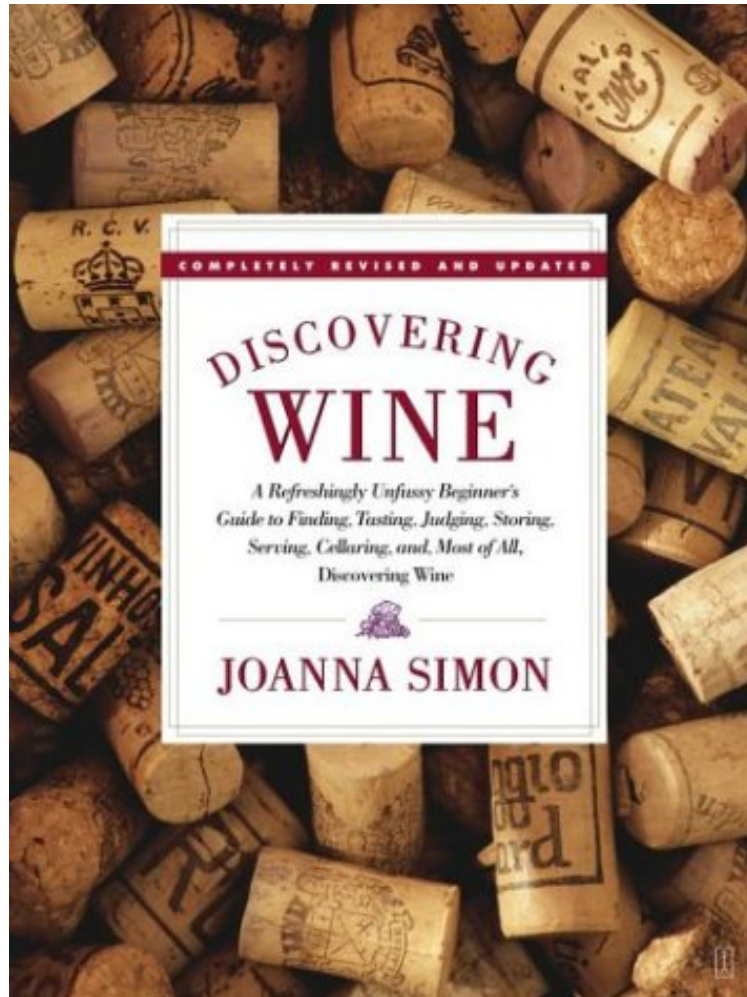


Discovering Wine

Joanna Simon

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Discovering Wine has been hailed by new and experienced wine lovers everywhere as the classic, approachable introduction to the luscious world of wine. In this revised and updated edition, Simon addresses the latest wine trends and provides brand-new information on vintages recently established in countries and continents around the globe. More than 250 full-color photographs, maps, and charts beautifully complement Simon's effervescent approach to the fascinating world of wine, and help to dispel the mystique that so often surrounds the subject. She provides the crucial hints that will help you to become a wine aficionado; virtually overnight. You will learn how to -Taste and judge wine like an expert -Correctly match food and wine -Follow the newest guidelines for serving and storing your wines -Discern classic wines from those that emulate them -Understand the importance and role of grapes -Know when a particular wine is ready to drink In addition to demystifying wine, Simon explores famous vineyards and explains how the winemakers use grapes to their most delicious advantage. And after a concise but thorough roundup of today's wine styles, Simon conducts a tour through the wine regions of the world; from Chianti to Coonawarra, from Meacute;doc to Moldova, and everywhere in between. As entertaining as it is informative, Discovering Wine is destined to remain the definitive beginner's guide to wine.

.com The subtitle says it all: Discovering Wine is, indeed, "a refreshingly unfussy beginner's guide to finding, tasting, judging, storing, serving, cellaring, and, most of all, Discovering Wine." If you thought you'd have to make a spectacle of yourself in public--sniffing corks, gargling bordeaux, etc.--in order to become educated on the subject of wine, relax. Author Joanna Simon makes it clear that even the most retiring persons can learn to judge wine without drawing attention to themselves. Using a combination of pictures and text, Simon describes the steps involved in tasting, serving, and storing wine. She offers suggestions for matching wines with different foods, then takes the reader on a tour of famous vineyards, explaining just what goes into a really fine vintage. Finally, she includes brief descriptions of the best-known wines from wine-growing regions the world over. So if you don't know your Asti from your Madeira, let Joanna Simon set you on the road to knowledge with Discovering Wine. About the Author Joanna Simon, a former editor of Wine magazine and Wine amp; Spirit International, is the award-winning wine writer of The Sunday Times (London) and a contributor to Style magazine. She was the broadcaster of BBC Radio 4's first series devoted to wine and has made numerous television appearances on wine-related subjects. She divides her time between London and France. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 Why and how to taste Unless you have aspirations to become a wine taster by trade, you will know that you wouldn't want to be seen dead going through that extraordinary contortionist tasting ritual of sipping (or slurping), sucking in air (far from soundlessly), chewing as if battling with a piece of tough steak, then spitting. And you wouldn't want to get into that habit of writing reports of every wine (usually littered with references to fruit and vegetables) and grandly calling them your tasting notes, would you? It all seems so pretentious, doesn't it? In fact, it is pretentious to do all that outside the environs of a wine tasting. It is not only that you don't spit out wine when you are drinking it for pleasure, it is also that you don't need to make a noisy spectacle of yourself to get a lot more pleasure out of every sip than you would if you simply knocked it back without thinking. And that's the point. You can treat wine simply as the unobtrusive stage set for the important action -- whether food, conversation, or a good book -- or you can let the wine play the title role. Give it your attention, concentrate on it -- and you will be duly rewarded. The middle route -- between drinking without taking any interest and the painstaking (and painful-looking) ritual of the professional in the tasting room -- is simply the one which delivers most pleasure. (The aim of the professional, after all, is not personal enjoyment, but assessment of whether wines will give enjoyment at the right time and right price to those who are destined to drink them.) To get more out of every sip, glass and bottle, you simply need to consider the wine in three stages: look, smell, then taste. Then, if you want a record for the future, you write down what you sensed in the same order, giving an overall impression at the end. (It is, I'm afraid, a mistake to rely on memory alone, especially if you are tasting or drinking more than one wine.) Lavishly bound cellar books look the part -- provided you fill them in -- but I've never managed more than a few entries in one of these before I've returned to my infinitely less glamorous, but always accessible, everyday notebooks. I start each entry by writing the date, the place (if it's not home), details on the wine label (of which more in a moment), where I bought it, the price, and size of bottle. On the whole labels are getting easier to understand (German and expensive Italian designer labels are the main exceptions), but it can still be difficult to work out which are the pertinent details. Label reading is explained in the last section of the book, but, as a guide, look for the name of the wine and of the property and producer, the name of a region or appellation, a vintage, and a grape variety and/or style (for example blanc de blancs or moelleux). You are now ready for the fun. Look Begin by looking at the wine, preferably in a reasonably good, but not fluorescent, light, and against a plain, pale background (a sheet of white paper is ideal if you're at home). If you are doing the pouring, don't fill the glass too full: it makes the tasting process far easier if you don't. Hold the glass by the base or the stem and tip it away from you at an angle of about 45 degrees (if the glass is too full, there will now be wine everywhere). Look down on it and you should be able to see how clear the wine is -- whether it has any minute bubbles or foreign bodies, how deep the color is, what sort of hue it is, and how much the color graduates from the center to the rim. (With white wines it isn't actually so necessary to tilt the wine -- you can hold the glass up and look at it at eye level -- but it is a good habit to get into.) Wine should

always be clear and bright, never cloudy or hazy. At best the latter is caused by sediment that has been shaken up. At worst it suggests some kind of contamination. Sediment is less common in white wine than red, but if it is present, apart from indicating that the wine is quite mature (probably seven or more years), it shows that it has not been over filtered -- which is a point in its favor. Of course, as with red wine (where a deposit may begin to appear within a couple of years), the sediment should remain in the bottle and not be tipped carelessly into the glass, because it muddies both the taste (it is often bitter) and texture, as well as the appearance. Small, colorless crystals at the bottom of a glass or bottle of white wine are harmless tartrate deposits and are a sign that the wine has not been overtreated. Bubbles in still wines can be a danger sign, indicating an unwanted refermentation, but a few tiny bubbles in a white wine -- especially a pale, young, light one for drinking young -- may be deliberate: wines such as Portugal's Vinho Verde are bottled with a little carbon dioxide to give a bit more zip to the palate (which you experience as a slight, refreshing prickle on the tongue). Bad -- secondary fermentation -- bubbles, on the other hand, give a vinegary sharpness to both smell and flavor. Although color is less indicative for white wine than red, it still varies from almost colorless, with perhaps a hint of green in a Mosel or a Chablis, to deep yellow. Once you see brownish tinges, however, it means that things are not looking good: white wines go darker with age (the reverse of reds) and by the browning stage they are usually heavily oxidized, or maderized, which gives them an increasingly sherrylike, or 'rancio', off-taste. Broadly speaking, paler wines come from cooler climates and deeper yellow ones come from warmer, especially southern hemisphere, regions, but sweet botrytis-affected wines (see page 92), including northern German ones, and oak-aged whites have more color too. The color in red wine gives more away -- in terms of age, quality and provenance. Red wines gradually shed their color (eventually as sediment), which means they become paler with age, changing from a deep purple-red, through ruby, to brick-red and finally to an over-the-hill tawny. The place to look to get a feel for a wine's age is the rim: the paler and browner it is (and the greater the graduation of color from the center of the glass), the more mature the wine. And generally speaking, a red wine of some quality that is intended to be aged, rather than drunk within two or three years, needs to have considerable color to start with -- because color is closely linked to tannin content, and tannin is a major life-giver in red wines. Inevitably, though, some grape varieties and climates produce more color than others. As with white wines, warmer regions produce deeper colors, but Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, for example, should produce a good, strong-colored wine everywhere. The same, only more so, goes for Syrah (or Shiraz) and Nebbiolo; although Syrah is basically only grown in reasonably warm climates anyway and Nebbiolo is pretty well a one-region (Piedmont) wine. Nebbiolo, though dark, also turns browner more quickly than most wines, as does Grenache. Pinot Noir, on the other hand, is naturally paler than wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. The way red wine is aged also affects color. Wines matured in wood lose more color than those matured predominantly in the bottle: wood-aged tawny port versus bottle-aged vintage port is the archetypal example. Rioja is another: although Tempranillo grapes produce well-colored wines, top-quality Gran Reservas and Reservas can be relatively pale because of their long oak maturation. Swirl Now for the first swirl. Either put the glass on the table, or continue to hold it by the stem or base (the base is more difficult), then twirl it round to get the wine moving -- and do practice at home with water first, rather than drench your neighboring taster. The main point of doing this is to aerate the wine so that it releases