

## **WINE AND AGING**

Perhaps you've had the chance to taste one of the world's great red wines when it was fully mature. If so, it's an experience you remember for many years. Mature wines from outstanding vintages are the stuff of legends and provide tangible ties to distant summers and harvests.

### **Most Wines Are Not Designed for the Long Haul**

In reality, only a tiny portion, some 5%, of the world's wines are actually better after a couple years in the cellar. Even fewer can improve for 10 or more years.

Most wines, both red and white, do not have the stuffing it takes to improve over time, but they can offer value and are perfect for everyday drinking.

### **The Rewards of Maturity: Bouquet and Texture**

The hallmarks of well-aged wines are bouquet and texture.

A young wine's fruity aromas and flavours come mainly from the grapes. As the wine matures, these vibrant primary fruit flavors slowly evolve, gaining dark, earthy and leathery notes called "bottle bouquet" or simply "bouquet."

Over time, a wine's texture also evolves. The wine feels smoother and silkier in your mouth. This happens when firm or rough tannins soften and fall out of the wine as sediment.

## **WHEN IS A WINE READY TO DRINK?**

A wine at its peak still has some youthful fruit flavours as well as the more subtle and complex aromas and flavours of maturity. The mature wine's texture will be smoother and the wine will seem more delicate and focused. The finish may also seem longer.

Finally, the remaining fruit fades and the wine declines, turning amber-brown. Acidity and tannins dominate and the wine can be described as dried out, over the hill or dead.

### **Picking the Peak**

One responsibility of professional wine tasters is to estimate the length of time it will take a wine to develop bottle bouquet and how long the wine might continue to improve.

These estimates are made on the basis of experience and can take some of the guesswork out of determining when to drink a wine.

As a rule of thumb, a mature wine will remain at its peak for about the same length of time required to achieve its peak. For example, if a wine takes 5-10 years to peak, it will stay at that plateau for another 5-10 years.

### **Personal Preference**

Finally, personal taste, which is infinitely variable, is the key determinant of when a wine is at its best. Some people like the fruity freshness of young wines, while others prefer the darker complexity of older wines.

Where along the curve of a wine's evolution you prefer to drink your wines is a question only you can answer, based on your own experience.