

Keeping Your Cool



By Ted Loos

If there's one thing that makes me cranky at a restaurant, it's being served a bottle of warm red wine. It happens all the time, even at places where the staff should know better. The interior of a bustling restaurant is nearly 80 degrees, and if the bottle hasn't been stored in a temperature-controlled environment, the wine will be way too hot to enjoy. When that happens, I always ask for an ice bucket and chill that puppy down to the right temp—between 55 and 65 degrees.

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When a red is too warm (I find this happens more with reds than with whites), the tannins and alcohol come leaping out at you, obscuring the fruit and finesse the winemakers are trying to seduce you with. Do you want to pay good money (at least two or three times as expensive on a wine list) for a nice wine like [J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon Paso Robles 2007](#) (\$35) and have the wrong serving temperature obscure the delightful berry goodness, courtesy of California's sunny Central Coast? I didn't think so.

Incorrect temperature is the most frequently made serving mistake, but—hallelujah, praise Bacchus—it's also the easiest to fix. And no, you don't need to carry a thermometer around at all times. You can guesstimate. (For those of you who *do* want to geek out, the new infrared thermometers are mighty handy, because they can read the temperature just by being held close to the wine. It's neat and clean.)

A bottle of red should go in the refrigerator up to an hour before serving. Other wine experts will recommend that a half hour is fine, but personal experience tells me that 30 minutes is not quite long enough. The red wine is going to warm up in your glass, especially if you like to linger over the wine or want to give it some air (look for my thoughts on decanting in the near future). The beguiling spice notes in the [Grande Dalles Home Place 2008](#) (\$60), a largely Tempranillo blend from Oregon, deserve the chance to be appreciated properly. If served too warm, those spicy notes will seem thick and heavy, applied with a housepainter's tool instead of a delicate watercolor brush.

White wines usually fall into the opposite camp. When you go to someone's house for dinner, that white you're often poured comes straight from the fridge and checks in at about 38 degrees. That's a little too cold, and results in a muting of all the flavors. Aim for a serving temperature somewhere in the 45- to 55-degree range for whites, depending on complexity. Generally speaking, the more complex the wine, the warmer it can be served. So, take it out of the refrigerator a half hour before serving.

For [Château Bonnet Entre-Deux-Mers Blanc 2009](#) (\$12), a pleasant white from an often-overlooked Bordeaux value zone, the cooler side is fine, as simple refreshment is the main goal here (serve rosés that way, too). But for a Grand Cru treasure like [Domaine Laroche Chablis Les Blanchots Réserve de l'Obédiance 2009](#) (\$99), I'd say 55 degrees is about right. This is a wine of layers and complexity that you just can't appreciate at an Arctic temperature (it's also too soon to drink this one, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have an idea about how to serve it in the future). At least with whites, you know that time is on your side: If they're too cold at the start, they're only going to get closer to the mark with some time.

For sparkling and a wide range of sweet wines, keep the temperature in the same zone as you do for whites. [Royal Tokaji Red Label 2006](#) (\$40), which might be the best-value sweet wine out there right now, is a Hungarian beauty that shows off very rich prune, raisin, cinnamon, and apricot flavors. Serve it too warm and the fruity sugars overwhelm you, but at 55 degrees or so, everything's in perfect balance, the acidity providing a frame around the sweet picture inside. [Adami Prosecco Bosco di Gica](#) (\$18), which tastes like a refreshing green grape and green melon granita, shows best when it's a touch cooler. Bring it down to a brisk 45 degrees. This sparkler would be perfect for opening at a graduation party this time of year, and nothing would better show that you've graduated from Wine Basics than to serve it at exactly the right temperature.



Ted Loos, a former editor of *Wine Spectator*, has written about wine for *Bon Appétit*, *Decanter*, *Town & Country*, and many other publications. He also covers design and the arts for *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, and *Architectural Digest*, among others. Follow Ted on Twitter: [@LoosLips](#)

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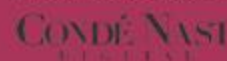
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