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T A S T E

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Decanting Wine: Everything You Need to Know

So you're having friends over for a special bottle of wine. What can you do to ensure the experience is truly something special? Take a leaf from wine expert Mark Oldman's book: Pull out the decanter. "Pouring wine into a glass vessel edges it out of the realm of the commercial and closer to something that is truly yours," Oldman writes in his forthcoming book, *How to Drink Like a Billionaire: Mastering Wine with Joie de Vivre*. "Placing wine into a decanter makes it your personal elixir, the first of many that you should share with friends."



If you've never done it before, the ritual of decanting wine, or transferring it from bottle to vessel, can be intimidating. But on top of offering plenty of mystique, decanting wine boasts several other big benefits.

To get the full rundown on decanting wines, we caught up with Oldman, who told us everything you need to know about which wines to decant, the biggest misconceptions about decanting, and how to pull it all off without looking like a poser.

Let's set the record straight. What exactly is decanting?

Mark Oldman: Decanting sounds like some sort of difficult process, but in reality, it just means pouring wine into a vessel—usually a glass container and often the kind of special container you'd find at Williams-Sonoma, like crystal or beautiful glass.

Why is decanting important?

MO: There are three reasons why everyone should decant. One is to aerate a wine, just to soften it—usually a young red like a Barolo or Cabernet Sauvignon that tends to have a lot of gum-puckering astringency. An astringent red can become less bitter and more aromatic and flavorful with an hour or more exposure to air. One cool thing that I point out in my new book is that wine experts have discovered the value of decanting white wine, too. Pour super dry and very acidic white wines, like certain Sauvignon Blancs or Savennières from the Loire Valley, and after an hour or two the white wine will become more approachable.



The second situation calls for decanting when you want to remove sediment from wine. People will decant to remove sediment from an older red wine: color pigments and tannins can solidify and appear in the wine as gunk, and this sediment is totally harmless but not texturally all that pleasant. But people don't have to worry about that unless their bottle is red and about 10 years or more of bottle age.

The final case for decanting—and this might be the most fun case—is to build anticipation. You're pouring the bottle into this beautiful glass container, and your guests ooh and ahh, and it makes the process of drinking wine that much more special. It ups the ritual factor of drinking wine. **Decanters are like a handwritten note**; it's one of those old-fashioned maneuvers that are easy to do. It's a great experience that can be yours for a relatively small investment of time and money.

OK, so how do you pull off decanting without looking like a total poser?

MO: The key is to relax! Most people have never done this—even some wine experts—so if you don't do it perfectly, no one's really

going to notice. Just open your wine, take your decanter, tilt it at a 45-degree angle, tilt your wine at a 45-degree angle, and pour the wine into the decanter. Don't worry about pouring it slowly or carefully, unless you're decanting to remove sediment from the wine.

How long should you be decanting?

MO: I have found you need at least an hour for the air to really mix with the wine. Don't swirl it, because you don't want to break the decanter. If you really want to be a wine insider, for that extra-puckery Barolo or Cabernet, some enthusiasts will use two decanters to double decant, and you pour the wine back and forth [between decanters] to accelerate aeration. If you want the wine to be in its actual bottle, I've seen wine double decanted and then poured back into the bottle.

How should you decant to remove sediment?

MO: Stand a bottle up, preferably for a few hours, so the sediment settles to the bottom. After you open the bottle, pour the wine slowly in the decanter, and do this over a light source under the neck of the bottle, so you can see the wine flow and when the sediment starts to enter the neck of the bottle. Then just stop pouring, and there you've separated your wine from that sediment.

Is decanting something that's reserved for only pricey or aged wines?

MO: It's not done enough. There's no downside to decanting; you're not going to hurt the wine. Sometimes the wine has to get used to the world. Over and over again, I've seen both simple and complex wines change in personality after 30-45 minutes of exposure to air. Mark my words: There's almost no situation in which you're going to make the wine taste less



interesting. Only with the most delicate red Burgundy that's been aged 30 years might you want to avoid decanting. Certain red Burgundies are so fragile that decanting might [negatively] accelerate the flavor.

But what about decanting, say, Champagne?

MO: It's generally not done with sparkling wine, because part of the magic [of sparkling] is the tiny bubbles that add texture. But if you want to get an even greater smell and taste of the Champagne, and you plan to pour it quickly before the bubbles dissolve, it's something you can experiment with. You might lose bubbles, but you gain more pronounced sensations with the wine. It's not unheard of.

There are swan-shaped decanters, dragon-shaped decanters and even gondola-shaped decanters. Does the shape of your decanter matter?

MO: Generally, you want a decanter which has a large hole on top and a large surface area so as much air gets to the wine as possible. That's decanting for aeration. But if it's just being done for mojo, then I really like some of the more elaborate decanters. It's like the adult version of a crazy straw: It creates a work of art, courtesy of your wine.

*Get more of Mark's expert advice by pre-ordering **How to Drink Like a Millionaire**, then check out the **full Williams-Sonoma collection of decanters**.*

