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What's New in the Grapevine this week?

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Bringing Wine Home

I know it is getting to vacation season because I got an e-mail recently from a college friend who wanted to know if his 18 year old grand-daughter could bring home a few bottles of wine from Italy for him.

First of all, it is **not** legal for travelers under the age of 21 to import alcohol - even as a gift.

Generally, one liter per person may be entered into the U.S. duty-free by travelers who are 21 or older, although travelers coming from the U.S. Virgin Islands or other Caribbean countries are entitled to more. (See the U.S. Customs booklet, "Know Before You Go" for additional information.) Additional quantities may be brought back, although they will be subject to duty and IRS taxes. Duty is generally 3% of value and the IRS excise tax is generally between 21-31cents per 750ml bottle of wine, 67 cents for champagne, and \$2.14/ hard liquor.

There is no federal limit on the amount of alcohol a traveler may import into the U.S. for personal use. However, large quantities might raise the suspicion that the importation is for commercial purposes, and a Customs inspector could require the importer to obtain an ATF import license (which is required for all commercial importations) before releasing it. If you do intend to travel with a large quantity of alcohol, I suggest you contact the entry branch of the port you will be entering the country through to discuss your situation in advance.

Although it may not be good legal advice I can tell you that U.S. Customs are unlikely to want to fill out forms for the additional cents in

revenue they would get from your bottle(s) of wine. It comes down to the practicality of creating a mile long traffic jam and wasting an agent's time to collect such a miniscule amount. My best advice is to declare your wine and let them decide to wave you through. Don't mess with the Feds.

Just a special word about Canada. If you bring wine back from the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia expect to pay that nominal 3 % tax and 25-30 cent duty when you cross back into the U.S. If you take U.S. made wine into Canada you will pay up to 68% of the wine's value in Canadian dollars. That means for a \$35 of Oregon Pinot Noir, you'd pay almost \$24 in duty. (We never charged the Canadians that much when we imported all their whisky during Prohibition so why is wine so steep?)

The total amount of alcohol you may enter the country with is primarily determined by the laws of the state where you will arrive back into the U.S. Each state sets the amount of alcohol a person may bring into the state without a license or permit from that state. In Montana, the number is technically zero. (Since the Montana Department of Revenue did away with the Connoisseur's license the path is easier.) In all practicality, no one from the State check bags to see if you have a bottle or two in with your dirty socks. Other travelers must check with the appropriate state ABC board, as the amounts vary from state to state. I regret that I am unable to provide this information, but I am barely able to maintain Montana information much less each of the 50 State's various requirements.

How do red wines age?

Simply put, it is all about tannins. Tannins are a family of natural organic compounds that are found in grape skins, seeds, and stems. They are the key to giving wine great aging potential, by slowing oxidation. Since they are an excellent antioxidant and natural preservative, the process of extracting tannin's benefits is a very important part of red winemaking. Unlike white wine where the juice is pressed off the skins, red wine is fermented with the grape solids, thus facilitating the natural tannin extraction.

Winemakers monitor and manage the tannin extraction by manipulating the solids (typically just the skins) which rise to the top and form a cap in the vat. Ultimately, the cap will be removed when the wine is determined to have extracted the required amount of tannin.

The tannins of a young red wine are very bitter. Over time, tannin compounds join with each other and with other molecules to form long

polymers. When these polymers grow larger, they settle out of the wine, making it softer and more pleasantly astringent than bitter. Sediment in the bottom of a bottle contains these long polymers.

Once bottled, wine has very little exposure to oxygen (just the airspace at the top). Shortly thereafter, the tannins will have absorbed the remaining oxygen in the bottle and the process becomes anaerobic (taking place without oxygen). At this point oxidation slows down considerably. From this point forward, the wine's components interact and continue to evolve and link together. Over a period of time, the wine develops increasingly complex aromas and flavors. In addition, it shifts in color from purplish to brick red.

Keep bottles stored at a uniform temperature (55-65 degrees Fahrenheit). If it is warmer, you will speed up the aging process. Experience has proven that cooler temperatures slow the aging process and results in better wine complexity.

Watch out for temperature fluctuation. When wine warms it expands, and when cooled it contracts. If so, the corks can move in or out accordingly. This can allow small amounts of oxygen into the bottle. This oxygen entering the bottle can spoil the wine.

Tips on cooking with wine

It seems with the change of seasons we are getting a lot of people coming in to ask about wine pairing and especially cooking with wine. I have a few tips for anyone cooking with wine:

Cook only with wine that you would drink. Don't try to get by with the cheapest wine you can find. Conversely this does not mean that you need a very expensive bottle. A well-made medium grade wine for under \$15 is just fine.

To start, I would suggest using a very mainstream white or red. As you get more accustomed to using wine as an ingredient in your dishes, you will be more likely to experiment. I prefer Sauvignon Blanc as a white wine for sautéing, marinating, and in sauces for seafood, and chicken. I have also been happy with the results of using Cabernet Sauvignon or Zinfandel for meats and meat based sauces.

If a wine is extremely fruity, sour, or unsavory, these characteristics will be also be emphasized during cooking. Stay away from oaky wines too; they can get bitter at high temperatures.

The trick is to experiment. The more you cook with wine, the better you will become at predicting how a specific wine will enhance your menu.

- When a recipe calls for water, replace the water with a favorite wine.
- Mix wine with your favorite Olivelle olive oil to baste meat and poultry.
- For meat dishes calling for wine, first heat the wine. Do not boil the wine, this will lose the flavor. Adding cold wine tends to make meat tough, while warm wine helps tenderize it.

Serve the same wine with dinner that you cooked with, as they will complement each other. If you prefer to use a fine wine during dinner, try to stay within the same wine family.

Bozeman Art Walk June 14

Every summer Bozeman hosts its downtown Art Walk on the second Friday of the month. We are afforded the opportunity to spend a leisurely summer evening marveling at the local artists and their works. Even if it is cool and gray, this is a great time to visit downtown with friends and family.

This month we will be at the new location for Miller's Jewelry. Not only is the Art Walk a fun time in itself, on this occasion we will be celebrating the new Grand Re-Opening of the new Miller's location at 35 West Main.

It is customary for the galleries and shops to offer wine and cheese during the Walk. While many of the other Art Walk locations offer wine, it is generally generic jug wine. That is not the case at Miller's! Cec and Jennie at Miller's are glad to have you come in and they want to be sure you are treated well. I have it on good authority that there will be 5 or 6 different Wine Gallery selected wines and one of the wines we pour will be French and bubbly to help celebrate the new venue.

Come into Miller's and look at their collection of artistic jewelry creations. Enjoy a glass of good wine while the most knowledgeable and experienced people in the jewelry business wait on you. The Art Walk officially starts at 6:00 PM June 14 so plan to stop in.

Make a night of it and plan some stops at Bozeman's best restaurants and watering holes after the Walk. Summer is the best time of year to enjoy your city and the cultural benefits that are our blessing.