

The American Wine Society Manual

Suggestions for the Operation of
American Wine Society Chapters

This manual is more than a chapter chairman's handbook. It explains how to arrange a wine tasting. If you teach wine appreciation, give wine tastings as part of your business, or like to arrange tastings in your home, you will find helpful planning tips here.



By A. W. Laubengayer
*former Executive Secretary of the
Society and present Historian*

Copyright 1978 by:

AMERICAN WINE SOCIETY
3006 LATTA ROAD
ROCHESTER, NY 14612-3298

The American Wine Society was organized in 1967 as a non-profit, educational, consumer-oriented organization for those interested in learning more about all aspects of wine. Membership is open to all adults.

National Organization

The Society is governed by a Board of five Directors elected by the members for two year periods. These Directors serve as President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Secretary. The national officers conduct those affairs that affect the entire Society, such as the annual national 2-day conference, publication of the Society's **JOURNAL** and special bulletins.

The Executive Committee, which meets twice a year with the Board, helps determine Society policies. This committee is composed of the Board, Regional VicePresidents, National Committee Chairpersons, Technical Advisors, the Editorial Staff and the past AWS Presidents.

Regional Organization

Nationally, the Society is divided into Regions. A region of the AWS can cover the area of a state, part of a state, or combinations of states, as convenient for operation. A regional vice president, appointed originally by the Board of Directors and thereafter selected every two years by the chapters of the Region, with re-election possible, is responsible for supervising and promoting the activities of the Region. These regional activities include fostering the formation of local chapters and holding regional meetings. The Regional VP receives the mailing list for mailing the names of new and moved members to each chapter chairperson.

Chapter Organization

Local Chapters are of paramount importance to the Society and their effective operation is imperative for the continued growth and success of the Society. The educational goals of the Society are best served by the members meeting and sharing ideas on a regular basis.

Local Chapters are self-governing and self-financed: their activities can include wine tastings, dinners, vineyard tours, amateur wine contests and other events of interest to the local group.

The following suggestions are offered with the hope of helping with chapter organization and operation.

How to Organize a Chapter

IF NO CHAPTER EXISTS IN YOUR AREA, inform the National Office of the Society that you wish to start a chapter. The Executive Secretary at the National Office will send you the names of members geographically near you. Using these names, an initial meeting can be called to see what wine interests the members have. If possible, the Regional Vice-President should attend this meeting.

IF NO MEMBERS LIVE IN YOUR IMMEDIATE AREA, go to a wine retailer or wine making supply store and ask the owner for names of serious enophiles. Contact these people either directly or through a notice posted at the retailer's store. The National Office will supply you with membership brochures so these interested new people can join. Again, if possible, the Regional Vice-President should attend the organizational meeting.

IF A CHAPTER ALREADY EXISTS and you are taking over the Chapter, write to the National Office and inform the Executive Secretary of your new position so that the names of new and moved members can be directed to the right person.

Chapter Officers

After the initial appointment of a chairperson to organize the chapter, a chapter chairman, secretary, and treasurer (couples or individuals) are elected at the last meeting of each calendar year to serve for the coming year. They may be elected for succeeding terms but it is highly desirable to rotate the management of the chapter as widely as possible among the membership to spread the work load and promote interest and a feeling of belonging.

Chapters can have various committees to suit the needs of the group. A wine selection committee can be appointed. A program committee is always a good idea. By naming committees at the beginning of the calendar year, so that many members can serve sometime during the year, the chapter work can be more evenly shared.

Chapter Activities

Scheduling

There is great flexibility for each chapter to set up its own program. The frequency, timing, and nature of these meetings can be arranged to fit the local membership interests. Four meetings per year is considered to be a minimum, six meetings have been found to work out very well, while some chapters choose to have monthly meetings on a more or less regular schedule. Tentative scheduling of the desired number of meetings at the beginning of the year is helpful. Even though meetings have been scheduled, it is well to mail notices of each meeting about one month in advance, specifying time, place, kind of program, and cost. Request an RSVP by phone or card by a given deadline (funds, also, if needed ahead of the meeting to purchase wine or other supplies).

The choice of a meeting place can vary. Home meetings are probably the best answer in most cases. Other good facilities may be available for modest fees if the expected group is larger than a home can accommodate. Ask other members for leads or make a few phone calls. If you plan to use a public meeting place and serve wines, be sure to discuss this with the management and have a firm understanding about such matters as corkage fees.

Types of Meetings

WINE TASTINGS. Choose a theme for each meeting centered about some aspect of wine. A talk, discussion, or audio-visual program should highlight the theme.

DINNER MEETINGS. These can be held in a restaurant where details of the wine service have been worked out, or in a facility or home which will allow members to bring both wine and food. Have a guest speaker if possible.

VINEYARD AND WINERY TOURS. If convenient, try once a year to visit a winery or vineyard. Many professionals who own wineries and vineyards are AWS members and will welcome your visit.

WINE PICNICS. This can be a very casual type of meeting that is most enjoyable.

OTHER. Once you begin to think about the combinations for wine appreciation and other activities, the possibilities become endless. Get together with the chapter members or the program committee to formulate new ideas.

Chapter Reporting

Reports of chapter activities can be sent to the National Office for publication in the American Wine Society Journal. Forms are available for this purpose. The most useful reports are those that give other chapters ideas for successful meetings.

Chapter Finances

National dues are used to handle National administrative and publication expenses. Each Chapter is self-supporting. Expenses are covered by making an assessment at each meeting of those attending, or prior to the meeting through reservations.

By making assessments a bit in excess of the actual costs, a fund can be set up to handle the costs of preparing announcements and mailings. The Chapter members may wish to vote a special assessment to purchase a supply of glasses or to cover mailings.

Chapter Mailing List

A list of all paid members should be sent to the chapter chairman by April of each year. Throw away the previous year's list. This new list will have up-to-date names and addresses of all nearby members. If you do not receive such a list, contact the National office. Throughout the year you will receive the names and addresses of new and moved members. All these names come on 3 x 5 cards and can be kept in a small file.

For mailing convenience, type all the names on a grid that will fit #5354 Avery self-adhesive labels for Xerographic copiers. In this way, every time you want to mail, a Xerox copy of gummed labels can be made from the grid.

If in the first announcement of the year, members who do not care to attend chapter meetings are asked to so inform the chapter secretary, the cost of further mailings to them can be eliminated.

All Chapter members should be members of the National Organization. If a guest does not join the Society after his first meeting, do not keep him on the mailing list. The American Wine Society is for members only.

Order of Business for Chapter Meetings

Set up a Registration table near the entrance (especially if the meeting is not in a private home) check off the names of those attending, collect funds if necessary, and give out name tags.

The members can take a place, set up their glasses and taste an apertif wine if one is served, before the formal part of the meeting starts.

The Chairman opens the meeting, briefly discusses any business, reminds the members of the next meeting, and introduces the program to the members.

If a speaker or formal program of any kind has been arranged, it should generally be given before the wine evaluation. This way the members will be better prepared to appreciate the wines. If the program material is extensive - more than 15 or 20 minutes - it is often a good idea to break it up and give members a chance to taste a few wines before getting back to the completion of the formal program.

How to Arrange a Wine Tasting

A cassette tape "Organizing Wine Tastings" is available from the National Office for a \$6.00 returnable deposit.

Wine

Amount to Buy

About half a bottle per person will suffice for an evening wine evaluation.

About one bottle per person is needed at a dinner.

The number of wines tasted per meeting can vary: six to eight different wines are usually enough for the average palate.

How to Buy

If possible, go to a knowledgeable wine merchant for your wines. To buy wines in the best condition you need a reputable retailer. (The AWS publishes a list of wine retailers who are members in the fall of each year.) Tell your merchant what you are going to do, if it is possible in your state he may be able to give you a discount.

If you have state-controlled wine sales, see if you can get a list of what they have so you can plan a tasting theme. Buy some recommended books from the AWS Wine Appreciation Checklist (published in the fall of each year) and see if you can find anything out about the wines on your state-controlled list.

Types of Tastings

OPEN - No attempt is made to cover the wine label or the bottle shape.

BLIND - The bottle is covered so the label and the shape is not apparent. Wine that is sold in distinctive bottles may have to be decanted.

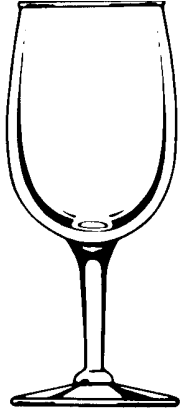
A code number is placed on the wine bottle and on the bag in which it is concealed. This eliminates confusion when the bottles are uncovered.



Permission for reprinting Logo given by Wine And The People Berkeley, CA

Themes for Tastings

Possible themes for wine tastings are abundant and varied. Some suggestions are: Characteristics of white wines versus red wines. Table wines, appetizer wines, and dessert wines. Varietal, genetic, and propriety table wines. Dryness, (sugar content), tartness (acidity), and astringency of wines. A selection of a given kind of wine (such as Riesling with New York, California, and imported samples). Vinifera wines, white, rose, red. Native American wines. French-American hybrid wines. Wines of a given grape variety versus blended wines. Sparkling wines. Flavored wines. Homemade wines provided by the chapter members. Wines of a given kind for different years. The possibilities are endless and everyone can learn and comment.



Glasses

Each person attending a tasting should have 3 to 6 plain, clear, all-purpose wine glasses. The glasses should be at least 6 oz. in size. Members may bring their own or the chapter can provide them by either buying or renting them. The National Office can supply you with names of glassware suppliers.

Cheese and Bread

Only plain French-style bread is really necessary for a tasting. A large loaf should take care of six people. See what you can buy and judge from there. You may add crackers to this. If so, cut back the amount of bread.

Cheese is most enjoyable and a very pleasant addition to a tasting. About 1/4 lb. per person is adequate. Try to match the cheese to your wines: bland cheese with mild flavored wines; more robust cheese with strong flavored wines.

Cut the bread and cheese either just before the meeting or pre-cut them and cover with plastic wrap.

Miscellaneous

Buckets to dispose of unwanted wine; water to rinse glasses; white paper napkins, plates and tablecloths; wine rating sheets; extra pencils; chairs and tables for all the people attending. Coffee and dessert are pleasant additions to home tastings.

Actual Tasting

Preparation of Wines for Serving

This is a subject about which there is some controversy. The traditional view is that white table wines (and some other types) should be chilled and opened just before serving and that red table wines should be opened as much as an hour or two before serving to allow the wines to "breathe." The most modern thinking is that serving temperatures are largely a learned preference and that opening red wines long before serving will have little or no beneficial effect (unless the wines have "off" odors, in which case decanting may be beneficial). What is known for certain is that temperature does influence the odor and flavor of wines and that contact with the air does cause wines to change in odor and flavor (sometimes improving for a short time and sometimes not improving at all).

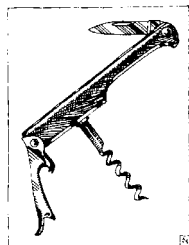
Some more-or-less traditional serving preparation suggestions are given below. Individual chapters may want to experiment to find those preparation methods that they prefer.

WHITE AND ROSE TABLE WINES. Chill to about 43-48° F (6-9° C). Sweeter wines are traditionally chilled more than dry wines.

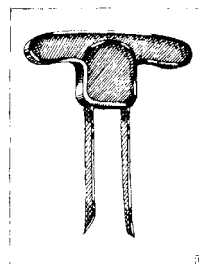
RED TABLE WINES. Cool to about 53-65° F (11-18° C). The lighter wines are traditional cooled more than the more robust types. Open young red wines an hour or two before serving. Stand old (6 years or more, depending on the type) red wines upright for several days to allow any sediment to collect at the bottom of the bottle, then decant the wine carefully 45 minutes or less before serving.

SPARKLING WINES. Chill to about 40-45° F (4-7° C). French Champagnes are usually chilled less than other sparkling wine types.

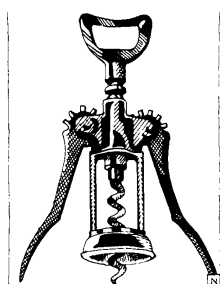
DESSERT AND APERITIF WINES. Chill to about 40-46° F (4-8° C). Sherries are usually chilled more than ports and Madeiras. Wine bouquet will develop and fade thru the tasting. Let the tasters observe this. If the wines are opened too far ahead this change is not observed by the members.



WAITER'S LEVER



"AH-SO"



MODERN LEVER CORKSCREW



CUTTING THE SEAL

Opening the Wines

Have several different types of openers and a cork extractor available. Be prepared to deal with some bad corks. Cut the foil carefully and remove it neatly. Clean the top of the bottle with a moist towel if mold is present and remove the cork. If the foil has to be removed completely for a blind tasting, do so. In any case the top of the bottle should be clean and trim when presented at the table. Never present wines with pieces of cork floating in the bottle. Decant it, or remove the cork in the first sample and discard it.

Order of Presentation of Wines

Dry to increasingly sweet. White, rose', red.

Seating of Tasters

Each person needs adequate room for glasses, an evaluation sheet, and access to bread and cheese.

If regular tables are available seat the tasters 8-10 to a table in even numbers. This will allow you to calculate your wine needs per table.

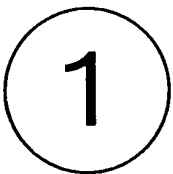
If TV or folding tables are used, organize the members so everyone has an adequate sample of wines.

Have as good a lighting as possible so colors can be seen well when the glass is held against the light or a white piece of paper.

Organize the Glassware

There are several ways to keep track of glasses. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Take a large sheet of legal size paper and draw circles for each wine glass and put a number in the center of each circle. Leave space on the sheet for comments. Xerox the master sheet onto legal size paper.
2. Mark each glass with a wax crayon.
3. Use white paper table cloths and mark the cloths.
4. Serve only 2 or 3 wines at a time.



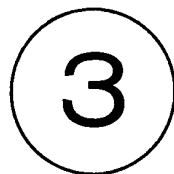
Name:_____

Comment:____



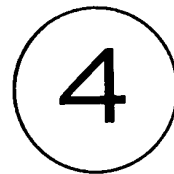
Name:_____

Comment:____



Name:_____

Comment:____



Name:_____

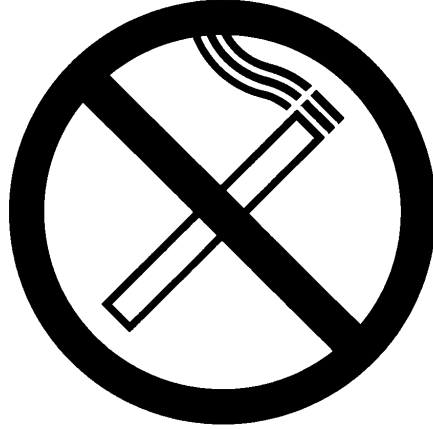
Comment:____

Serving the Wines

Appoint wine stewards for each set of bottles. The stewards will serve generous one ounce samples per glass. (Color and bouquet are best observed in smaller samples which permit the wine glasses to be tipped and swirled as necessary.) About twenty samples can be supplied from one bottle. There should be enough reserve of each wine so that members can get second amounts of those they wish to taste further. While the wines are being poured appropriate information can be given about each. It is interesting to serve two or three wines of the same type simultaneously so they can be compared. By having wine stewards pass out the wine, it is possible to avoid the congestion which occurs if members have to come to one table or try to pass bottles themselves.

Clean Up

A special clean-up committee can be appointed or individual members can handle this chore themselves, depending on the size of the tasting. When wine glasses are collectively owned by a chapter it is important to collect and account for these and assign someone to wash and store them. Left over wines or foods can be auctioned off, given as gifts to the hosts, or saved for future tasting events.



Reprint permission from Sebastiani Vineyards, Sonoma, CA

Evaluation

SMOKING SHOULD BE PROHIBITED DURING THE TASTING. Members should be as quiet as possible and keep their comments to themselves until all are finished with the group of wines. Rating sheets are available from the National Office and have suggestions on how to evaluate wine printed on them so the topic will not be discussed here. The completed rating sheets can be collected and tabulated for immediate results. If the tasting is blind, uncover the bottles. Retail prices and the wine merchant should be revealed.



AMERICAN WINE SOCIETY
3006 LATTA ROAD
ROCHESTER, NY 14612-3298