



Let The Wine Breathe!

“Would you like me to open the wine now so it can breathe?” Yes, I would like like you to open the bottle, but not for the reason you think.

One of the first things a waiter should be taught about wine service is that merely opening the bottle does not let the wine “breathe.” A gasp is about all it will achieve. This is one of the most common misconceptions about wine. But this is not to say that wines don’t benefit from exposing them to air. Many young, concentrated red wines, like an expensive Cabernet Sauvignon or Bordeaux that can age for several years, undergo a sort of micro aging process by getting lots of air into them.

The same goes for a young and concentrated or especially astringent white wine, such as a white Burgundy. The reason is that forced exposure to air begins to oxidize a wine, causing subtle chemical changes that affect both the flavors and the texture. If you’ve ever left a half-empty bottle of wine for a couple of days in your kitchen, you know that it will soon turn stale. The idea of “breathing” is to start this process but stop it in time – by drinking the wine – to achieve only a mild oxidation.

Just popping the cork isn’t going to get you there, however. The best and most entertaining way to accomplish real aeration is to pour the wine into a decanter. It doesn’t have to be crystal or silver; it doesn’t even have to be a real decanter, just whatever glass pitcher or jar or ceramic bottle with a wide mouth that you have on hand. Your decanter, whether elegant or funky, can add a nice new element to the table, so it’s tempting and perfectly acceptable to aerate any young wine.

You don’t need a candle for this, either. That kind of decanting is called for only with a bottle of much older wine that has sediment in the bottom. If you’re at home, get your wine to breathe by pulling the cork and pouring the wine into the pitcher from the greatest height you can achieve without spilling everything all over the counter. The idea is to splash it as much as possible to maximize the wine’s contact with air.

At a restaurant, answer the waiter by saying yes, please open the wine now. Then ask if she’ll decant it for you. There’s no charge. If the restaurant isn’t set up for decanting, then ask that your wine be opened and glasses poured for everyone, even if you’re saving the wine for the next course.

Your wine will do a lot more breathing in your glass than it ever would have while still cooped up in the bottle.

Enjoy!

North County Wine Company
1099 San Marcos Blvd. San Marcos, Ca 92078 760/744-2119