
LE
COAM
COURS D'OENOLOGIE AND MORE
How to Taste Wine?
The simple method

This e-book is sent upon registration for the COAM newsletter, which provides advice and information about wine tasting.

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Dear Reader,



This guide aims to provide you with a **clear** and **concise** introduction to wine tasting.

Since the launch of COAM, I have been working with our **trainers** on our teaching methods, to simplify wine tasting concepts and make them easier for you to memorise. In the following pages, you will discover a **step-by-step** guide to put words to the wine you are tasting, and also better understand it.

Remember, tasting is a continuous **learning journey**, so practice regularly and read everything you can on the subject!
You can also find advice and practical information to help you develop your wine tasting skills in our newsletter, *La Lettre du Dégustateur*.

Are you ready?
I recommend reading this book with a glass of wine in hand, for a step by step tasting experience… 😊

Enjoy,

Yann
The COAM team



Before we get started, here is a quick reminder of the golden rules of wine tasting, that are also included in our oenology course tasting notebooks.

The Golden Rules of Wine Tasting

- Trust your senses, try to express how you perceive the wine.
- Taste regularly to develop your senses.
- Take notes.
- Be curious about all the wine you taste, with no preconceptions.

Contents

1. **How does it work?**
2. **The appearence**
3. **The nose**
4. **The palate**
5. **Wine tasting conclusions**
6. **A final note**

How Does it Work?

There are 3 phases in wine tasting.

A visual phase, olfactory phase and gustatory phase, in the following order: observe, smell and taste! Each of these phases reveals information about the wine you are tasting.

Your eyes tell you about:

- The age of the wine
- Its alcohol content

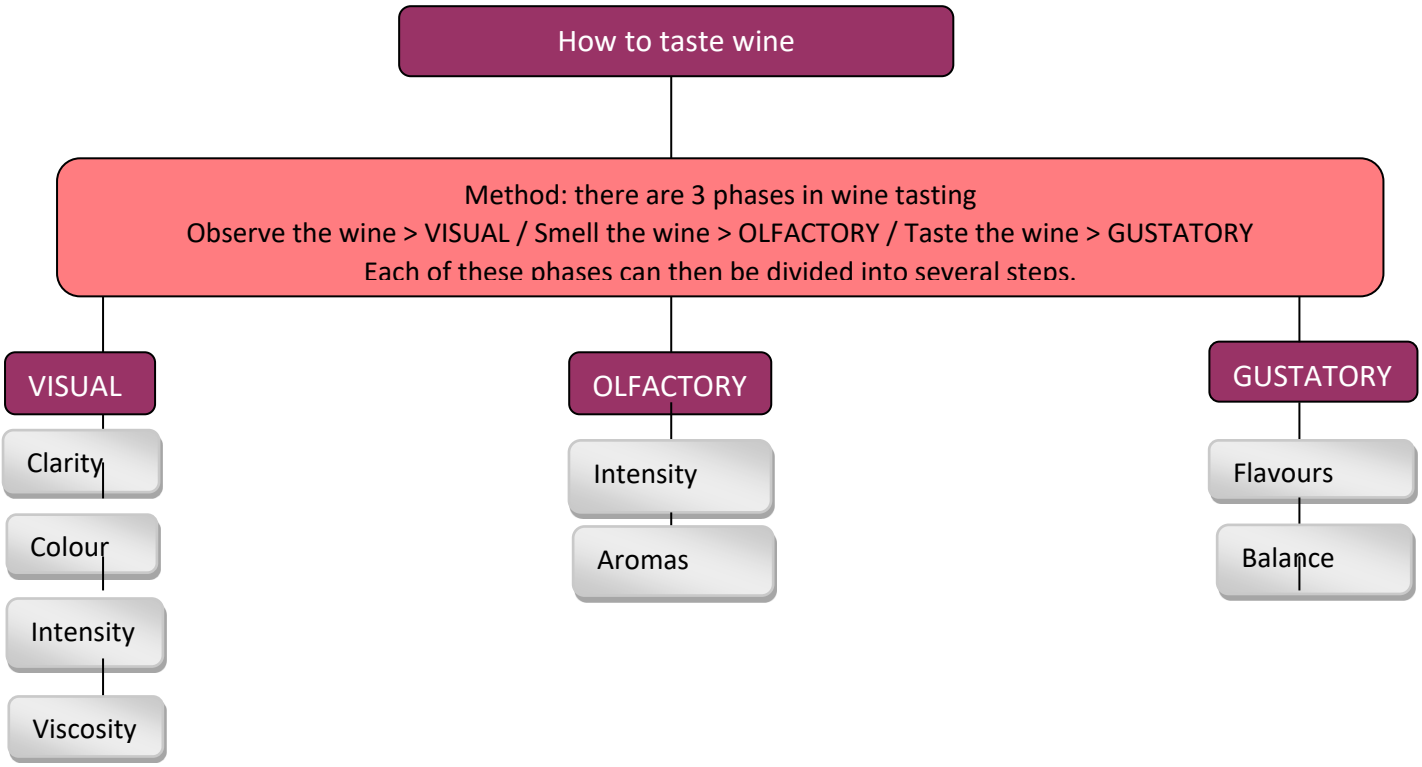
Your nose tells you about:

- Any wine faults
- Its potential age

Your mouth tells you about:

- The wine's balance
- Its quality
- Its potential age

Each of these wine tasting phases can be split into different steps:



Now, let's take a closer look at each of these components.
Starting with the visual phase!

The Visual Analysis of Wine

Colour

Red Wine	White Wine
Purple	Colourless
Cherry	Green-Yellow
Ruby	Lemon-Yellow
Brick	Gold
Mahogany	Orange



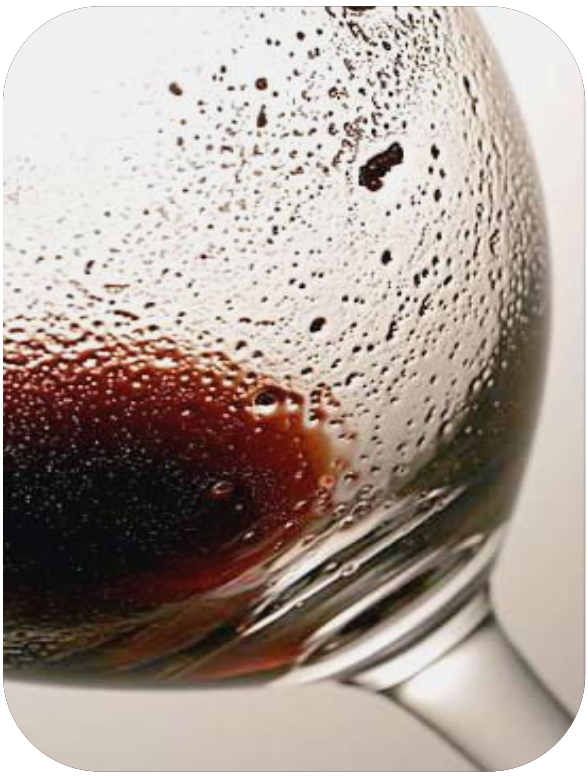
Development over time

Development over time

A wine's colour is an indication of its age: red wine goes from purple (young) to brown (old), and white wine from greenish-yellow (young) to orange (old).

In white wines, an orange hue can also be characteristic of a sweet wine (rich in sugar): sweetness affects the colour of white wine.

If you're interested in finding out more, here are a few factors that can impact on a wine's colour: grape variety, vintage, fermentation and maturation.



Clarity

Vocabulary: Clear / Cloudy / Murky

There are two things to look for here:

The presence of sediment:

- In red wines: a well-aged (or unfiltered) wine. Sediment is usually found at the bottom of a bottle or in the glass (see photo).
-
- In white wines: white crystals are tartrate crystals. They form when the wine is stored in a cold environment… but it's not a fault!

Or a murky colour:

- This is often due to an alteration of the wine's quality.

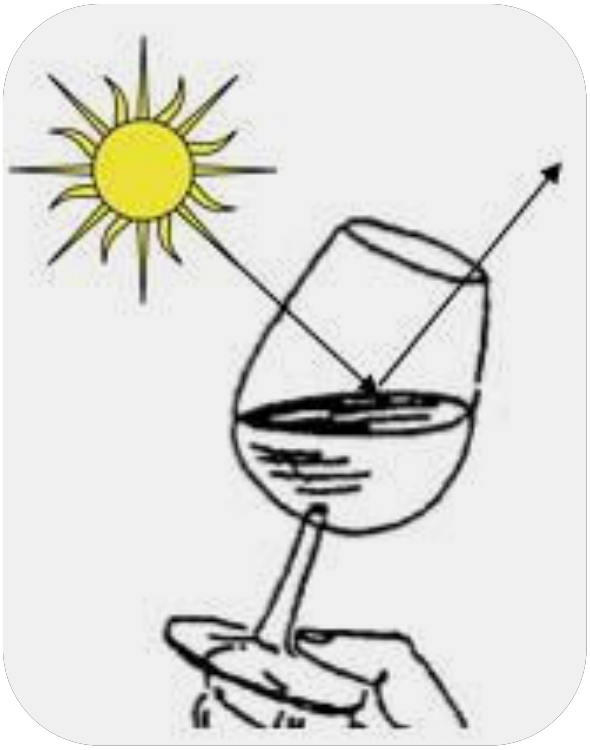
Brightness

Vocabulary: Dull / Matt / Bright / Brilliant

This step is about evaluating the reflection of the light on the wine's surface.

Brightness can tell you about the **state of health** of the grapes and the wine's level of acidity. As wine ages, it **loses its acidity**, and its brightness diminishes.

Which is why a dull colour is often indicative that the wine is past its prime and that the bottle should have been opened sooner!



Intensity

Vocabulary: Pale / Deep / Intense / Dark

Wine can be dark or pale. I recommend filling the glass a third of the way up and tilting it above a white surface. If you can see your fingers through it, the wine is pale. If not, it is deep or dark.





But what does this intensity mean?
There are several explanations for these differences in colour.

In Red Wines

- **Grape variety**

  The red pigment found in black grape skins colours red wine during the maceration process. The intensity of this colour therefore varies according to the colour pigments released by the grapes. Makes sense, doesn't it?



Some grape varieties, such as Syrah, Cabernet-Sauvignon or Malbec, are richer in colour pigments (=anthocyanin) than others, such as Pinot Noir or Gamay.

- **Vintage**

A rainy vintage “dilutes” the grapes, resulting in paler colours.

- **Yield**

A low yield produces more concentrated grapes, and a more intensely flavored.



Based on the above comments about **vintage** and **yield**, the darker of two wines made from the same grape variety and of the same appellation, will be better in quality because the grapes are richer in substance.

- **Another factor to consider is** vinification.

In White Wines

- Certain white wine **grape varieties** also have more concentrated colours, such as Gewürztraminer (Alsace) and certain Mediterranean varieties.

- The age of the wine

Oxidation occurs over time and causes wine to change colour (see previous page). White wine becomes darker as it ages, with orange hints.

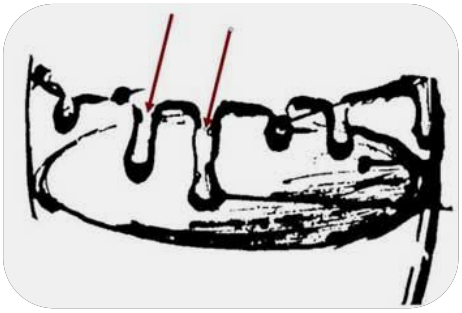
- **Another factor to consider** is vinification.

Viscosity

Vocabulary: Watery / Thick / Fat / Viscous

When you hold your glass at an angle, droplets will appear on the side, known as “legs”.

The presence of these legs, or “tears”, are associated with the wine’s alcohol and sugar levels. Legs are therefore indicative of the wine’s body.





The Olfactory Analysis of Wine

To describe the nose of the wine, begin by sniffing the contents of your glass, without swirling it. This is the “first nose” and helps to identify some of the aromas. Then smell the wine a second time while aerating it (swirling it in your glass) to release the aromas: this is the second nose.

Intensity

Closed / Discrete / Aromatic / Open / Powerful

This step is about describing the strength of the aromas.

Aroma Families

Wine has a wide olfactory range!To make it easier to describe the aromas, they have been split into families.

The main families are:

- **Fruit:** apple, peach, pear, banana, red currant, black currant, grapefruit
- **Floral:** Hawthorn, acacia, honeysuckle, jasmine, rose, lime blossom, violet
- **Vegetal:** herby, green pepper, undergrowth, fern, thyme, bay leaves, box, humus
- **Woody:** dry wood, cedar, vanilla
- **Spice:** pepper, mint, cinnamon, liquorice
- **Empyreumatic:** smoked, toasted
- **Animal:** leather, fur, game
- **Balsamic:** pine, resin
- **Mineral:** iodine, petroleum, cardboard, flue, gunflint

What conclusions can you draw from these aromas?

Aromas vary according to the grape variety, maturity, winemaking process, age of the wine, etc. In other words, there are lots of factors! The main thing to remember is that aromas change over time: a young wine has fresh fruit and floral aromas, which move towards candied fruit, and then develop into forest floor and mushroom notes. Here is a little diagram about wine aromas:

What are a wine's dominant aromas?

Fresh fruit, flowers

Young wine

Wood, toasted

Wine aged in oak barrels

Mushrooms, forest floor

Aged wine

Candied fruit, ripe fruit

Generally an aged wine. Can also indicate a wine froma warm southerly climate.

Cork, vinegar, sulphur

Faults!

Le COAM – Overview of Wine Aromas

The Gustatory Analysis of Wine

Take the wine in your mouth and hold it for 8 to 10 seconds, so that it moves across the entire surface of your tongue. This will enable you to identify the wine's flavours – sweetness, saltiness, acidity, bitterness.
Next, while still holding the wine in your mouth, suck in a little air. This is called "retro nasal olfaction" and it helps to identify the wine's flavours.
The gustatory phase aims to identify the wine's dominant balance.

The Dominant Balance in Wine

White Wine

There are two sensations to assess in white wine:

- Acidity
- Texture (varies with alcohol, glycerol or residual sugar content)

Your goal as a wine taster is to identify the dominant sensation, and each of their levels.

With practice, you will learn to identify the **profile** of each wine you taste and discover that each wine's dominant profile varies according to the appellation, wine region and grape variety. If you get into the habit of identifying the dominant balance of each wine you taste, you will progress very quickly.

You will find out more about this and learn how to characterise wine according to its dominant balance in COAM's Introduction to Tasting course.

Red Wine

There are three sensations to assess in red wine:

- Acidity
- Texture (varies with alcohol, glycerol or residual sugar content)
- Tannins

Before going any further, here are a few **basic notions about tannins**: tannins are compounds contained in grape skins, that pass into the wine during the maceration process. They can be found in lots of plants. They create that “dry” and rough sensation in your mouth and provide astringency. I will provide more information about tannins and how to easily describe them shortly by email (via our newsletter).

Once again, your goal here is to identify the dominant sensation(s) and each one’s level.

With practice, you will discover different categories of wine.
You will find wine dominated by:

- Tannins + acidity, or
- Tannins + texture, or
- Texture, or
- Acidity

Practice distinguishing the dominant balance whenever you taste wine!

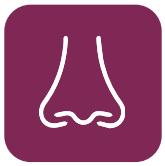
We’ll look at this balance in further detail in our ecology classes.

Next steps: you can also characterise the flavours and their length (referred to as the “finish”).



Recap

Here is a little reminder of the three wine tasting phases and some vocabulary to help you put a name on your sensations.


VISUAL ANALYSIS	
Appearance	**Clarity**
	Brightness
	Viscosity
	Intensity
Colour	White wine: colourless, green-yellow, pale yellow, lemon, straw, gold, honey, orange
	Red wine: purple, cherry, ruby, garnet, tawny, mahogany, brick
OLFACTORY ANALYSIS	
Intensity	closed, poor, discrete, aromatic, open, strong, intense
Aromas	Name aromas by family / sub-family
GUSTATORY ANALYSIS	
Flavours and tactile sensations	**Acidity**
	Texture
	Bitterness
	Tannins
Balance	
Body	
Flavours	
Finish	
Conclusion	

TASTING VOCABULARY MATRIX

COLOUR	FRUIT	ACIDITY	TANNIN	ALCOHOL	TEXTURE	STRUCTURE	QUALITY	MATURITY	OAK	NOSE
clarity	forward	low	soft	low 7-10	smooth	light	integrated	youthful	toasted	spicy
brilliant	ripe	moderate	light	moderate	silky	delicate	balanced	young	buttery	closed
bright	opulent	high	moderate	high 13+	opulent	supple	harmonious	immature	integrated	open
deep	tropical	fresh	high	generous	velvety	restrained	elegant	fresh	cedar	oxidised
dark	rich	crisp	ripe	burning	rich	generous	finesse	vibrant	coconut	reductive
translucent	generous	pronounced	firm	hot	round	firm	refined	lively	vanillin	earthy
flushed	honeyed	marked'	rounded	spirity	succulent	forward	length	developed	moccha	gamey
viscosity	supple	searing	silky	watery	supple	broad	prolonged	evolved	sweet	overt
limpid	primary	racy	velvety		persistent	depth	aftertaste	peaking		sappy
mid-depth	secondary	malic	fine		viscous	elegant	voluptuous			grapey
opaque	exotic	tartaric			voluptuous	fine	silky			tropical
light	concentrated	tart			soft	taut	racy			pungent
dull	high-toned	refreshing			fat	concentrated				aromatic
cloudy		sour			concentrated	pure				fragrant
pale		bitter			sinewy					mineral
		astringent			thin	thin				herbaceous
		flabby			hard	lean				restrained
		soft			steely	grip				
					lean	rigid				
					dilute	hard				
	grassy					unbalanced				
	vinous		grippy			steely				
	leafy		broad			low intensity	unbalanced			
	sinewy		dry			muscular	clumsy			
	thin		dusty			neutral	dull			
	lean		aggressive			subdued	flat	closed		
	stemmy		astringent		clean	weighty	austere	mature		
	appley		hard		dry	fat	dilute	fading		
	citrus		coarse		sweet	over-extracted	short	drying out		
	intensity		harsh		flat	1-dimensional		dumb		
	floral		green		full bodied	fractured	premium	tired		
	clean		oaky		flabby	angular	mid-market	past it		
	steely		stalky		mineral	backward	mid-range	aged		
						limp	bulk	potential		

Synonyms and other useful words

POSITIVES	NEGATIVES	SUGGESTS	PROVES	ODDS&SODS
striking	lack of	indicates	confirms	nuance
lively	hollow	indicative of	supports	notes
vivid	devoid of	points to	shows	block-busting
prominent	subdued	suggests	highlights	over-tones
defined	lacks	illustrates	underlines	characteristics
distinctive	restrained	demonstrates	denotes	envelopes
appealing	flabby	expresses	reveals	weight
attractive	undefined	establishes	influenced by	structure
rich	dull	shows	defines	texture
silky	neutral	signifies	signifies	definition
racy	low key	emphasises		provenance
positive	obtrusive	impression		integral
intense	shallow	potentially		
concentrated		consistent with		
persistent		composition		
pronounced		typicity		
prolonged		emphasis on		
integrated		incisive use of		
harmonious		evidence of		
balanced		expansive		
deep				

Wine Tasting conclusions

Now it's time to take a look at each of the tasting phases to draw some conclusions, based on your perceptions of the wine. Here is a very simplified example of some tasting conclusions (or assumptions).

An example of conclusions drawn from tasting notes for a Bourgogne Pinot Noir of regional appellation:

- **Colour:** pale, ruby colour with purplish tints
  We an assume that it is a young wine because of the purple hues. The pale colour is also characteristic of a grape variety with little colouring pigments, in this case Pinot Noir.

- **Nose:** notes of red fruits, cherries and spices (pepper)
  A fresh nose, most likely characteristic of a young wine.

- **Palate**: first impression is lively (i.e. there's acidity), the tannins are fine and soft. There are black fruit flavours. Medium-length finish.
  The dominant sensation is acidity. (The fine grained tannins "don't stand out" from the balance).

Now, it's your turn to put words on your sensations and best describe your wine, to remember it. And of course, tasting is an enjoyable experience, so your conclusion should also include whether you liked the wine, and why…

And don't forget, nothing beats regular practice (in moderation 😊) in order to progress in wine tasting! Here is a **tasting sheet template** that you can use to take notes on your wine.



Tasting Sheet

Name					
Appellation					
Vintage					
Blend					
Tasting date					
Colour					
Clarity	Clear	Cloudy			
Colour	Purple	Cherry	Ruby	Garnet	Brick
	Colourless	Green-yellow	Lemon	Gold	Orange
Intensity	Pale	Medium	Deep	Dark	Opaque
Brightness	Matt	Luminous	Bright	Brilliant	
Viscosity	Watery	Thick	Viscous		
Nose					
1st impression	Fault	No faults			
Intensity	Closed	Discrete	Aromatic	Open	Explosive
Aromas					
Palate					
Sweetness	Dry	Off-dry	Semi-sweet	Sweet	Very sweet
Alcohol	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Acidity	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Tannin	None	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Body	Very light	Light	Medium	Full-bodied	Powerful
Intensity of flavours	Very low	Low	Medium	High	
Flavours					
Finish	Short	Low	Medium	Long	
Conclusion					
Quality					
Potential age	Young	Mature	Past prime		
Balance / General impressions:					

Glossary english-french

White wine => vin blanc
Red wine => vin rouge
Still wine => vin tranquille
Rosé => rosé
Sweet natural wine => vin doux naturel
Liqueur wine => vin de liqueur
Sparkling wines, fizzy => mousseux, effervescent, pétillant
Table wine => vin de table
Yellow wine => vin jaune
Dessert wine => vin de dessert
Aeration => aération
Alcoholic fermentation => fermentation alcoolique
Aging => vieillissement
A hint of… => une pointe, un gout de…
Alcohol => alcool
Aluminium tank => cuve en aluminium
Aperitif => apéritif
Appellation wines => vins d'appellation
After taste => arrière-goût
Alcoholic fermentation => fermentation alcoolique
Aroma => arômes
Balanced => équilibré
Body => corps
Barrel => tonneau
Blend => assemblage
Blind testing => dégustation à l'aveugle
Bottle => bouteille
Breathing => respiration
Buttery => beurré
Barrel => barrique, fût
Capacity => capacité, contenance
Cask => tonneau
Cellar => cave
Cork => bouchon
Corked => bouchonné
Chilled => frappé
Champagne glass => flûte
Crusher => fouloir
Delicate => fin
Tannin => tanin

Domaine, Estate => domaine
Dry => sec
Enjoy your tasting! => bonne dégustation !
Enology => oenologie
Fairly, medium-sweet => demi-sec
Fermenter => cuve de fermentation
Fine colour => une belle robe
Fermenting time / Vatting time => Temps, durée de cuvaison
Full-bodied => corsé, charpenté
Finish => arrière-goût
Fresh, cool => frais
Fleshy, medium bodied => charnu
Fortified wines => vins mutés
Fruity => fruité
Grape => raisin
Grape skin => peau de raisin
Grape variety => cépage
Growth / Cru => un cru
Glistening => chatoyant
Harvest => vendange
Iced => glacé
Label => étiquette
Late harvest => vendange tardive
Light => léger
Maturing in… => élevage en…
Must => moût
Nose => nez
Nut => noisette
Oak => chêne
Oak cask => fût de chêne
Oak barrel => tonneau en chêne
Oaky => boisé
Owner => propriétaire
Oxidation => oxydation
Press => pressoir
Powerful => puissant
Picking, harvesting of grapes => vendange
Preservation => conservation
Perfumed => parfumé
Powerfull => puissant
Round => rond
Wooden => en bois

Tasting => dégustation
Tank => cuve (fermée)
Taste => arôme, goût
Tools, equipment => les outils, le matériel
Vat => cuve (ouverte)
Vinification => vinification
Vintage (year) => millésime, récolte
Vineyard => vigne, vignoble
Very dry => brut
Vat => cuve
Wine-growing, vinicultural, wine industry => vinicole
Wine merchant => négociant
Wine picker, harvester => vendangeur
Wine-waiter => sommelier
Wine grower => viticulteur
Winery => cuverie
Wine tasting => dégustation
With a short finish => cours en fin de bouche
Wine-tasting cellar => caveau
Woody taste => boisé
Wood => bois

Spittoon => crachoir
Straw wines => vins de paille
Sweet => doux, moelleux
Spicy => épicé
Robust, strong, rich => corsé
Ruby => rubis
Sediment => dépot
Small cellar => caveau

Verbs :

To grow => faire pousser
To decant => décanter
To siphon => transvaser
To pick, to harvest the grapes => vendanger
To taste => goûter
To let breathe => laisser respirer
To taste => déguster
To tread => fouler aux pieds
To match foods and wine => accorder des mets et des vins

A Final Note

Thank you for reading this e-book!



I hope that it's taught you more about the world of wine, and above all, that I've shared some of my passion with you. Wine is a continuous learning journey and a lesson in humility, so taste regularly and read up on the subject!
And if you haven't already, sign up to my newsletter, "La Lettre du Dégustateur", in which I regularly share advice and practical information about wine and tasting.

Here's a link to join my newsletter:

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Thank you for reading!

Yann

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