

Recently a group of us gathered for a unique experience: tasting several older wines - and all at the same tasting. Occasionally you get a chance to sample an older vintage with other wines. We were able to taste seven different wines that were all ten years or older.

Now time is not always a friend to wine. Some wines are meant to be consumed young, in the same year as they were made. That's part of the Beaujolais Nouveau craze. The wine is a month old or less.

Most wines now are made for drinking when released by the winery. But that could be 2 or 3 years after it was made. It has been aging in barrels and the bottle after that.

As far as purchasing is concerned, about 95% of all wine is consumed within 48 hours of getting home with the buyer. We buy it to drink today or tomorrow.

For me I find that many wines benefit from a little time in the bottle. They mature and soften some. The hard edges go away. It's sort of like Rubens visiting Haute Couture.

Beyond that some wines age very well. Just like people, they take on a different character. They become rich and flavorful with time. The youthful exuberance may be gone. But a depth that's great to experience replaces it.

After a glass of sparkling, we settled in to taste our treasures. The first was a white wine that ages well - Chablis. Ours was 1996 Chateau de Maligny Chablis Premier Cru. The grape here is Chardonnay.

Wow was this a powerful white. It had rich flavors and a pretty light golden hue. It amazed us all as a first in a line of several new experiences.

Our other white wine was 1989 Pavillion Blanc du Chateau Margaux. This first growth Bordeaux winery is one that produces a white wine as well as the expected red. This blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semilion usually ages very well.

Well this one sure did. It was a little darker than the Chablis and softer. Even more flavors came as we sipped and enjoyed.

No question wine is better with food. To me the reverse is just as true. Food tastes best with a nice wine.

For our food for the night, everyone brought an offering. The suggestion was a cocktail party type appetizer to share. We had a real bounty. There was smoked salmon, Kielbasa slices, a spread made from roasted red peppers and another spread loaded with lots of lump crabmeat. There was a plate combining sour cream and bacon topped with fresh tomatoes.

To go with all those goodies, I had grilled some pork tenderloin. This is a very under-appreciated cut of meat that doesn't get used enough. It's very well priced and gives you almost 100% yield. A pack of two will feed 8 to 10 people and set you back less than \$10. A dollar a person is strong in my book.

A key to food for tasting wine is that it not be too assertive. Heavy, hot or spicy flavors won't allow you to enjoy the wine as much.

The first red we tasted was 1990 Sierra Cantabria Rioja Reserva in magnum. I took a bottle of this same wine to a tasting a few years ago hosted by David Weiss. I was the star that night and held its own with us. It still had plenty of sweet fruit to fill out the complex flavors.

Our next red was 1992 Gallo Sonoma - Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon. This bottle was from the first real Gallo venture outside of the Modesto properties. Later this became the Gallo Family line.

The early wines here were rich and strong. They were made in a "you can keep it" style. This bottle sure was. It had the true "Cab" smell and a full rich taste. The earthiness of the wine was outstanding.

The third red was 1990 Taurino Notapanaro. This wine is primarily Negro Amaro blended with about 10% Malvasia Nero. This winery is in Puglia - the heel of the boot.

Minerals exploded in the nose and mouth of this wine. That smell that says "Italian" to me was in the wine by the truckload. The taste here was so good.

Our final red was 1986 Chateau Branas Grand Poujeaux. This blend of Cabernet and Merlot was superb. It seemed as though it borrowed the

best characteristics of the prior wines and put them in one bottle. The minerals, the earth, the fruit and the powerful flavors were all there.

The final wine of the night was Great Western Ruby Port. This bottle was purchased in 1975. The Solera was established several years earlier.

Wow – so much flavor. The wine was a little cloudy from sediment. The bright red color from the 70's was gone. It had settled to the redish brown of a tawny Port.

The Port was a blockbuster - just a little sweet with so many layers of flavor. We could have sipped this one for hours.

One of the things that we learned was how full the taste was for all of these wines. It was almost like the whole bottle was concentrated in your glass.

Just because you don't a closet stash of older wines is no reason to not have your own special tasting. There might be a special bottle you are saving. You might have a souvenir from a trip. Wine is much better than a tee shirt.

The same is true for several of your friends. Ask each of them to bring a bottle and have a good old time tasting new wines and sharing food too.

Another idea is to contribute \$10 to \$15 each and get one of your group to purchase a very special bottle to share. This will be one that you might not ever buy just for yourself. The other wines can be just regular stuff.

In any case you will have fun and might create just as memorable an experience as we had.