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WARM REDS AND COOL WHITES - GETTING THE TEMPERATURES RIGHT

AS we reach the end of another hot summer and start to look forward to the cooler months, I wonder how much red wine you have been drinking this summer? Reds often take a nose dive in sales during summer, not surprising given our climate. But are we doing reds a disservice and simply not treating them with the care and respect in serving them at the right temperature? Chilling a red wine makes it eminently more attractive on a summer evening. Conversely, white wines are often served too cold in the heat of summer. In fact a Wine Intelligence survey found that 21 per cent of consumers drink white wine straight from the freezer in summer. Whether it be at home or in a restaurant, wine is generally not served at the optimum temperature.

Service temperature is worth thinking about and Clare Valley's Taylors wines have gone a bit further in highlighting the problem by doing some research at the Sydney Wine Academy late last year. Around 100 people were selected as a cross section of the Australian drinking public and given a blind tasting of two glasses of Taylors Estate Shiraz served at two temperatures - one at room temperature (24C) and one at 17C. Seventy-one per cent preferred the chilled sample and said they would pay more for it. It was also noted that 100 per cent of tasters could not recognise the two wines were exactly the same, which goes to show how important service temperature is.

There has been other sporadic research carried out on the effects of serving temperature on wine. It is thought that oak aromas can dominate a chilled chardonnay, while its fruit aromas are more evident at

room temperature. The perception of texture in wine changes with the temperature. Warmer wines have a richer texture to them and this is especially important with high acid varieties like riesling. Chilling wine can also get rid of unwanted aromas and flavours. Traditionally European reds suffered from brettanomyces. To counteract this fault you can try chilling the wine down as research found that it lessened the effect. This is not rocket science as we all know a smelly cheese left out of the fridge becomes even smellier.

To maintain the correct temperature always hold the wine by the stem so you don't warm the wine with your hands (difficult with trendy stemless glasses) and don't over fill the glasses.

On our courses at the Sydney Wine Academy we serve both red and white wines at room temperature, and while we don't bring them down to 17C they are below 20C as our main wine cellar is held at 15C and they warm up during the class and on pouring. This is done to ensure the aromas of white wines are not masked by being too chilled and students can more easily identify varietal signatures which

they often need to do in practice for their examinations. The only alteration to this policy is sparkling wines which must be chilled to open successfully.

The optimum service temperature changes slightly for different styles of wines. The coolest service temperature is of course applied to sparkling wines at 6-8C. Within that band you should consider the higher end (even up to 10C) for more complex and autolytic styles of champagne or older vintage wines.

Aromatic white wines such as sauvignon blanc, riesling and gewurztraminer can be chilled, but not overtly. So 8-10C is ideal but nothing below as you lose all the aromatics. Check your refrigerator temperature as the standard set temperature is a chilly 3-4C. So you should leave them out for a while before opening them. You want them cold and refreshing in summer and a bit warmer in winter. Riesling benefits for being served towards 10C but it varies depending on the amount of residual sugar. With white wines that have undergone oak treatment, most commonly chardonnay, you should only chill to 10-12C and with aged white wines have them around 12-14C. This is to appreciate the complexity of the wine. You could look at it this way - the more you pay for your white wine the less chilled you should have it.

When it comes to red wines you hear much talk about serving at room temperature. But that is taken as a London temperature not Sydney or Brisbane. Room temperature they are talking about is around 18C. So in Australia all reds will need chilling down, especially in the hotter months.

Alcohol at over 20C can start to evaporate

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and becomes more apparent so that is one valuable reason why we need to chill our reds. However tannin and bitterness are more noticeable on the palate of chilled reds so it can be a fine balancing act.

With this in mind light reds with often soft tannins and lower alcohol such as some fruit-driven pinot noir, merlot and beaujolais can be served around 12-14C. But the more complex the wine the warmer it should be. So full-bodied cabernet sauvignon, barolo, aglianico and shiraz should be served at 18C which will still appear chilled on a hot day. That leaves styles like grenache, tempranillo and sangiovese. These would be served below 18C but it would depend on their fruit, alcohol, tannin and weight as to what precise temperature would be best.

Don't forget to treat fortified wines with respect. Dry Fino sherries must be well chilled 6-8C and a tip I got in the Douro Valley many years ago was on a warm night to drink a chilled glass of 10-year-old Tawny - that was a revelation!

To maintain the correct temperature always hold the wine by the stem so you don't warm the wine with your hands (difficult with trendy stemless glasses) and don't over fill the glasses, are two useful tips to remember.

Since 2014 Taylors have used thermo-chromatic ink technology on their bottles in what they call their Optimum Drinking Temperature sensor. This changes colour depending on the temperature of the wine so you can check when the wine has reached optimum drinking temperature. This could be a useful addition applied to all Australian-sold bottles. 



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