

Evaluating Wine Quality

Perhaps the most important and essential tools available to winemakers are their senses. With sight one can critically examine a wine's appearance; with smell detect pleasing and not-so-pleasing odors; with taste perceive desirable and undesirable flavors. Thus, sensory analysis not only is the ultimate test for evaluating wine quality, it is the best method for controlling quality throughout wine making.

Commercial winemakers have the formidable task of properly and reliably evaluating wine quality, as well as developing and applying an understanding of consumer taste preferences. Fortunately, hobby winemakers need only be concerned with pleasing their own tastes. Even so, certain skills are helpful, such as the ability to recognize volatile acidity, or tartness (acidity levels) and sweetness or lack of sweetness (is the wine dry or slightly sweet?). Practical methods for sharpening these kinds of tasting skills are given in *How to Test and Improve Your Wine Judging Ability* (see Selected References).

The ability to evaluate the overall quality of a wine is largely based upon the taster's previous experience. All judgments of wine are subjective, influenced by the

memory of wines previously tasted. Thus, wine quality is easier to recognize than it is to define. A winemaker's ability to recognize wine quality can be enhanced by frequent, regular tasting of many different wines. In addition, it is helpful, especially for the inexperienced, to taste wines, using a standardized and systematic method. Various kinds of score cards or scoring systems have been developed for this purpose. Moreover, a score card is a permanent record of the sensory analysis that can be used to compare subsequent tastings of either the same wine or other wines. One such scorecard, used for many years to evaluate wine quality, is the so-called "Davis 20-point scale," developed in the Department of Viticulture and Enology at the University of California, Davis (fig. 8). Note that the term "acescent" refers to the presence of volatile acidity or wine vinegar odor/flavor, and that space is provided on the sheet for brief narrative comments about each sample being tasted as well as scores. For a more detailed and complete discussion of wine tasting in general, and the use of score cards in particular, we recommend *Wines: Their Sensory Evaluation* (see Selected References).



SCORECARD

Name _____

Name or no.					
Appearance 2					
Color 2					
Aroma & bouquet 4					
Acescent 2					
Total acid 2					
Sugar 1					
Body 1					
Flavor 2					
Astringency 2					
General quality 2					
Total					

Fig. 8. According to the Davis 20-point scale, to achieve a score of 17 to 20, wines must have some outstanding characteristic and no marked defect; 13 to 16, standard wines have neither an outstanding character nor defect; 9 to 12, wines are of commercial acceptability but with a noticeable defect; 5 to 8, wines are of below commercial acceptability; 1 to 4, wines are completely spoiled.

