you think about it, pizza is cheese, bread and sauce – sort of the 'holy trinity' for wine," Sbrocco says. Try a glass of Chardonnay – a hint of smoky cheese pairs nicely with lightly oaky Chardonnay.

Whether eating Gouda, Piave or other hard, salty cheeses, JENNASRIN likes to pair them with dry rosé wines. "I've had one from Quivira (California) recently and one from Adi (Italy). Delicious!"

If you like red with pizza, try Chianti. It has enough acids to break through the richness of the cheese, and it goes well with tomato sauce, says Sbrocco.

With veggie pizza, Sbrocco favors whites, such as Orvieto, a bright Italian Sauvignon Blanc. "It really picks up the crunchy herbal character of a veggie pizza, and goes especially well with mushrooms and bell peppers."

### **Popcorn, Chips and Salsa**

"One of my favorite snacks in the world is potato chips and bubbly," says Sbrocco. On her list of favorite, inexpensive (usually under \$10) sparklers is Prosecco "Brio" from Italy and Cava Brut from Spain. "These go great with chips, Doritos®, popcorn – anything really salty."

With chips and salsa, a Sauvignon Blanc-based white or high-acid red like Pinot Noir are nice complements to tangy, spicy tomatoes.

### **At Home**

#### **Basic Equipment**

Start out simple: Wine glasses, a foil cutter and a corkscrew. Sbrocco recommends affordable, all-purpose glasses with generous (16- to 22-ounce) bowls. Why so big? You'll have plenty of room for swirling and less opportunity for the wine to end up on your carpet or you! Sbrocco likes thin crystal because it's thicker than glass. Plenty of stores have affordable crystal glasses for about four to six dollars a stem.

A simple "waiter's friend" corkscrew will cost around \$5, while lever-style cork pullers can average from \$20 to \$100. A foil cutter simply cuts the top foil section from the bottle so a corkscrew can be inserted. This is also a great tool to attach to a gift bottle of wine.

#### **Preserving Your Wine**

"Keeping wine in the refrigerator will extend its life," says Sbrocco. Depending on how delicate the wine is (lighter wines have a shorter life span than bigger, more alcoholic ones), three to five days or more is the average life of an opened bottle.

### Buying Wine: Mastering the Store

One of the best tips we can offer you is this: Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you prefer to buy from a liquor store, ask for someone who knows the wine section well. Learn how to phrase your needs. Do you prefer fruity, sweet or dry wine? If you are looking for something with a smooth finish that's lower in tannins, say so. Do you want a lighter wine with less alcohol per volume? What's your price range?

Here are some favorite bottles from our Community Board users:

- PENDERLK suggests trying a refreshing white Viognier [vee-oh-NYAY] or Beaujolais [boh-zhuh-LAY] as a nice red for beginners. Two Beaujolais producers PENDERLK mentions are Joseph Drouhin and George de Boeuf.
- SHELLMORK likes Gamay Beaujolais or Sutter Home White Merlot.
- THE\_GOUDA\_WIFE prefers Chateau Ste Michelle's Riesling.
- Blue Moon Riesling from Oregon is my favorite, LESJO81 says.
- A few of \*CRUELLA\*'s favorite reds are: Francis Coppola Black Label Claret, Black Opal Cabernet Merlot, Greg Norman Estates Limestone Coast Shiraz, and Ruffino Chianti Classico.
- If you want to try a red that's not too expensive, MOM2AZNJZ suggests Fetzer Valley Oaks Merlot or Forest Glen Merlot.
- IMERALD likes Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio.
- For a special occasion wine, MISSKIE recommends splurging on Cabernets from these California producers: PlumpJack, Cakebread Cellars or Chateau St. Jean.

### Gift Giving

A great bottle of wine is a fantastic gift. Whether the occasion is a housewarming, dinner party, bridal shower or birthday, an impressive bottle never goes out of style. Sbrocco has a few budget-friendly favorite wines that come in great packaging: Cateana Malbec (Argentina); Concannon Chardonnay "Selected Vineyards" (California); and Perrin Brothers from France are all in the \$10 range.

Message Board user, SQUEEZYWEEZEE, likes to give a bottle of Merlot from Pietra Santa. "It is our gift for friends who love red wine. Everyone raves about it."

How can you turn a delicious bottle into an even better gift? Add a personal touch. Sbrocco suggests putting a favorite recipe on a pretty note card and tying it around the bottle. When giving sparkling wine, Sbrocco likes to attach a little bag of gourmet nuts or unpopped popcorn.

Are you considering giving an after-dinner wine? Sbrocco recommends the sleek, clear bottle of Warre's Otima, a Tawny Port. "It's a lovely, sweet dessert wine and I like to package up some caramels and nuts with the bottle. It makes a great gift."

*\* Prices vary and wines may not be available in all areas.*