



Take Your Time With That Wine

MAKING AN ARGUMENT FOR EXPERIMENTAL AGING

TIME IS WINEMAKING'S magic ingredient. Trial and error through the ages has resulted in distinct and magnificent aging regimens intended to accentuate a given wine's best attributes, be they complexity, suavity, or freshness. But sometimes it can be fun to buck conventional wisdom and experiment by cellaring expressions that aren't typical candidates for aging.

Let's say the life of a wine begins once it's been legally declared wine (or once it's gone as far down the paths of primary and malolactic fermentation as it's meant to). Some wines are then aged in a combination of barrels, tanks, or bottles for years prior to release, and many are then cellared for even longer. Gran Reserva Riojas famously must age for a minimum of five years in total, with a minimum of two years in barrel and two in bottle. Sherries take it further, held as they are in a solera/crianza system that is continuously adding to and subtracting from the stock.

At the other extreme are wines such as Beaujolais Nouveau, which is bottled as soon as fermentation is complete and

rushed to market to be consumed immediately. Heck, try asking interns to stop sipping on semi-fermented Chardonnay, which in all its yeasty, fizzy sweetness is undeniably appealing, and your requests will undoubtedly go ignored.

Countless wines fall between these extremes, and many grape varieties can be given a range of treatments and result in quality wine. But what of bottlings not typically considered ageworthy? Here is my secret sauce for spicing up your drinking life, in, as luck would have it, a budget-friendly way: Play around with aging "atypical" wines, meaning less complex, lower-priced wines not typically considered candidates for aging. With roughly five to 15 years, you may get surprisingly gratifying results. I've had more success with whites and rosés than reds, but don't let that deter you; it comes down to personal preference.

Because not all wines improve with age, there's a risk you'll sacrifice fresh, bright, fruity aromas and flavors in the pursuit of rounded, nuanced notes. Aging a Vinho

Verde, for example, might not result in much other than a muted, bland drink past its prime. But other wines can punch way above their weight class when given some age. Dry Riesling may surprise you, and I personally love a good ten-plus years on Chenin Blanc. I recently enjoyed an Idlewild 2015 The Bee Flora and Fauna White, a blend of Italian varieties produced in Northern California. This wine was aromatic, zippy, and delicious in its youth, but I'm so glad I cellared some bottles, because over time new notes evolved: Candied apricot, toasted almond, and lemon verbena showed themselves, and the wine became seamless while developing a gorgeous golden color. It wasn't better, necessarily, just delicious in a different way.

I marvel at how time can change a wine in ways that cannot be mimicked by other winemaking practices. Respecting the process and anticipating the reward is part of the pleasure derived from aging wine. Don't be afraid to take a chance here and there on something that everyone else says should be drunk young. 