

# ***AFLSE Wine Tasting***

## ***"Mild to Wild"***

### **Preparation Instructions**

#### **Introduction**

We are going to be tasting four wines, from "*< sigh>...mild...*" to "**Woah! Wild!**" in a relaxed, fun environment: your home.

My goal is for you to learn a few simple tasting techniques to help you decide what you like to drink -- not what some snooty wine snob says you should drink, but what resonates with you. "*Drink what you like!*" is what I always say. Except for white zinfandel. You should never drink white zinfandel; it's a crime against nature and I'll explain why when we get together. Just trust me on this one, OK?

While we are tasting, I'll share a number of tips with you, to help you have a more enjoyable tasting experience, including food pairings, tasting techniques, how to hold a glass (and how not to hold a glass), how to open a bottle of wine (the ones with corks, not screw tops - duh!), some tips for making even a mediocre wine taste better, and a few other things I've learned along the way.

If you survive (wait a minute... it's not that kind of tasting, sorry!) Er, after you get through the tasting, you'll be able to go into a wine shop, avoid getting ripped off and be able to pick out wines you know you will love, as well as how to find wines a little outside of your comfort zone, but worth trying.

If you pay attention (and use the spit bucket, but more on that later...), you'll be able to hold your own against those wine snob wannabees you get stuck talking to at Embassy parties...

#### **Preparation Stuff**

##### *Glasses:*

Whether alone or tasting with a group, you'll want a separate glass for each wine, so four glasses per person. You'll want a fifth regular glass just for water. Drinking wine is like doing a 60-minute Endurance ride on your Peloton - it's important to stay hydrated!

##### *Wine Storage - Pre Event:*

Changes in temperature kill wines more than storing them at improper temperatures (within reason). If a wine is too cold, it will close up and hide all the good tastes. Too warm, and the alcohol will dominate, making the wine taste "hot" and obscuring all the good flavors.

If you have a wine fridge, great! If not, try to find a place for the wines in the shade, near a slightly drafty window where the ambient temperature is about 60 degrees F.

*Wine Storage - Post Event:*

Wines oxidize after a few hours, so if you want to keep some of the opened bottles, go get a *Vacu-Vin* and make sure you have four stoppers. These are sold at wine shops and better supermarkets. It's basically a hand pump for removing most of the air from a wine bottle with a rubber stopper that acts as a valve to keep air from leeching back in to the bottle. You should pay about \$15 for the pump and four stoppers.

*Spit Bucket:*

All the tasting action is on the tongue and in the nose, not in the gut, so once you've tasted, swallowing the wine doesn't enhance the tasting experience, so spit it out. If you have a plastic pitcher, or even just a wide-mouthed glass, that's fine. You may not like one or two of the wines we are tasting, and not only is that OK, it means you are learning what you like and don't like to drink!

*Safety First:*

Another reason to use the spit bucket is because you will have four bottles open. Even if you have a group of four or six people, that's (nearly) a full bottle each. Most people don't realize they are trashed when they drink sitting down -- until they get up to go to the can, trip and fall and cut their head open on the coffee table. Don't make me have to mute you on the Zoom call, OK?

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## The Wines

All of these wines cost \$11 - \$16 dollars here in Maine. I don't know the alcohol tax situation in DC, but you shouldn't pay much more. If these are not available locally (I tried to stick with larger-volume producers) ask the wine shop for something similar. Whole Foods, at least up here, has great selections, the staff is very knowledgeable, and the prices are surprisingly competitive.

### *Wine One: The Palate Cleanser*

If you have a group, go get a sparkling Prosecco. Make sure the alcohol percentage is not more than 11%.

If it's just you, congrats on staying COVID-safe! Be adventurous and go get a (white) Gruner-Veltliner. Just make sure the alcohol is 12.5% or less. Here's a reliable one:



### *Wine Two: Let's Go To Italy!*

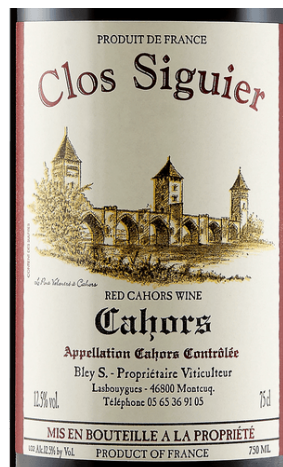
Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wines are nice, basic reds that are generally light on fruit so the earthy bits can come through - but not in a heavy-handed way. They won't stand up to a juicy burger with blue cheese and BBQ sauce, but they won't overwhelm a store-bought cooked garlic and herb chicken. This one is my favorite, but it's \$16, so at the top of the range.



*Wine Three: Malbec (or Chianti). Feeling Adventurous? Look for a Cahors (French Malbec).* Malbecs are the new Cabernets. In the past several years the better ones have gotten much more complex and sophisticated, and the prices have increased as well. I'd stay away from the \$9 bargain Malbecs in favor of the more Chateau-like labeled Malbec closer to \$15. Cahors is a region in France that plants Malbec grapes. Fun Fact: before the swamps of Bordeaux were filled in to allow grape growing, Cahors was THE wine-growing region of France. The soil is very sandy, so Cahors have a LOT of earth flavors in them. The earth is so sandy there, that the 1868 phylloxera epidemic that nearly wiped out the entire French wine industry didn't touch Cahors because the pests can't survive in soil so sandy.

Alternatively, if the Malbec pickings are slim by you, go get a nice Chianti (doesn't have to be a Riserva). Just look for "DOCG" (not "DOC") on the seal on the top of the bottle, like in the picture below.

If you are ready to start getting wild, go find a Cahors!



#### *Wine Four: The Wild Child*

Zinfandel. A monster Zinfandel. How do you know it's a monster? The label (ideally) should say "Old Vines" and the alcohol should be 14% or 14.5% -- no less. Italians generally settled Napa Valley, and they planted a lot of Zinfandel. With mechanized farming, other higher-yield varietals came into fashion, and many Zin vines on steeper slopes were abandoned. Really old vines yield very little fruit, but what they do yield is incredibly concentrated. Drinking an old vine Zin without food can border on the unpleasant. But for that really juicy burger with blue cheese and BBQ sauce, Old Vine Zins are an ideal match!

The Tortoise Creek is not Old Vines, but the Predator Wines is. If you can find it, Cline Old Vine Zinfandel is my favorite!



## Food Pairings

Here are some suggested no-fuss food pairings as we go through the wines:

### *Wines One and Two:*

Raw almonds are super easy. If you are adventurous, go get some Manchego cheese and whole pitted dates. Cut the manchego into 1/4" x 1/4" x 1" blocks, split the dates, and stuff the cheese into the date to eat them together. If you are a bread lover, go get a baguette and some herbed goat cheese.

### *Wines Three and Four:*

Store-bought fully cooked rosemary, or garlic and herbed chicken, burgers, BBQ or pizza are all good. You want a dish that has some fat or oil to it, because you are going to see how the wine cuts through the fat, preparing your palate for the next bite.

OK! Go shopping, and I'll see you later! Any questions beforehand, just send me an email: [LMStone@LMStone.com](mailto:LMStone@LMStone.com).

All the best,  
Mark Stone