



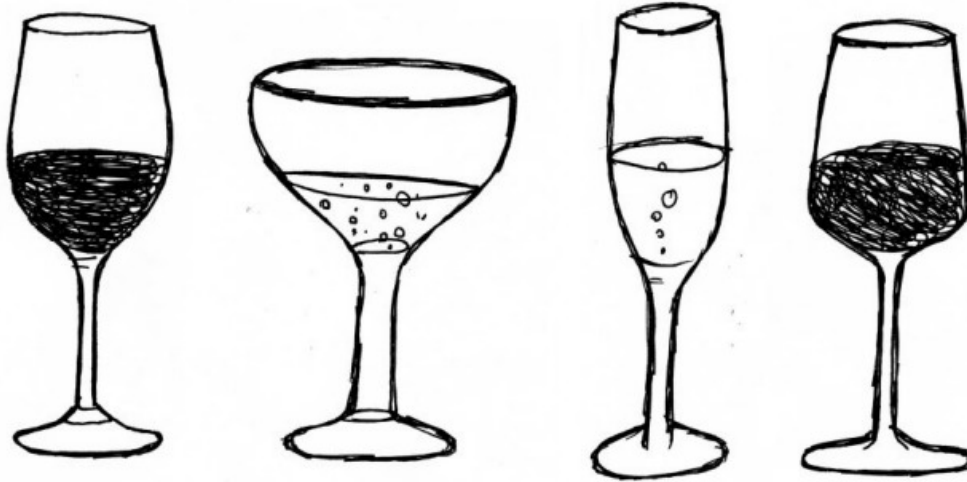
Wine guru Jancis Robinson.

Jancis Robinson's 10 things you must know about wine

It's fair to say British critic Jancis Robinson knows a thing or two about wine. As well writing a weekly wine column for *The Financial Times* she edits *The Oxford Companion To Wine*, and has co-authored *The World Atlas of Wine* and *WineGrapes: A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties*. In 2003 she received an OBE from the Queen, whose cellar she now advises on. Her most recent book, *The 24-Hour Wine Expert*, aims to demystify a topic that attracts more than its fair share of pompous, quasi-experts. In that spirit, Good Food asked Robinson for her list of 10 things you simply must know about wine.

- 1.** Establish a relationship with a local retailer. You know how you go into a bookshop and say, "I liked this book," and the job of the bookseller is to say, "Well, if you liked that I think you'd like this". There are very strong parallels between booksellers and good wine retailers. Find an independent retailer, tell them what you've liked and ask them to suggest something else.
- 2.** This is not going to make me any friends with those who design and sell wine glasses but you really only need one wine glass shape or size. It will do for reds, for whites, for fortifieds and for sparkling. [It should go] in towards the top so you can swirl the wine around and release the all-important aroma without losing it.
- 3.** Never fill a glass more than half full, so that you can swirl it around without losing the wine. Swirling is important because it releases the aroma. And the aroma is really important because at least half, probably two-thirds of the flavour is in the aroma, rather than what you actually put in your mouth.
- 4.** There are no rights or wrongs in wine appreciation; you can't be wrong if you just say what you think. Because what you think is the most important thing. Don't be cowed by your friend who says there are wine experts and I've got to agree with them. That's a waste of time. Just follow your own nose and your own likes and dislikes.
- 5.** There is no direct relationship between price and quality in wine. There are a lot of overpriced wines and there are some underpriced wines, which is rather nice. There

are a lot of wines where you're paying over the odds because there's a marketing person saying, "we need to segment our offering" and "we need an icon wine", and all that kind of rubbish. A lot of expensive wines are often over-oaked or too alcoholic or exaggerated.



Illustrations from The 24-Hour Wine Expert by Jancis Robinson. Penguin Random House copyright.

6. Serving temperature is really important. It may seem a bit precious but if you serve a white wine too cold it won't smell of anything. But if you serve a red wine too warm then it all tastes kind of soupy and muddy and not very refreshing. The ideal serving temperature of a white and red is surprisingly close: probably around 15 or 16 degrees for more or less everything.

7. When you're matching food and wine the colour isn't as nearly as important as the weight of the wine. So, if you're eating something that is really rich and complicated, serve it with a full-bodied wine and if it's a very pure, light, fresh kind of dish, like poached fish, then serve it with a light wine...one that is 12 per cent alcohol or less.

8. For inexpensive white and rosé wines, be sure to drink the youngest vintage available. They are made to be drunk young, they're not meant to be aged and, in fact, they lose their fruity freshness with time.

9. If you're choosing wine in a bottle shop, avoid bottles that have been stored too close to strong light. You certainly don't want anything that's been in the window and you wouldn't want something that been high up on the shelf underneath a strip light. Because light isn't very good for wine, it tends to age it too fast.

10. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help. In restaurants people are often reluctant to ask for advice, tending to think that it's a battle between them and the restaurant as to who will win. But, in fact, it's an almost infallible rule that the more you know about wine the more likely it is you'll say to the waitstaff, "can you advise me?" I've been writing about wine for 40 years, I don't know everything about every single bottle.

Peter Barrett