

**550+** WINES REVIEWED PAGE 79

**SOUTH AFRICAN WINE REBELS** PAGE 66

**BORDEAUX'S SURPRISING WHITES** PAGE 60

# WINE ENTHUSIAST

 THE WORLD IN YOUR GLASS

SEPTEMBER 2014

## THE HOME ENTERTAINING ISSUE

**HOW TO HOST**  
THE ULTIMATE WINE PARTY

**TOP TOOLS**  
FOR THE WINE LOVER

**EASY COCKTAILS**  
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# THE WINE LOVER'S GUIDE TO HOSTING





Whether it's a grand gala, a dinner party or an intimate wine tasting, here are the best tips, tricks and pro secrets to help you host envy-inducing soirées.

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AND JEFF JENSSEN



WILLIAM ABRAMOWICZ/ART+COMMERCE



# THE WINE TASTING

Hosting a wine-tasting party is an affordable and fun way to share your love of the stuff. But despite its low head count, this get-together has a lot of moving parts. Here's how to pull yours off like a pro.

**NUMBER OF GUESTS:**

2-22

**THE VIBE:**

COME AS YOU ARE;  
INTIMATE; A FUN WAY TO  
CATCH UP WITH FRIENDS





Watch our video on how to taste like a pro at [winemag.com/tastingtips](http://winemag.com/tastingtips)

## + the Tips

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

Taste wines from wineries and vineyards you've visited so you can provide a story. It'll add depth and color to the tasting.

### DOUBLE UP

Aim to taste up to five or six bottles, but get at least two of each so after the formal tasting, guests can drink the ones they liked best.

### GO PRO

If your wine smarts are still developing, hire someone to lead the tasting. Start at your favorite wine shop. The young clerks there are often studying for advanced wine certifications, are passionate and don't make a ton of money, so it's win-win.

### SET THE STAGE

Round tables turn the conversation inward, taking the focus off the wine. Instead, guests should all face you.

### STAY GLASSY

Your tasters only need one glass each: A stemmed white-wine glass.

### CREATE A CRIB SHEET

List the name, origin and vintage of each pour, with room enough for notes, if they wish.

### PRESERVE PALATES

Before tasting: clean and wake up your palate like a sommelier with a swish of cooled Chablis. During the tasting: offer water and neutral-tasting crackers or bread. Serve the flavorful fare after the



tasting when you can actually drink.

### POUR SMALL

One or two ounces is all you need to taste and judge a wine.

### KNOW YOUR STUFF

If you don't know what the heck you're pouring, you lose credibility and your party will fast become an "uh"-filled dud. Spend 15 minutes researching the varieties, the region and the producer. Start here: [winemag.com](http://winemag.com)

### DON'T DRINK IT ALL

It's a party, so it's O.K. to drink a few tasting samples. To avoid a drunkfest, remind people imbibing can dull the nose and palate. Provide a spit bucket or cups—and lead by example.

### PLAY PRICE IS RIGHT

Dollar signs will skew everyone's perception of a wine, so don't reveal the price until everyone ventures a guess.

## + the Wine

### FIVE SECRETS FROM A WINE DIRECTOR

Rajat Parr, wine director of the California-based Mina Group on how he'd run your tasting.

**1** I'd group your wines either by region or grape variety.

**2** If by region, I'd highlight how varied wines can be within a single area, but also ask if people can find a common thread in the terroir.

**3** If by variety, it's fun to see how the same grape can taste drastically different, which can lead to a discussion on how important climate and local styles are to winemaking.

### < BOARD SLATE

Cheese board with chalk; \$40. [wineenthusiast.com](http://wineenthusiast.com)



### PUT A CORK IN IT, AHAB

Jonathan Adler Moby Dick Bottle Stoppers; \$48. [gracioushome.com](http://gracioushome.com)

**4** For a regional tasting, I'd pour different Gamays from Beaujolais, including a few Beaujolais Crus. They're good, complex value wines, with soft tannins that won't dry out your mouth.

**5** For a varietal tasting, I'd go with Pinot Noir—one of the world's most diverse grapes. Although it originated in Burgundy, France, excellent versions are produced all over the world, especially in California, Oregon, Germany and New Zealand.

## + the Tasting Cheat Sheet

- + There are five basic steps for tasting: See, Swirl, Smell, Sip and Savor. Pros add a 6th "S": Spit.
- + A balanced wine is a pleasing combination of flavors, tannins, acidity, alcohol and sugar.
- + Acid causes your mouth to water, like you just sucked on a lemon slice.
- + Tannins coat and dry your mouth, starting with your tongue and gums.
- + The higher the alcohol, the more you'll sense pepper-like heat on the back of the tongue and throat.
- + Sugar shows mostly on the tip of the tongue.

### SIT & REVISIT WITH ME

After all the swishing and spitting, it's time to eat flavorful food and actually drink the wines your guests enjoyed tasting. Some refer to this stage as revisiting. We call it partying.

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# THE DINNER PARTY

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Serving delicious food is important, but your sit-down feast is about the vino. And it should be. Here's your manual on how to wine and dine your guests in style.

**NUMBER OF GUESTS:**

20-50

**THE VIBE:**

SMART CASUAL; A  
TRUE FEAST; A CHANCE  
TO SHARE TOP-SHELF  
WINES WITH FRIENDS



## + the Tips

### TABLE IT

If you need more than one table, rent them with matching chairs. It's cheap and party suppliers often offer same-day delivery.

### LESS IS MORE

Serve several small courses—about five or six. It creates a leisurely pace and allows more opportunities for exploring wine pairings.

### CHART YOUR COURSES

Typically, you should allow 30 minutes for arrivals and apéritifs, 30 minutes per course for pouring, serving, eating and clearing the table.

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

White or solid-colored dishes, clear stemware, light-colored tablecloths, short candles and uncomplicated flatware will keep the

focus on your centerpieces, what's on the plate and, most importantly, what's in the glass.

### RUN HOT & COLD

Alternate between hot and cold dishes so you're not stuck in the kitchen for long periods between courses.

### RACK IT

Create kitchen space for your courses by stacking baking racks in the refrigerator to shelve pre-plated cold dishes, like gazpacho shots, sashimi or salads.

### BREAK IT UP

You and your cohost need to sit at separate tables. Nobody wants to feel like they're relegated to the kiddie dinner party. If solo, change tables every few courses.

### SPLIT THE CHORES

The No. 1 tip for a smooth, stress-free dinner: One host handles the wine, the other makes sure plates

are cleared and the food finds its way to each table. Decide who does what and stick to it.

### GO BIG

The better the pours, the more fun your feast. Period. So, go ahead and splurge on great bottles and pull a few gems from the cellar. Do it.

### PLAY SOMM

When pouring, have the label face the guest, and say a few words about the wine and why it's going to pair perfectly.

## + the WINE

### FIVE SECRETS FROM A SOMMELIER

Carrie Lynn Strong, wine director at Aureole in New York City, shares her insider tips on how—and what—to pour at a dinner party.

**1** I'd start with lighter dishes and lighter wines. Both should get stronger in weight, body and flavor as the meal progresses.

**2** To kick things off right, break open an impressive Champagne, like a Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut Champagne from 2004. It's food friendly, has a beautiful freshness, with apple and floral flavors, and just the right amount of toasty notes. >>>

**3** For elegant and surprising still whites, I think about Italy. One of my favorites is Gaja's Ca' Marcanda Vistamare from Tuscany, a blend of Vermentino and Viognier that has a delightful floral quality but isn't overwhelming. I also



### TUB O' FUN

Ice bin; \$90. [crateandbarrel.com](http://crateandbarrel.com)

enjoy Bertani's Le Quaiare Trebbiano from Lugana in northern Italy, which is medium-bodied with good acidity. Either of these will seamlessly transition into heavier fish or game birds, or dishes with cream sauce.

**4** My go-to for lighter chicken, pork or veal dishes is New Zealand Pinot Noir, especially from producers like Felton Road or Mt. Difficulty. They're a bit pricey, but worth it for a nice dinner. They're rich in the mouth, with nice touches of brightness, so they won't overpower the food.

**5** *Sideways* had it backwards. For beef or lamb, open Merlot from California or Washington State. The bright fruit flavors and silky, soft tannins will complement, not mask the food.

Bottles from 2009 and 2010 are drinking well now, and I have some '05s and '06s that are beautiful.

From California, I like Provenance, Hill Family Estate and Pride. From Washington, I really love Pedestal and Leonetti Cellar.



# THE GLASSES

## WHAT YOU REALLY NEED

**Basic:** Stemless Glasses.

**Intermediate:** White and red glasses and a Cognac snifter.

**Advanced:** All the above, plus a tasting glass.

*Here are a few of our favorites...*

Sommeliers Montrachet  
by Riedel;  
\$68

Vinum Cognac X.O.  
by Riedel;  
\$50 for 2

Vinum Cabernet  
Sauvignon / Merlot  
by Riedel;  
\$50 for 2

Stemless Cabernet  
Sauvignon/ Merlot by  
Wine Enthusiast;  
\$15 for 2

Vinum Gourmet  
by Riedel;  
\$25 for 2

Vinum Red Burgundy  
by Riedel;  
\$50 for 2

XO Glass by Wine  
Enthusiast;  
\$30 for 4

For these and more, go to [wineenthusiast.com](http://wineenthusiast.com)



# THE GRAND AFFAIR

Whether you're marking a holiday, an engagement or just want to party, the massive and refined house gala is your opportunity to give scores of guests one of the best and most memorable times of their lives. Here's how to ensure your fête is nothing short of magical.



## NUMBER OF GUESTS:

100+

## THE VIBE:

FORMAL; PARTY OF THE YEAR; ARE THE SOCIETY REPORTERS HERE YET?



## FIVE SECRETS FROM A GRAND HOSTESS

Each year Charlene Lange of LangeTwins Winery in Lodi, California plays host for several fund-raising parties with guest lists topping 300.

**1** Choose a theme. Everything will make a lot more sense, from invitations to décor to food and wine. It doesn't matter what it is—just choose one and stick with it. Wild West. Midnight Magnums. Parella Party. You're already thinking about it, right?

**2** Don't just pair a single wine with each course, pour two vintages of the same wine or two different varieties from the same year, and let your guests talk about which they like best.

**3** To ensure centerpieces aren't too high, place your elbow on the table with your forearm straight up. Now, make a fist. The height of your knuckles is the maximum height of anything placed on the table if you want everyone to interact.

**4** Rectangular tables are much easier for guests and servers to navigate. Round tables create annoying, awkward spaces.

**5** The best way to keep guests from being overserved is to hire extra servers to only fill water glasses. They're worth the extra money. Trust.



## + the Tips

### DON'T BE A HERO

You are not going to prep and cook this one on your own. And you're certainly not cleaning up. If you want to make dessert, fine, but bring in a full service caterer to help manage your party (see the following page for a few of our favorites).

### READ THE WINE PRINT

Generally, caterers don't provide wine and drinks. This is a good thing, because it ensures you can handpick what's served.

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

For the cocktail-only folks, skip stocking a full bar. Instead prepare a giant batch of a mildly stiff punch to pour at each serving station. Head to [winemag.com](http://winemag.com) for easy and tasty punch ideas.

### COLD, COLD HEART

Wine chiller; \$40. [wineenthusiast.com](http://wineenthusiast.com)

### KEEP OUT

Use the main floor of the house, but make sure guests know the kitchen is off limits and for staff only.

### SET IT OFF

Whether a DJ or a full band, there is but one rule to tunes at a formal party: Keep the volume at background music levels during the apéritif hour and meal. People want to talk. Crank it only for post-dinner dancing.

### PLACE YOUR PLATES

Make sure your dinner tables don't become used-glass cemeteries during the apéritif hour by setting out all the dishes, glasses, napkins and flatware before the first guest arrives.

### PLANT PARTY MOLES

Place a family member or a close friend at each table to act as host. They can introduce guests to one another and be the staff's point person at the table.

### THREE TIERS FOR YOU

Slate stand; \$80.  
[wineenthusiast.com](http://wineenthusiast.com)





CARTER SMITH/ART + COMMERCE

## + the Wine

Since you will be pouring liberally for a large number of guests, peruse our Best Buys in our Buying Guide (page 78). Also, most retailers offer case discounts when buying in bulk. If you're starting with sparkling, Cava may be your best bet. Remember: Begin with lighter fare and serve lighter, fresher wines, then gradually transition into your heavier dishes with full-flavored pours to match.



**SPIKE YOUR DRINK**  
Ayers Skull Cocktail Spikes; \$105.  
ralphlaurenhome.com

## + the Caterers We Love

**MIAMI & LOS ANGELES**  
SHIRAZ EVENTS

**NEW YORK CITY**  
COMPANY CATERED EVENTS

**HOUSTON**  
SWIFT + COMPANY

**ATLANTA**  
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