



WINE NOTES

By Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

'SHOULD I DECANT?'

This is one of the questions we are asked most often, so much so that we have written about the subject extensively (for a copy of one of the columns, drop us a note at wine@wsj.com). In the absence of sediment in the bottle, which might require decanting to pour off the clear wine, we do not decant. We like to see how a wine tastes from the first sip to the last; we like to sense it changing slowly, for better or worse. Besides, if we taste a wine and it's so young and tight and challenging that it needs decanting, we can still do that; but if we decant a wine and then think, gee, we think some of its fruit dissipated into the air, we can't put the genie back in the bottle.

One reason we don't decant is that we linger over wines—especially fine, older wines—for many hours. We can imagine some occasions—at a restaurant, for instance—when someone would order a young, aggressive wine and want to drink it fairly expeditiously, in which case it might be best to have it decanted (but, again, only after tasting it first).

Fine wines change in the glass. As they warm and as they get air, whether in the bottle or in your glass, they can often seem like several different wines. That is one of the things we love about good wines. Every year, on Open That Bottle Night, we are reminded anew

about the amazing life-cycle of a wine after it is opened. Some examples from OTBN 9:

1980 Argiano Brunello di Montalcino (Italy). "The wine showed good aging. It was balanced, very earthy, with lots of red fruit, maybe some brick. As the night progressed and we transitioned from appetizer to entrée, the wine opened up." *Daniel Roca, New York*

1925 Château Lafite Rothschild (France). "The first sip was full of flavor. The fruit and tannin were remarkable for so old a wine. After an hour and 20 minutes, the wine started to crash." *Tom Spiro, Atlanta*

1997 Château Talbot (France). "When I opened the bottle I worried that I had let it sit too long. But what a transformation after it was allowed to breathe—mellowed tannins, good fruit and alcohol balance." *Bill Hansen, Glen Rock, N.J.*

2001 Vine Cliff Cabernet Sauvignon (California). "We marveled as the wine opened up slowly and deliciously." *Tom and Tracy Burton, Madison, Wis.*

1970 Château Ausone (France). "The smell was great, but the wine was a bit musty and thin until we chilled it down a little bit and let it sit. In the end, it was delicious for 38 years old—lots of wood, still some nice fruit and a bit of Port-type flavor." *Jeff Fisher, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.*

1993 Gundlach Bundschu "Rhinefarm Vine-

yards" (California). "The first nose was ripe with dark plum, cherry and a hint of earth. The flavor was rich, with raisin, Mission fig and slight chocolate notes—very leggy and so aromatic that it seemed like one could almost get a buzz from the scent. We poured the second glass about half an hour after the first and it was even better. More mellow and flavorful. There was now a hint of celery seed in the nose, ending with a touch of rosebud. Really remarkable!" *Leslie and Charlie Hilmer, Stevensville, Mich.*

1934 Viña Tondonia (Spain). "First sip verdict: drinkable. As the evening progressed, we upgraded it to palatable and by meal's end we called it reasonably good." *Rae and Norm Leaper, San Francisco*

Inevitably, when we write about how a wine can improve as the night goes on, some people ask whether the wine has actually improved or whether the company, the setting and the alcohol have simply conspired to create the illusion that the wine has improved. Irene and John Mann of Davenport, Iowa, touched on this when they wrote about their **1997 Joseph Phelps Insignia (California).** "The wine did not disappoint," they said. "It exploded on our tongues with cherry and pepper. Throughout the evening, it transformed, as did our conversation, moving from the tip of the tongue to a soothing

and warm blackberry and cinnamon essence. Does the wine get better as it opens, or does it taste different as the alcohol works on the senses?" We say: It doesn't matter. Just enjoy it.

FINDING WINES

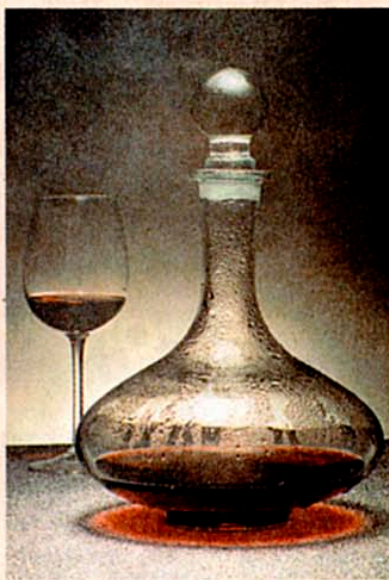
Please tell me how to do a quick online check to find where I can purchase a particular wine.

I recently had and loved a 2005 Colterenzio Müller-Thurgau. Do you know of this wine and where to purchase it online?

A friend of mine went to Argentina and fell in love with a wine there. Would you happen to know where I might find this wine?

These three letters are typical of hundreds we receive asking how to find a specific wine. This is yet another reason to discover and embrace a good wine merchant who is friendly and might be willing to help you find special bottles. Beyond that, thanks to the wonders of the Internet, it is easier than ever to locate wines. Try these four sites: wine-searcher.com, wineaccess.com, winezap.com and winfetch.com. These sites will let you know what's available at many wine stores. You might find that the wine is available locally; if not, you might be able to have the wine shipped, depending on local laws.

Melanie Grayce West contributed to this column. You can contact us at wine@wsj.com.



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