

Worksheet Five

AROMA

As this chapter's workshop can be time-consuming, it's best to enforce a time limit for detecting each champagne's aromas. A single learner will still enjoy a really good exercise with one champagne, and it really is the best way to practise. For a group tasting, prepare six champagne flutes plus one large burgundy glass per person. Select the appropriate number of bottles of champagne, one each from the following categories, allowing a half-bottle per person. Number each bottle of champagne to assist with the workshop, and pour glasses from left to right.

Champagne One

Choose any champagne from the pretty village of Cramant in Champagne, preferably pure Cramant fruit.

- » Bonnaire Blanc de Blancs Extra-Brut NV
- » Brice Cramant NV
- » Diebolt-Vallois Fleur de Passion Vintage
- » Lilbert Fils Blanc de Blancs Vintage or Perle Blanc de Blancs Vieilles Vignes NV
- » Mumm Blanc de Blancs Mumm de Cramant NV
- » Voirin-Jumel Vintage

Champagne Two

- » Moët & Chandon Vintage
- » Mumm Vintage

Champagne Three

- » Ayala Brut Majeur NV
- » Laurent-Perrier NV

Champagne Four

- » Delamotte Brut Rosé NV
- » Veuve Clicquot Rosé NV

Champagne Five

- » Devaux Blanc de Noirs NV
- » Drappier Brut Nature 100% Pinot Noir NV
- » Egly-Ouriet Blanc de Noirs NV
- » Marie-Noëlle Ledru Cuvée de Goulte Blanc de Noirs Vintage
- » Paul Déthune Blanc de Noirs NV

Champagne Six

- » Charles Heidsieck Rosé NV or
- » Gosset Grand Rosé NV
- » Henri Giraud *Esprit de Grande* Rosé NV
- » Pol Roger Rosé Vintage

THE FIRST BREATH INWARDS

Allow five minutes for this exercise

Open Champagne One. Is the wine in good condition? If it smells good, pour a small amount per person into the large burgundy glass and an equal amount into the first (far left) champagne flute.

This exercise exhibits the different aromas released by different glassware. Gently swirl the champagne around the glasses to unleash its aromas. Sense the initial delicate aromas, and quickly note them.

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Which of the two glasses reveals the most about the wine?

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Does warming the bowl of the burgundy glass with your hands make any difference to the strength of the aromas?

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Stop, look, listen! Put your ear to either glass. You can hear the bubbles, which waft the aromas to your sensory organs.

ASSESSING THE AROMAS

Allow about 75 minutes for this exercise

Pour 15 ml of the second champagne into the second flutes. Begin the exercise below by writing the number of the wine (e.g., for this wine, write 2 on the sheet) against the aroma displayed in the champagne. When you are ready, pour samples of bottles 3–6 in turn into the flutes, and continue quickly to assess their first aromas.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Fresh fruit? Poached? Baked? Dried?

Flowers? Fresh? Dried?

Vegetal?

Nuts?

Bakery?

Savoury?

Animal?

Mineral?

Store cupboard?

Woodland?

Wood?

Next, become more discriminating about the aromas. From the long list below, mark the number of the wine next to each aroma detected. Throughout this exercise, switch between the champagnes to refresh your nose. Go back to the first champagne and note any new perfumes that have appeared. Repeatedly test for newly emerged aromas. Each champagne will be different – don't expect every listed aroma to be present in one wine.

Allow ten minutes per champagne, then a further ten minutes for comparisons between all of them. You will need to work quickly.

Fresh Fruit – *primary aromas from fruit*

- Apple
- Berries – blackberry, blackcurrant, blueberry, redcurrant, strawberry
- Cherry, especially morello cherry, or red/black cherry
- Citrus – grapefruit, lemon/lime, mandarin
- Fig
- Gooseberry
- Melon
- Pear
- Quince
- Stone-fruits – apricot, nectarine, white/yellow peach, plum
- Tropical – banana, coconut, guava, kiwifruit, lychee, mango, papaya, passionfruit, pineapple, star fruit
- Flowers** – *primary aromas from fruit*
- Acacia
- Apple blossom
- Citrus blossom
- Hawthorn
- Honeysuckle
- Jasmine
- Peonies
- Rose, faded or intensely wild
- Vine blossom
- Violets
- White flowers
- Vegetal** – *primary aromas from fruit*
- Bell pepper/capsicum
- Cooked vegetable

- Cucumber
- Cut hay/herbaceous
- Grassy
- Mint
- Mineral** – *primary aromas from fruit*
- Chalk
- Flint
- Limestone
- Oyster shell
- Slate
- Washed stone
- Savoury** – *secondary aromas from fermentation*
- Bacon
- Polish
- Smoky
- Animal** – *secondary aromas from fermentation*
- Game
- Leather
- Meat
- Musk
- Wood** – *secondary aromas from fermentation*
- Likely to show up as very gentle oxidation, unless the wine has been matured in newer oak barrels
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- Bakery** – *a. Secondary nose from fermentation*
- Biscuit
- Bread
- Brioche
- Butter

Dough
 Pastry
 Patisserie
 Toast
 Wheaten

Bakery – b. Tertiary aromas from age

Baked fruits
 Candied fruits
 Citrus rind
 ‘Cold tea’
 Cream
 Dried fruits
 Fruit cake
 Honey
 Macaroon
 Toffee

**Store cupboard – partly secondary
 fermentation-derived, partly age-derived (tertiary)**

Caramel
 Chocolate
 Coffee
 Confectionery
 Liquorice
 Marzipan
 Nougat
 Salt

Spice – cinnamon, ginger or mint,
 white or black pepper

Tobacco
 Vanilla

**Nuts – young, fresh, grilled or roasted –
 tertiary aromas from ageing**

Almond
 Cashew
 Hazelnut
 Kernels or bitter almonds
 Pine nut
 Pistachio
 Walnut

**Woodland – developed (secondary) aromas
 from ageing**

Beeswax
 Fern
 Forest floor
 Mushrooms
 Pine

Developed – tertiary aromas from ageing

If the wine is very old:

Oxidised
 Sherry-like
 Sour/ vinegary

CATEGORISING THE CHAMPAGNES

Allow 10 minutes for this section

Sort the six champagnes numerically in terms of overall aroma strength, from strongest to most subtle. To help you assess the aromas, here is a scale of aroma strength.

Developed, powerful, intense, perfumed, appealing, pleasant, fine, delicate, subtle, light, shy, clean, undeveloped, flat.

Sort them on the basis of elegant aroma – neither overly fruity, nor too developed. Which do you think is the most elegant?

Which champagne has the longest list of discovered aromas? The more aromas, the more complexity. Can you list the wines in order of complexity?

Now sort the champagnes in order of your preference.

Which champagne do you think is the youngest?

THE EFFECTS OF BLEND, FERMENTATION AND AGEING ON AROMA

Allow 15 minutes for this section (one minute per point)

Do any of the champagnes fit these profiles?

Very ripe tropical aromas can occur in well-developed Chardonnay-dominated champagnes.

Delicate flowery spice and warmth probably means that Meunier is one of the grape varieties that has been included.

Black-skinned grapes are more likely than white-skinned to yield biscuity, toasty and fresh bread aromas.

Mature Chardonnay-dominant champagne also displays biscuity and toasty aromas, plus, sometimes, honeyed or nutty aromas.

Mineral aromas such as chalk can indicate Chardonnay.

Plums, or a touch of liquorice, indicate ripely picked Pinot Noir.

Young Rosé, with its component of red-skinned grapes, very often reveals raspberry or, more often, strawberry aromas.

Pear drop or bubble gum aromas are more likely if the fermentation has been very cool

Yeast may also impart some ripe tropical notes, e.g., banana, pineapple.

Freshly disgorged champagne smells overwhelmingly of the pastry shop.

Wine matured in wood will have aromas introduced by slow oxidation and evaporation through the wood. Young wood is not often used to make champagne, but the younger the wood, the more woody notes will appear in the aromas.

Empyreumatic aromas – cooking aromas – occur in more mature champagnes. Look for grilled nuts, toffee, roasted coffee, chocolate.

As Pinot Noir ages, it can develop Burgundian-type aromas of mushroom and forest floor, a hint of the stable or moss.

A tobacco aroma can occur in young Chardonnay or developed Pinot Noir.

Now assess the champagnes according to the number of their tertiary aromas indicating ageing

Can you order them from oldest to youngest?

After you drink your well-deserved champagne, smell the interior of the empty glass to observe how pure and strong the aromas are without the distraction of alcohol.

Keep honing your skills. Try the same exercise again as a private study session on a single bottle.