

DRINKS

wines and wherefores

With invaluable advice from Singapore Airlines' panel of wine consultants – Michael Hill-Smith MW, Karen MacNeil and Steven Spurrier – **LIM HWEE PENG** distills useful information on wine appreciation.

Matching food and wine

Understand the flavours of both. For instance, delicate steamed dishes go nicely with a light-bodied white wine. Bear in mind the preparation method and accompaniments: for example, pair black pepper steak, which is dominated by the flavour of its sauce, with spicy-nuance Shiraz. Since it is taste that influences the choice of wines, there will always be more than one wine to match a dish – a mushroom risotto can be enhanced by either a Burgundy rouge or a creamy, rich Chardonnay.

How to order wines from a wine list

Ask the sommelier for a recommendation, or refer to a favourite grape variety or wine estate, so that he or she can guide you to an appropriate selection. Consider the occasion (romantic date or business luncheon) and the food. Be adventurous and you may uncover a gem.

How to taste like a professional

When tasting white wines, look for fruitiness and freshness (acidity). In tasting reds, consider the same flavours, plus the quality of the tannin (the astringent taste that can range from hard, firm and gripping to soft and velvety). Dessert wines must be sweet and well-balanced with acidity.

Appreciating wine in the air

Imbibing wine at 35,000ft can be a different experience as our palate becomes less sensitive to flavours. So, a subtly fruit-sweet wine on the ground can taste flat in the air. That's why Singapore Airlines invests in wine selections that show their best at high altitudes.

Investment buys

Select reputable merchants and wines that are in demand.

These include the prized Bordeaux wines, such as its First Growths (only five wines qualify for this category), Chateau Cheval Blanc and Chateau Y'quem; rare and limited production single vineyard wines, namely Domaine Romanee Conti (Burgundy); proven pedigree Australian classics, specifically Penfolds Grange and Henschke Hill of Grace; or Vega Sicilia in Spain. Before investing (prices from about US\$6,000), read reputable wine publications, like Decanters Magazine, to identify blue-chip wines.

Wine guidebook dos and don'ts

Remember that ratings – be it 100- or 20-pointers, or Gold and Silver medal awards – indicate the quality of wines, and not necessarily popular taste. ■

Wine maestros

The Singapore Airlines panel of wine consultants comprises Michael Hill-Smith MW, Karen MacNeil and Steven Spurrier.

Michael Hill-Smith MW is the first Australian winemaker to attain the prestigious Master of Wine (MW) title, and is a partner in Adelaide's Shaw and Smith winery; **Karen MacNeil** is the award-winning author of The Wine Bible, and a wine educator; and **Steven Spurrier**, a wine personality in Britain and Europe, is a wine journalist and wine educator.

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