

HOW TO IDENTIFY & MEMORIZE WINE AROMAS MORE EASILY



The Wine Aroma Wheel was created to facilitate communication about wine flavor by providing a standard terminology.

“The figure most responsible for the emergence of the modern sommelier lexicon was not a swish-and-spit celebrity like Parker but a professor of viticulture and enology at the University of California at Davis named Ann Noble. In 1984, Noble, drawing upon the work of other sensory scientists at Davis, published the Wine Aroma Wheel, a circular chart of six dozen descriptors that could be used to describe wine by smell.”

Is there a better way to talk about wine?

By Bianca Bosker, The New Yorker, JULY 29, 2015

The requirements of words included in the wheel was very simply that the terms had to be specific and analytical, and not be hedonic or the result of an integrated or judgmental response.

Floral is a general but analytical descriptive term, whereas "fragrant",

"elegant" or "harmonious" are either imprecise and vague (fragrant) or hedonic, and judgmental.

The wheel has very general terms located in the center, going to the most specific terms in the outer tier. These terms are NOT the only terms that can be used to describe wines, but represent ones that are often encountered.

Novice tasters often complain that they "cannot smell anything" or can't think of a way to describe the aroma of wine. Fortunately, it is very easy to train our noses and brains to connect and quickly link terms with odors. The fastest way is to make physical standards to illustrate important and major notes in wine aroma. To do this, with few exceptions, materials available from the grocery store are all you need.



One of the few standards that cannot be provided is the linalool aroma of Riesling, Gewürztraminer or Muscat wines; for this, get handiwipes: the distinct floral, citrus aroma is Linalool; Put a opened handwipe into an empty covered glass. alternatively, bring some FROOTLOOPS and put them dry into an empty wine glass. Sounds silly, but it makes a good linalool standard).

White Wine

If you are just beginning then it is easier to evaluate white wines, so start by selecting some wines with large differences in flavor. For example, include an oaky, buttery Chardonnay (most Australian, or California ones will do), for a "vegetative" Sauvignon blanc, wines from Sancerre or a Sauvignon blanc from New Zealand or cool parts of California will suffice. A floral Riesling or Gewürztraminer from cooler parts of California (North or Central Coast), Oregon, Germany, Alsace, France will provide a further contrast. If you wish to use a fourth wine , you could try an unoaked Chardonnay (IF you can find it), non-vegetative Sauvignon blanc or include another variety such as Viognier.

Then make some standards in a neutral white wine (usually a cheaper jug white will be adequate for this purpose). For each standard the approximate recipes are provided below, but they all need to be tweaked. Add more "stuff" if the aroma is not identifiable; dilute with the base wine if it is too strong.



Dr. Ann Noble puts the standards in labelled wine glasses, and cover them with disposable plastic Petri dish lids, watch glasses or even saran wrap will do . The reason for the lids is to increase the intensity of the aromas and to prevent contaminating the odour of the entire room.

Aroma References

The standards for the white wines would then most importantly include (per single 2-oz glass of wine standard):

- Asparagus (several drops of brine of canned asparagus)
- Bell Pepper (tiny piece of bell pepper - don't leave in too long)
- Vanilla (drop of vanilla extract)
- Butter (drop of butter extract)
- Clove (one clove, don't leave in too long)
- Citrus (teaspoon or so of a mixture of fresh orange and grapefruit juice)
- Peach or apricot puree or juice (teaspoons)
- Pineapple (teaspoons)
- (Honey: optional standard, needs quite a bit per glass)

BASE WINE (the unadulterated wine used for making standards)

From this point on, anything goes: smell the wines first, smell the standards, start to see which terms describe which wines. Perhaps you all come up with NEW terms (lichee/lychee--so get some!). Smelling the BASE WINE makes it really easy to identify the spiked aromas by contrast.

Red Wine

For beginning red wine tasting, using the same principle that you should include very different wines, include a Pinot noir (Carneros or very cool central coast area of Ca., Oregon, or Burgundy), a Cabernet Sauvignon (for vegetative, get a wine from a cooler CA region) for less vegetative, try Napa, Sonoma, Washington, a black peppery Zinfandel (Sonoma, Placer county, El Dorado county of CA) . Additional wines could be Italian varieties such as Sangiovese.



Aroma References

The standards for the above red wines would then most importantly include (per single 2-oz glass in a neutral red wine):

- Asparagus (several drops of brine of canned asparagus)
- Bell Pepper (tiny piece of bell pepper - don't leave in too long)
- Vanilla (drop of vanilla extract)
- Butter (drop of butter extract)
- Clove (one clove - don't leave in too long)
- Soy sauce (few drops, great for older reds; try molasses separately)
- Berry (mix of fresh or frozen berries and/or berry jams - experiment!)
- Strawberry jam ((for the Pinot noir) 1-3 tablespoons OLD strawberry jam)
- Artificial fruit (add few crystals of red Koolaid® powder)
- Black pepper (few grains black pepper)
- Anise, black licorice (use few drops of extract)

BASE WINE (the unadulterated wine used for making standards)

Again, be sure to smell your creations to be sure that you can detect the desired aroma and that it is not too strong.

Sparkling Wine

Sparkling wines need different terms than those on the wine aroma wheel. In addition to citrus and berry standards, below are listed some of the terms most relevant to sparkling wines, especially those with long aging on the yeast lees before being disgorged.



Aroma References

Standards for sparkling wines: (In 2 oz neutral white still wine)

- Lime (Try few drops of Rose's lime Juice and make separate standard of squeezed lime juice)
- Apple (Difficult to make; try apple juice and experiment)
- Toasted hazelnuts (Try different nuts in an empty glass)
- Sour cream/yogurt (Try tbsp in empty glass; try tbsp in base wine)
- Malt extract (Tbsp Malt syrup)
- Vermouth (Few drops to tsp)
- Vegemite (Tiny amount of Vegemite in base of wine glass, add base wine)
- Cherry/strawberry (Use a few drops to 1 oz of cherry or strawberry flavoured juices or extracts)
- Nutmeg (few grains)
- Caramel (crush one Kraft caramel in base wine)
- Vanilla (as above).

Wine Faults

For your own benefit, some of the commonly encountered wine defects can also be illustrated by making standards, although for some, such as a moldy cork, the BEST standard is the actual example of the defect.



Aroma References

- Volatile acidity/VA - resulting from oxidation or acetobacter spoilage
 - Ethyl Acetate (few drops ethyl acetate or nail polish remover)
 - Acetic acid (few drops vinegar)
- Oxidation
 - Acetaldehyde (few drops of sherry)
- Sulfur
 - H₂S - Hydrogen sulfide (boiled egg or black sand from Japanese store)
 - Ethyl mercaptan (smell of natural gas - tell people to experiment on their own)
 - SO₂ - Sulfur dioxide (dried apricots that are orange and say they have sulfites)
- Brettanomyces - a horsy , barnyard smell (drop of creosote or piece of old fashioned band-aid)
- Moldy Cork
 - TCA - Trichloroanisole (a very potent compound) (just save a wine you find that has this defect)

The Wine Aroma Wheel was shown to be a great learning tool:

“The aficionado consumer is one who consumes and enjoys a hedonic product regularly but has failed to obtain product expertise from his/ her many experiences. In experiment 1, we find that providing aficionados a cross-modal learning tool (wine aroma wheel) during their tasting helps them strengthen their experiential memory and withstand influence from misleading marketing communications. In experiment 2, we find that accurate multisensory information delivered through either the wine aroma wheel or advertising can enhance how aficionados learn from their direct tasting experience.”

K.A. Latour & M.S. Latour Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 37, December 2010

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