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## APPEARANCE - WHY THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN MEETS THE EYE

THE EVALUATION of a wine is a sensory experience that involves the analysis of appearance, nose and palate. This naturally uses your sense of sight, smell and taste. So much enjoyment can be gained from appreciating and understanding these three aspects of wine imbibing. So, in this and the next two editions of Winestate we will discuss each element separately and in detail.

The appearance might seem a trivial aspect, but it can give a lot of clues about the wine. It can indicate whether it has been stored correctly, or what influence the production process has had. It gives an insight into the chemical composition and might tell you whether that glass of wine offered in a restaurant is from a bottle that has been open too long. Understanding what to expect from the colour is the first step to assessing a wine's quality.

have the potential to be very pale; water-white in fact. Often these bleached or bright colours indicate low pH levels (high acid) in a wine. The scale to measure pH is logarithmic so a small amount, such as .02, can make a big difference in the appearance and taste of a wine. It is an inverse scale, so the lower the number the higher the acidity. Generally, white wine has a pH of between 2.9 and 3.5, while reds are normally between 3.2 and 4. The lower levels of pH protect a wine from bacterial spoilage and generally allow the wine to age better.

High natural acidity could allow the winemaker to reduce the amount of sulphur dioxide needed to protect the wine. That is good news for some allergy sufferers. The acidity of a wine directly comes from the grape, influenced by where it is grown, or it can be adjusted by the winemaker. Grapes grown in cool

Anthocyanins are part of the phenolics in a grape that increase as the grape ripens. So stronger colour is obtained from riper grapes and that is one reason why our Barossa shiraz is so inky and black while, a Northern Cote du Rhone is lighter red.

The amount of anthocyanin differs with each grape variety but can also be influenced by the winemaker. Pinot noir, for instance, has a low anthocyanin content and thin skins, resulting in a light intensity and strawberry/ruby colour. However, if the winemaker chooses to macerate the skins more during fermentation they can extract additional colour, to some extent.

Grenache is another grape with thinner skin but its colour can be concentrated by either lowering the vines' yield, leaving the grapes to ripen longer or increasing skin contact during fermentation. A hotter fermentation will extract more colour as well. Some grape

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When you look at a wine, you assess brightness, clarity, intensity and colour. Amazingly, our eyes are finely tuned instruments with the ability to distinguish between a million shades of colour.

Wine, both red and white, should be bright. The opposite to bright is dull, and if a wine is dull then it is probably going to taste dull and be past its best. A wine should also be clear. Now that is not to say you should be able to see through it but, again, it should not look like a murky swamp or have an abundance of sediment. The latter is part of the ageing process and does not affect the smell or taste in a detrimental way, but it is just unsightly.

Different grape varieties display different colours and that applies to both white and red wines. Let's look at white wine first.

Colours range from water-white through lemon-green, lemon, gold and, finally, amber. Generally, all white grape varieties

climates have higher acidity and the wine therefore is paler than a hot-climate wine. White wines slowly mature and oxidise over time in bottle which darkens the colour, so expect a more golden appearance. If a white wine spends time in oak it is exposed to a process of slow oxygenation, and therefore will be darker than a wine kept in an inert environment. In young wines, expect to see medium-intense lemon coloured chardonnay (often aged in oak), while high-acid riesling and sauvignon blanc will either be water-white or pale lemon-green.

Red wines also exhibit bright, often purple, colours with lower pH levels. But the grape plays a bigger part in determining the colour of a wine. This is due to the amount of anthocyanin in the all-important grape skin, as most red/black grapes, with a few exceptions, such as alicante bouschet, have colourless juice.

varieties have distinctive colours - such as nebbiolo, that has as a telltale orange rim.

Youthful red wines should display purple or, more often, ruby colours that develop as the wine ages in barrel. As a red wine ages in bottle, the anthocyanins link with tannins to form long-chain molecules that eventually fall out of the wine as sediment. That is why red wine becomes lighter in colour and with the process of oxidation the wine shows more garnet, followed by brick-red and tawny.

Other observations include the 'tears' or 'legs'. I've always commented that I'm not a 'legs' man and they mean little in judging the overall quality of a wine. They indicate the viscosity of the wine and are caused by alcohol, sugar content and other ingredients, including glycerol. But they do add to the first impressions and provide more evidence that there is more to the appearance of a wine than at first sight. 1