

Understanding Wine and Oxygen

By Gary Gottfried

Understanding the relationship between wine and oxygen can often be considered a little confusing or even complex, because there are mixed messages often associated with it. As a result, all too often many people and even operators may shy away from it due to a concern of not being correct. The truth is that, although it can be a lot more involved, as an operator it can be simplified so that you can be of the best benefit of knowledge and value to your customers.

There are always exceptions; however, you having a general understanding can help customers gain a comfort level of knowledge that will aid a majority of their wine experiences when dining with you. Be familiar with this knowledge and you will enjoy sharing it with customers new and old alike. The confusion starts with the fact that oxygen can be both a friend and a foe when it comes to wine experiences. There is the act of aeration, which helps the wine (predominantly reds) “open up” or soften the wine. This is the “friend” part as the tannins in the wine mellow with their exposure to oxygen. For those of us engaged with wine for a long time, we can probably reflect back to hearing of and/or performing the practice of allowing the wine to “breathe”. This could be through the use of a decanter, the simple act of pouring a glass and allowing it to sit, or more recently accelerating the process by the use of products known as aerators.

The traditional method, tended to be using a decanter which served several purposes. By placing wine in a decanter, the design was established to allow the wine to have a greater surface area exposed to air, which affords better aeration. 20 minutes +/- in advance of drinking usually was about the time needed to allow the breathing to impact the wine. A second benefit of decanting is/was the ability to help separate the sediment from the wine when poured while a third is the pouring of wine with ease from an attractive vessel. Although a seemingly formal process, this is still a nice way to go, especially if done in a manner not meant to be “stuffy”, but one that enhances

the wine consumer's experience.

Aerating in a glass is perfectly fine (and smart) for those by themselves or simply getting things done informally. The third using an aerator, is the newer contemporary way to "force" feed the aeration process on the wine with the advantage of time. No wait. Easy and effective this has become a popular way to aerate.

The second act with oxygen is oxidation where it becomes the "foe". Oxidation is what cause iron to turn in to rust, or an apple turn brown, or wine to being impacted and thus taste bad. In the short term the oxygen acts like a friend, but wait too long and suddenly it turns on you. The lighter the wine, the more susceptible it tends to be to oxidation. For example, whites will oxidize quickly; however, since most people keep their whites chilled in the fridge, the refrigeration process will not eliminate but will slow down oxidation.

Fortunately there are a number of wine preservation products now on the market and the list seems to keep growing. Various methods work to varying degrees, however, the fact that there are options that can help can be extremely beneficial for consumer and operator alike. There are gas, vacuum, oxygen scavenger methods and even within those methods options to consider. We will look forward to helping share more detailed information on the various means in a future article, although if any immediate questions, certainly feel free to contact me.

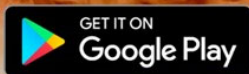
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