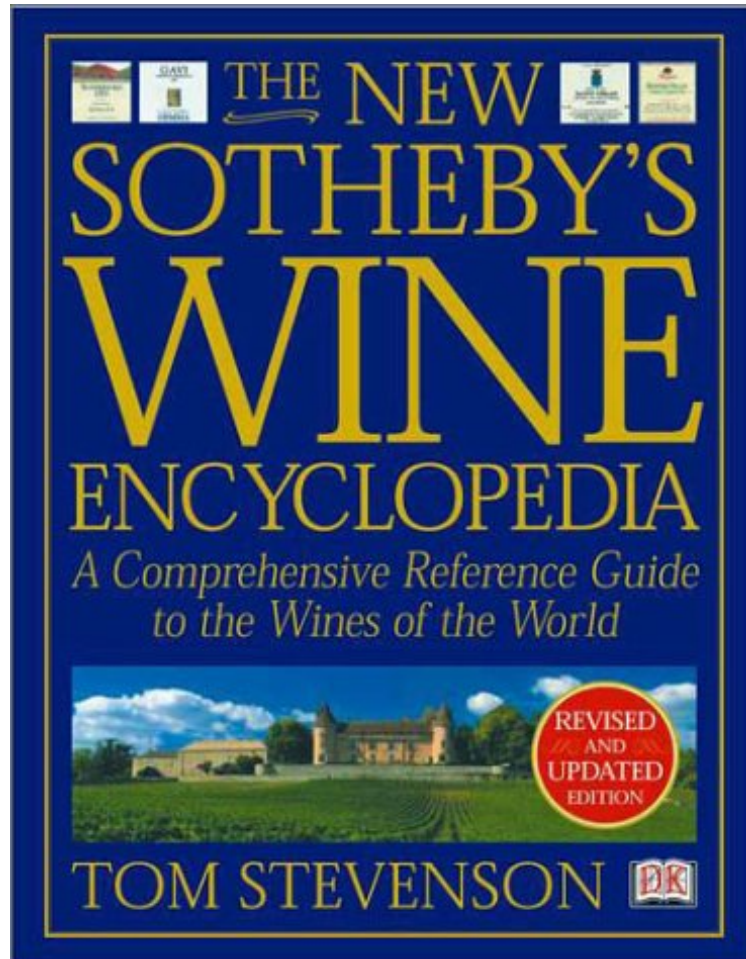


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## The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia, Third Edition

Tom Stevenson

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**Tom Stevenson : The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia, Third Edition** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia, Third Edition:

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Authoritative, international and up-to-date, The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia is arranged geographically and

combines maps and photographs with information on all wine-growing areas, profiles of distinguished producers and assessments of individual wines. The book's easy-reference style, and wealth of practical advice, make it an unrivaled source of information for all lovers of wine -- from the occasional drinker to the connoisseur. *Wines of the World*. Distinguished wine authority Tom Stevenson examines the viticultural history of each wine-making country, discussing its wine-producing regions and the current reputation of its wines. He analyzes the factors affecting the taste and quality of each region's wines -- location, aspect, soil, microclimates, grape varieties, and methods of viticulture and vinification -- before assessing its appellations, the individual wine producers (chateaux or wineries), and, of course, the wines themselves. *Enjoying Wine*. Tom Stevenson provides practical guidelines on wine tasting, while an "author's choice" chart at the end of each section lists the very best wines. A star-rating system identifies the finest producers and highlights those offering the best value. A "taste chart" explains how to identify the flavors in a wine, and a "troubleshooter's guide" spots common wine flaws. Whether you are a newcomer wanting to explore the pleasures of wine or a wine enthusiast looking for inspiration, *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia* is the book to consult again and again.

A tour de force, a triumphant success for which I have the highest praise. (First Edition) (Clive Coates) Tom Stevenson has struck gold again. (First Edition) (Robert Parker) About the Author Tom Stevenson has been writing about wine for 25 years and is the author of 20 books and the winner of 26 literary awards including, on three occasions, Wine Writer of the Year. In April 1999 he received the coveted Wine Literary Award, America's lifetime achievement award for wine writing. Only nine other authors have received this award prior to Tom Stevenson. The first edition of his *Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*, published in 1988, won a record five awards, and *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*, published in 1997 by Dorling Kindersley, won the Prix du Champagne Lanson Gold Label Award. These editions have sold more than 400,000 copies in 12 languages. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

**THE TASTE OF WINE** The difference between tasting and drinking is similar to test-driving a car you may buy and the relish of driving it afterwards. One is a matter of concentration, as you seek out distinguishing merits and faults, while the other is a far more relaxed and enjoyable experience. Tasting is a matter of concentration, and almost anyone can acquire the technique. When tasting a wine it is important to eliminate all distractions, especially comments made by others; it is all too easy to be swayed. The wine should be tasted and an opinion registered before any ensuing discussions. Even at professionally led tastings, the expert's job is not to dictate but to educate, to lead from behind, putting into perspective other people's natural responses to smells or tastes through clear and concise explanation. The three "basics" of wine-tasting are sight, smell, and taste, known as "eye", "nose", and "palate".

**THE SIGHT OR "EYE" OF A WINE** The first step is to assess the wine's limpidity, which should be perfectly clear. Many wines throw a deposit, but this is harmless if it settles to yield a bright and clear wine. If it is cloudy or hazy, the wine should be discarded. Tiny bubbles that appear on the bowl or cling persistently to the edge of the glass are perfectly acceptable in a few wines, such as Muscadet sur lie and Vinho Verde, but probably indicate a flaw in most other still wines, particularly if red and from classic Old World regions. The next step is to swirl the wine gently around the glass. So-called "legs" or "tears", thin sinewy threads of wine that run down the side of the glass, may appear. Contrary to popular belief, they are not indicative of high glycerol content, but are simply the effect of alcohol on wine's viscosity, or the way the wine flows. The greater the alcohol content the less free-flowing, or more viscous, the wine actually becomes. The color of wine Natural light is best for observing a wine's color, the first clue to its identity once its condition has been assessed. Look at the wine against a white background, holding the glass at the bottom of the stem and tilting it away from you slightly. Red wines vary in color from claret, which is almost rose, to tones so dark and opaque that they seem black. White wines range from a colorless water-white to deep gold, although the majority are a light straw-yellow color. For some reason there are very few rose wines that are truly pink in color, the tonal range extending from blue-pink, through purple-pink to orange-pink. Disregard any impression about a wine's color under artificial lighting because it will never be true -- fluorescent light, for example, makes a red wine appear brown.

**Factors affecting color** The color and tonal variation of any wine, whether red, white, or rose, is determined by the grape variety. It is also influenced by the ripeness of the actual grapes, the area of production, the method of vinification and the age of the wine. Dry, light-bodied wines from cooler climates are the lightest in color, while fuller-bodied or sweeter-styled wines from hotter regions are the deepest. Youthful red wines usually have a purple tone, whereas young white wines may hint of green, particularly if they are from a cooler climate. The aging process involves a slow oxidation that has a browning effect similar to the discoloration of a peeled apple that has been exposed to the air.

**THE SMELL OR "NOSE" OF A WINE** Whenever an experienced taster claims to be able to recognize in excess of 1,000 different smells, many wine-lovers give up all hope of acquiring even the most basic tasting skills. Yet they should not be discouraged. Almost everybody can detect and distinguish over 1,000 different smells, the majority of which are ordinary everyday odors. Ask anyone to write down all the smells they can recognize and most will be able to list several hundred without really trying. Yet a far greater number of smells are locked away in our brains waiting to be triggered. The wine-smelling procedure is quite simple: give the glass a good swirl, put your nose into the glass, and take a deep sniff. While it is essential to take a substantial sniff, it is not practicable to

sniff the same wine again for at least two minutes. This is because each wine activates a unique pattern of nerve ends in the olfactory bulb; these nerve ends are like small candles that are snuffed out when activated and take a little time to reactivate. As a result, subsequent sniffs of the same smell can reveal less and less, yet it is perfectly feasible to smell different smells, therefore different wines, one after the other.

**THE TASTE OR "PALATE" OF A WINE** As soon as one sniffs a wine the natural reaction is to taste it, but do this only after all questions concerning the nose have been addressed. The procedure is simple, although it may look and sound rather strange to the uninitiated. Take a good mouthful and draw air into the mouth through the wine; this makes a gurgling sound, but it is essential to do it in order to magnify the wine's volatile characteristics in the back of the throat. The tongue itself reveals very little; sweetness is detected on its tip, sourness or acidity on the sides, bitterness at the back and top, and saltiness on the front and sides. Apart from these four basic taste perceptions, we smell tastes rather than taste them. Any food or drink emits odorous vapors in the mouth that are automatically conveyed to the roof of the nasal passages. Here the olfactory bulb examines, discerns, and catalogues them -- as they originate from the palate the natural inclination is to perceive them as tastes. For many of us it is difficult to believe that we taste with an organ located behind the eyes at the top of the nose, but when we eat ice-cream too quickly, we painfully experience precisely where the olfactory bulb is, as the chilly ice-cream aromas literally freeze this acutely delicate sensory organ. The texture of a wine also influences its taste; the prickly tactile sensation of CO<sub>2</sub>, for example, heightens our perception of acidity while increased viscosity softens it.

**QUALITY AND TASTE: WHY OPINIONS DIFFER** Whether you are a novice or a Master of Wine, it is always personal preference that is the final arbiter when you are judging wine. The most experienced tasters can often argue endlessly over the relative merits and demerits of certain wines. We all know that quality exists, and more often than not agree which wines have it, and yet we are not able to define it. Lacking a solid definition, most experienced tasters would happily accept that a fine wine must have natural balance and finesse and show a definite, distinctive' and individual character within its own type or style. If we occasionally differ on the question of the quality of wine, should we disagree on what it tastes like? We may love or hate a wine, but surely the taste we perceive is the same? Conveying specific taste characteristics from the mind of one person to that of another is difficult enough, whether one is writing a book or simply discussing a wine at a tasting. Much of this difficulty lies in the words we choose, but the problem is not confined to semantics. In a world of perfect communication, conveying impressions of taste would still be an inexact art because of the different threshold levels at which we pick up elementary tastes and smells, and because of the various tolerance levels at which we enjoy them. If individuals require different quantities of acidity, tannin, alcohol, sugar, esters, and aldehydes in a wine before actually detecting them, then the same wine has, literally, a different taste for each of us. In the unlikely event of people having the same threshold for every constituent and combination of constituents, disagreement would probably ensue because we also have different tolerance levels; therefore, some of us would enjoy what others dislike because we actually like the tastes and smells they dislike. Thresholds and tolerance levels vary enormously; the threshold for detecting sweetness, for example, varies by a factor of five, which explains the "sweet tooth" phenomenon, and there are an infinite number of tolerance levels. Apply this to every basic aroma and flavor and it is surprising that we agree on the description of any wine.

**PHOTOS VISUAL EXAMINATION** Unless it has an extreme color or hue, the appearance of a wine is the least interesting aspect of a tasting note for most readers, which is why most authors use color descriptions sparingly. The eye is, however, one of the most important sensory organs for professional tasters, as even the most subtle shade or nuance can provide numerous clues to the wine's identity.

**NOSING A WINE** As we smell most flavors, rather than taste them, a good sniff tells us a lot about a wine. But refrain from continuously sniffing as this will dull your sense of smell. Take one good sniff, then pause for thought. Do not rush on to tasting the wine. Remember that no smells are specific to wine -- they can all be compared to something familiar, but you need time to work out what they are.

**SPITTING OUT** When tasting a large number of wines, each mouthful should be ejected after due assessment to avoid alcohol affecting the ability to taste. Yet some wine will remain, even after spitting out, coating the inner surface of the mouth, where it is absorbed directly into the bloodstream. Contrary to popular belief, the more you taste the better you taste, but it is a race between the wine sharpening the palate and the alcohol dulling the brain.

**MAGNIFYING THE TASTE OF A WINE** The tongue discerns only sweetness, sourness, bitterness, and saltiness. Every other "taste" we smell. By drawing air through a mouthful of wine, the volatilized aromas are taken into the back of the throat where they are picked up by the olfactory bulb, which automatically analyses them and transmits the information to the brain as various so-called flavors.

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