



# Tasting Mastery

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SWE Conference

August 13, 2014

# Today's objectives

- Examine the concept of “mastery” in tasting
- Review best practices used by top professional tasters
- Learn and use strategies taken from best practices

- Strategies & exercises to improve your own tasting
- Strategies & exercises to teach students at all levels
- Food for thought – pushing the envelope
- To be curious, explore and have fun!

Intent

What is mastery in the context  
of tasting?

Tasting with a high degree  
of proficiency and  
consistency

What's required?

Duration of time

Extensive repetition

Consistency

Heightened sensory acuity

Using best practices

What are best practices?

# Strategies of top tasters

What do top tasters do?

They use a consistent  
starting sequence

They taste using a very focused  
state of concentration

They consistently use a tasting grid or method at the unconscious level

They have highly developed  
olfactory *memory*

Practically all\* use image-based memories for smell and taste

They're able to keep a lot of sensory information in their field of awareness either simultaneously or in rapid sequence

They do so by using highly individual  
wine “maps” to internally  
represent wine

They calibrate the structural elements  
in wine precisely and consistently—and  
do so visually

They have processes or sequences to identify grapes, wines, regions and vintages

The background of the slide is a complex, abstract fractal pattern in shades of blue and white. It features intricate, swirling, and overlapping lines that create a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is reminiscent of a digital or organic structure, possibly representing a network or a complex system.

# Today's concepts

I. Glassware stance:  
addressing the glass consistently

II. Establishing an inner “zone”  
using overlapping

III. Using a grid consistently; moving  
the grid from conscious to the  
unconscious

IV. Using submodalities for olfactory sensitivity and to install olfactory memories

V. Awareness of the internal  
wine “map”

# VI. Calibrating structural elements with visual constructs

VII. Recognition strategies:  
label check & calibrating with  
extremes

## VIII. Using a decision matrix

IX. *Lieder ohne Worte*:  
associative rehearsal and  
tasting

# About the strategies and exercises ...

All involve visualization

We will be moving quickly ...

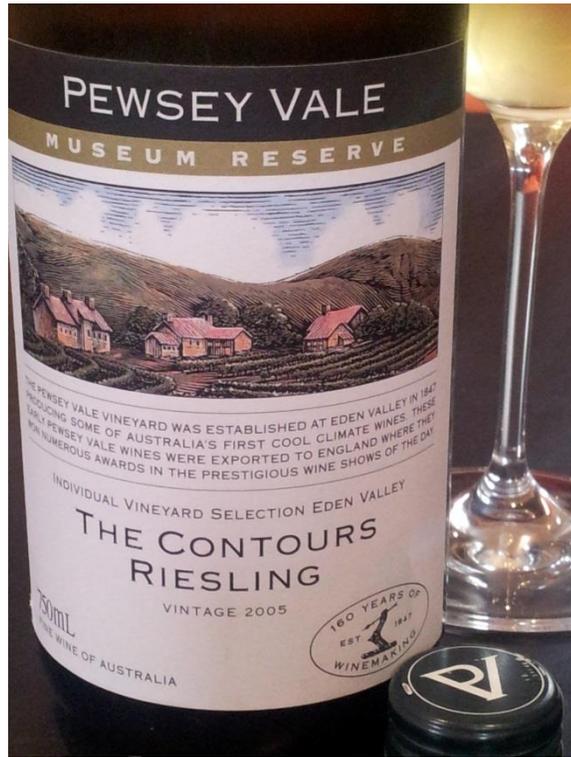
**DON'T PANIC**

To Begin ...

Team up!

Today's wines

# 2008 Pewsey Vale Riesling, “The Contours,” Eden Valley





2009 RdV Vineyards “Rendezvous,” Virginia

Let's begin

First: examine the wines

# Strategy I: Glassware stance

Tasting wine is like playing golf ...



Consistency in how you  
approach the glass is vitally  
important

Exercise with your partner:

Find your starting place and show it to your partner

To demonstrate ...

- Be aware of:
  - The angle of the glass
  - Eye position – where do you look?
  - Eye focus – quality of gaze
  - Auditory prompt – self talk?
  - Inner state ... feelings

Glassware stance

- **\*\*\*Important!**

- **Knowing how to start is the most challenging and difficult thing for beginners**

- Teach them a consistent starting place with the glass and their eyes!

Teaching beginners

STRATEGY II:  
THE ZONE



Sabato Sagaria, MS

Union Square  
Hospitality Group



What is the *zone*?

An intensely focused state of  
concentration held over a  
duration of time

What does the zone  
accomplish?

- Necessary focused state to carry out complex tasks
- Shutting the world out
- Avoidance of nerves, stage fright and the flight or fight mechanism in an exam setting

The zone accomplishes ...

How can one establish the zone  
and control it?

# Exercise: Overlapping

What is overlapping?

Creating a deep state of concentration by  
overlapping between the senses

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic
  - Physical
  - Emotional

Building layers of sensory information

Overlapping =

Crosstalk =

Synesthesia

Overlapping exercise I:

Recalling a physical activity

- Visual

- Auditory

- Kinesthetic

Exercise I: physical activity

- Eye position: direction, proximity, location
- Quality of focus –
- The depth and shape of your field of concentration
- Feeling: location, movement?
- Self talk – volume, tonality, location

When you come back be aware of ...

# Overlapping exercise II

Recalling a wine

- Visual
- Olfactory
- Palate

Exercise II: recalling a wine

- Eye position: direction, proximity, location
- Quality of focus –
- The depth and shape of your field of concentration
- Feeling: location, movement?
- Self talk – volume, tonality, location

Once again be aware of ...

Connecting the zone to the glass

Creating a physical trigger

- Picking up the glass
- *google earth zoom in*
- Go to eye position and quality of focus
- Auditory prompt
- Practice and repetition
- How deep can you go?
- How fast can you get there?

Creating a physical trigger

Re-examine the wines

Strategy III: using a tasting method or grid at the unconscious level

## 2013 Court of Master Sommeliers - Deductive Tasting Format



### SIGHT

- **Clarity**
  - Clear/ medium clear/slightly cloudy/cloudy
- **Brightness**
  - Dull/ hazy/bright/day bright/star bright/brilliant
- **Color**
  - Reds: purple/ruby (red)/garnet/yellow/brown
  - Whites: clear/green/straw/yellow/gold/brown
- **Concentration:** low/medium/high
- **Rim Variation:** color of rim/edge
- **Gas Evidence**
- **Sediment/Particlas**
- **Viscosity:** low/medium/high

### NOSE

- **Flaws**
  - Corkiness, H<sub>2</sub>S, volatile acidity, Brett, oxidation, etc.
- **Intensity:** delicate/moderate/powerful
- **Age assessment:** youth vs. vinosity
- **Fruit:** primary and secondary
- **Non-fruit aromas**
  - Flowers/spices/herbs/botrytis/other aromas
- **Earthiness**
  - Mineral/chalk/stony/dust/mushroom/barnyard/musty
- **Wood**
  - Old vs. new – French vs. American – large vs. barrique

### PALATE

- **Sweetness**
  - Bone dry/dry/off-dry/sweet/very sweet
- **Body:** light/med-/medium/med+/full
- **Fruit:** confirm nose
- **Non-fruit flavors:** confirm nose
- **Earthiness:** confirm nose
- **Wood:** confirm nose
- **Tannin:** low/med-/medium/med+/high
- **Alcohol:** low/med-/medium/med+/high
- **Acidity:** low/med-/medium/med+/high
- **Finish:** short/med-/medium/med+/long
- **Complexity:** low/med-/medium/med+/high

### INITIAL CONCLUSION

- **Old World/New World**
- **Climate:** cool/moderate/warm
- **Grape Variety/Blend**
- **Age Range**
  - 1-3 yrs./3-5 yrs./5-10 yrs./more than 10 yrs.

### FINAL CONCLUSION

- **Grape Variety/blend**
- **Country/Region/Appellation**
- **Quality level**
- **Vintage**

# WSET® Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine

## WSET® LEVEL 3 SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TASTING WINE

APPEARANCE							
Clarity	clear – dull						
Intensity	water-white – pale – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – deep – opaque						
Colour	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>white</td> <td>colourless – lemon-green – lemon – gold – amber – brown</td> </tr> <tr> <td>rosé</td> <td>pink – salmon – orange</td> </tr> <tr> <td>red</td> <td>purple – ruby – garnet – tawny – brown</td> </tr> </table>	white	colourless – lemon-green – lemon – gold – amber – brown	rosé	pink – salmon – orange	red	purple – ruby – garnet – tawny – brown
white	colourless – lemon-green – lemon – gold – amber – brown						
rosé	pink – salmon – orange						
red	purple – ruby – garnet – tawny – brown						
Other observations	eg rim vs core, legs/tears, deposit, petillance, tints/highlights						

NOSE	
Condition	clean – unclean ( <i>fault: oxidised – out of condition – cork taint – other</i> )
Intensity	light – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – pronounced
Development	youthful – developing – fully developed – tired/past its best deliberate oxidation
Aroma characteristics	fruit – floral – spice – vegetal – oak – other

PALATE	
Sweetness	dry – off-dry – medium-dry – medium – medium-sweet – sweet – luscious
Acidity	low – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – high
Tannin	low – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – high
Alcohol	low – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – high fortified: (low/medium/high level)
Body	light – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – full
Mousse	delicate – creamy – aggressive
Flavour intensity	light – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – pronounced
Flavour characteristics	fruit – floral – spice – vegetal – oak – other
Length	short – medium (-) – medium – medium (+) – long

CONCLUSIONS	
Quality	poor – acceptable – good – very good – outstanding
Price category	inexpensive – mid-priced – high-priced – premium
Readiness for drinking	needs time to develop – ready to drink, but can improve – ready to drink, but will not improve – too old



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- A check list of yes/no questions
- A way of organizing your thinking about wine
- A measure of progress – consistency!

Why use a grid?

- Seeing it in your mind's eye and manipulating it
- Foreground / background – moving images in front of and behind the grid
- Changing size and location

From conscious to unconscious

- “Rehearsing” wine with it
- **Lots of repetition** – and *most* of it without wine in hand
- Your grid **MUST** become automatic – **always knowing what’s next**

From conscious to unconscious

Tasting with a grid makes us alternate  
between ...

One more thought on using a grid ...

A fully associated state when we focus on the outside world to see, smell and taste what's in the glass and ....

One more thought on using a grid ...

A intensely disassociated state where we go inside to process all the information and try to make “sense” of everything

One more thought on using a grid ...

- Top tasters go back and forth between the two rapidly
- Eye positions for both states with an “in between” place that functions for both

Further thoughts on using a grid

## STRATEGY III: THE BASIC SET



Premise: all olfactory memory is  
based on life experience

What is the basic set?

The 30 or so aromas found in over 80% of all wines

Top tasters “own” these aromatics

And many more!

What is the basic set?

# Using the basic set

- Images and words
- Images
- Words

# Basic Set: Common Fruit Aromas

- Green apple
- Red and/or Golden Delicious apple
- Pear
- Lemon
- Lime
- Orange
- Pineapple
- Banana

## Common Fruit Aromas – Cont.

- Peach
- Apricot
- Black cherry
- Blackberry
- Sour red cherry
- Red raspberry
- Cranberry
- Raisin/prune

# Common Non-Fruit Aromas

- Roses
- Violets
- Mint/eucalyptus
- Pyrazines – bell pepper
- Herbs: rosemary
- Lavender
- Pepper: white and black

## Common Non-Fruit Aromas – Cont.

- Vanilla
- Cinnamon
- Cloves
- Toast
- Coffee
- Chocolate
- Chalk
- Mushroom & forest floor

# Complexity defined ...



Re-examine the wines

Changes?

Strategy for teaching beginners

\*\*\*Create awareness of the visual – olfactory connection using their life memories of wine aromatics

Strategy IV. Using submodalities for olfactory sensitivity and to install olfactory memories

Submodalities:  
the structure of thought;  
the fabric of experience

Discovered by Richard Bandler, Judith DeLorzier, and colleagues in the mid-1970's

Submodalities defined

The structural qualities of internal  
images, sounds and feelings



- Black & white or color\*
- Proximity: near or far\*
- Location\*
- Brightness\*
- Location\*
- Size of image\*
- Three dimensional or flat image\*

- Associated / Dissociated
- Focused or Defocused
- Framed or Unframed
- Movie or still image
- If a Movie-Fast/Normal/Slow

**\*Driver Submodality**

## Visual Submodalities

- Volume: loud or soft
- Distance: near or far
- Internal or external
- Location
- Stereo or mono
- Fast or slow
- Pitch: high or low
- Verbal or tonal
- Rhythm
- Clarity
- Pauses

Auditory submodalities

- Intensity: strong or weak
- Area: large vs. small
- Weight: heavy or light
- Location
- Texture: smooth, rough or other
- Constant or intermittent
- Temperature: hot or cold
- Size
- Shape
- Pressure
- Vibration

Kinesthetic submodalities

Exercise:  
submodality awareness

Goal: finding your strongest “driver”  
submodality

The one structural quality that  
when altered changes your  
experience

Needed: an easy olfactory  
memory

Keep it simple!

Test for: distance, size, proximity,  
brightness

- Change one thing at a time!
- Reset image every time before doing something else
- Go for it!

# Instructions

- Take the image of your smell memory
- **Distance:** make it as close as possible – then reset; make it far away - reset
- **Size:** make it huge – then reset; make it tiny – reset: changes?
- **Proximity:** move it far up – reset; move it behind you – reset
- **Brightness:** make it incredibly bright – reset; make it dull – reset

# Instructions

Exercise:  
submodalities and aromatics in wine

1. Find a dominant fruit, spice or other aroma in the wine
2. Keep smelling the wine and take the image of the dominant aroma and test for:
3. Distance, size, proximity, brightness
4. To demonstrate ...

Instructions: use RDV Rendezvous

- **Distance:** make it as close as possible – then reset; make it far away - reset
- **Size:** make it huge – then reset; make it tiny – reset: changes?
- **Proximity:** move it far up – reset; move it behind you – reset
- **Brightness:** make it incredibly bright – reset; make it dull – reset

# Instructions

Does the wine change?

How is this useful?

Exercise: using submodalities to improve  
olfactory sensitivity

Needed: “easy” olfactory  
memory

Take the memory and use your dominant  
driver submodality to  
find the vanishing point

1. **Proximity:** keep pushing the image away until you can't "smell" lemon any more
2. **Size:** make the image so smaller until you can't smell "X" anymore
3. **Brightness:** make the image duller until you can't smell "X" anymore

Instructions

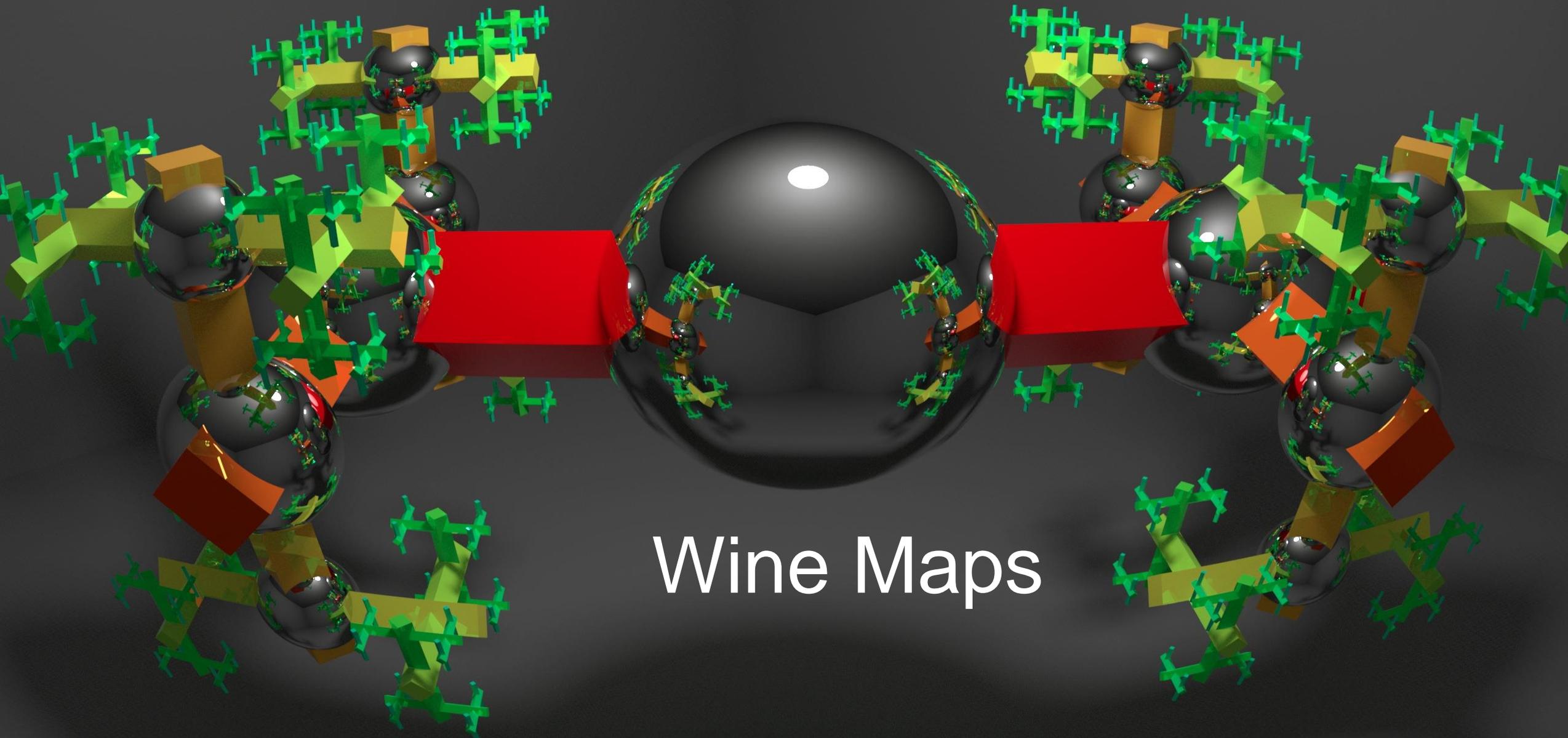
Keep pushing your nose and brain!

Installing an olfactory memory using  
submodalities

**Drag and drop!**

# Drag and drop

1. Note criteria for “easy” submodality memory
2. Wipe the slate clean
3. Drag and drop while smelling new aromatic in hand



# Wine Maps

VI. Top tasters use individual wine “maps” to internally represent wine

Premise: we can keep between 5 and 9  
things in our field of awareness  
simultaneously or in rapid sequence

Think back to the overlapping exercises!



- SIGHT**
  - Clarity
    - Clear/ medium clear/slightly cloudy/cloudy
  - Brightness
    - Dull hazy/bright/day bright/star bright/brilliant
  - Color
    - Reds: purple/ruby (red)/jammy/yellow/brown
    - Whites: clear/green/straw/yellow/gold/brown
  - Concentration: low/medium/high
  - Rim Variation: color of rim/edge
  - Gas Evidence
  - Sediment/Particles
  - Viscosity: low/medium/high
- NOSE**
  - Flaws
    - Corkiness, H2S, volatile acidity, Brett, oxidation, etc.
  - Intensity: delicate/moderate/powerful
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  - Wood
    - Old vs. new – French vs. American – large vs. barrique

- PALATE**
  - Sweetness
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  - Fruit: confirm nose
  - Non-fruit flavors: confirm nose
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  - Wood: confirm nose
  - Tannin: low/med-/medium/med-/high
  - Alcohol: low/med-/medium/med-/high
  - Acidity: low/med-/medium/med-/high
  - Finish: short/med-/medium/med-/long
  - Complexity: low/med-/medium/med-/high
- INITIAL CONCLUSION**
  - Old World/New World
  - Climate: cool/moderate/warm
  - Grape Variety/Blend
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    - 3-5 yrs./5-10 yrs./more than 10 yrs.
- FINAL CONCLUSION**
  - Grape Variety/Blend
  - Country/Region/Appellation
  - Quality level
  - Vintage

© Court of Master Sommeliers 2008

# Auditory Prompt: "What's there?"

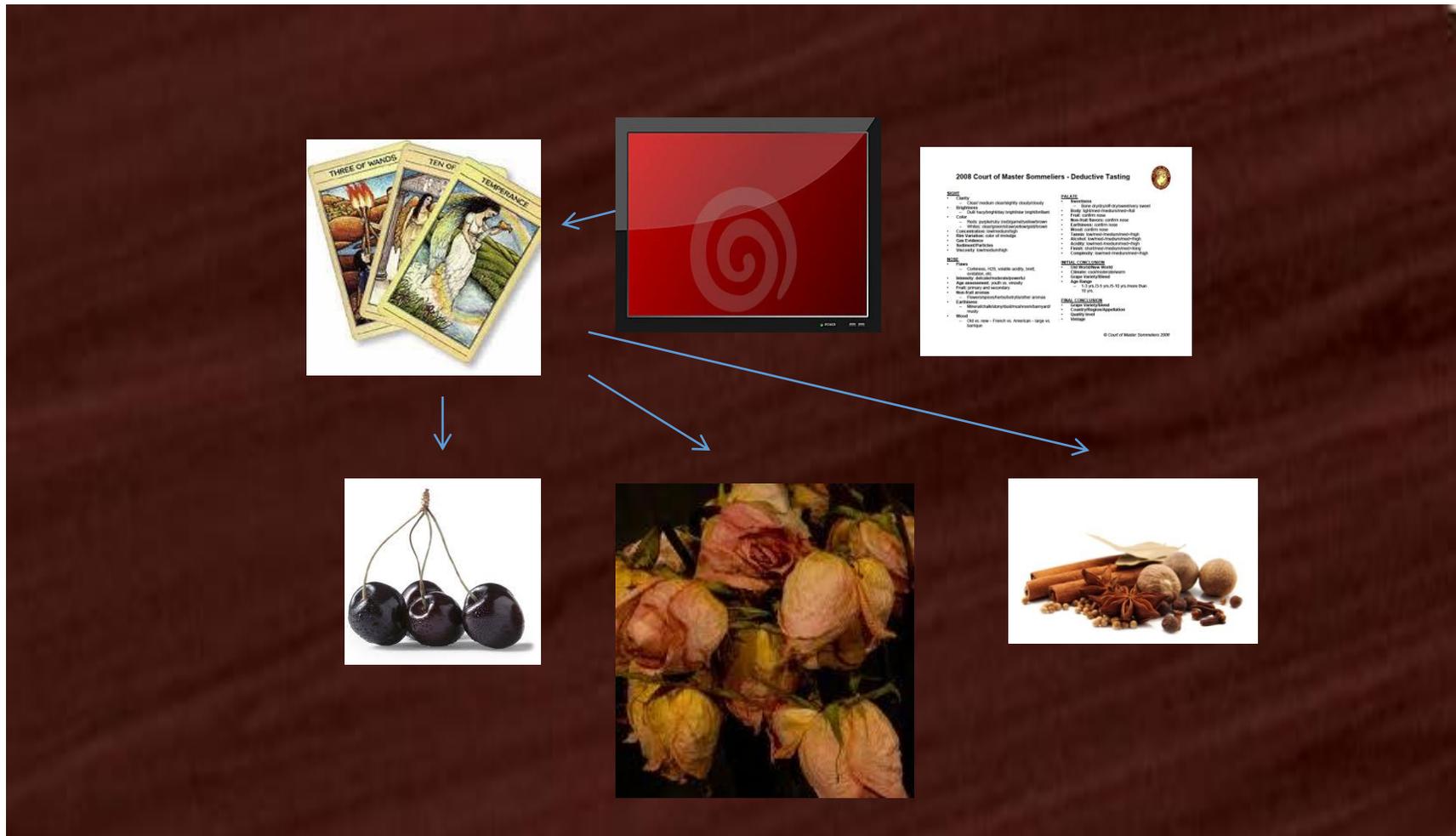


## Tim Gaiser, MS



# Emily Wines, MS

Auditory prompt: "What's there?"



2008 Double Bond Pinot Noir, Wolff Vineyard, Edna Valley

Exercise in pairs:  
discovering your internal wine map

Show your partner your image  
*locations*\* and other qualities for  
fruits, non-fruits etc.

**DON'T PANIC**

Other possibilities ...

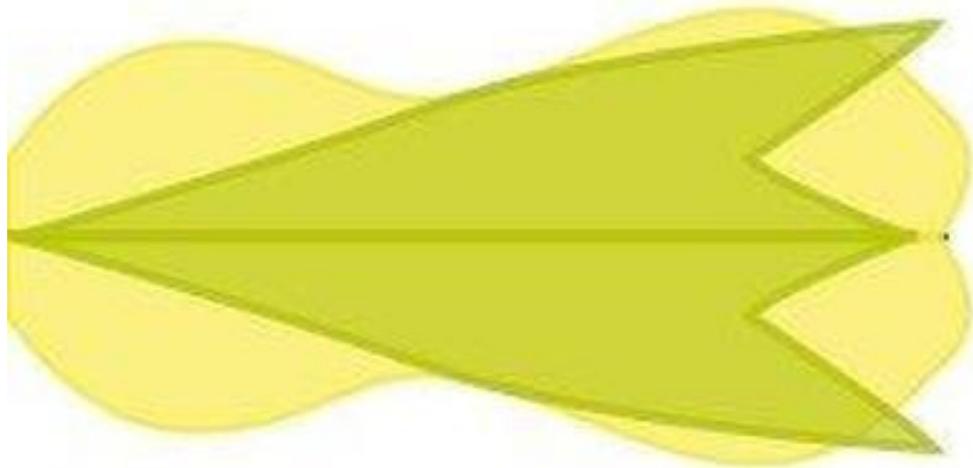
The outliers ...

Tell them about the sequence of your  
inner movies

Tell them about how the wine is reflected in  
a shape(s) that comes out of you

# Gilian Handelman

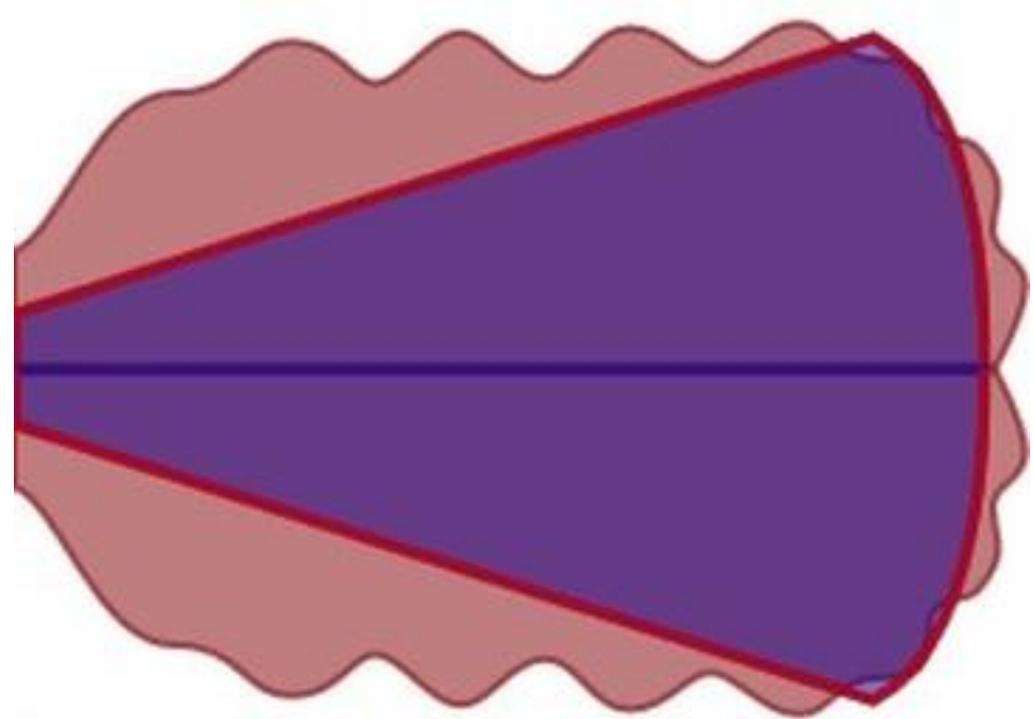
## Kendall-Jackson Reserve Chardonnay



Texture Acidity Tannins

8/15/2014

## KJ Highland Estates - Napa Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon



Texture Acidity Tannins

Strategy VI. calibrating structural elements  
with visual constructs

Top tasters use internal visual  
constructs or cues to calibrate the  
structure in wine

Exercise: installing your  
calibration scale

1. Create your scale: use a ruler, dial or whatever works best, easiest – make it BIG!
2. Locate “low,” “medium” and “high” on the scale (also med- and med+)
3. Place calibration “button” or “marker” etc. at medium

## Instructions

- Calibrate for acidity, alcohol, tannin
- Use **EXTREMES**

Instructions continued

- Examples:

- **Acidity:** lemon juice for high and water for low
- **Alcohol:** Port for high vs. Moscato di Asti for low
- **Tannin:** Barolo (Petite Sirah?) for high vs. Nouveau Beaujolais for low
- \*\*\*Find “low” and “high” first then medium in the middle; then calibrate medium – and medium +

Instructions continued

# VII: recognition strategies - label check

- Old world new world style: fruit or earth-driven?
- Oak vs. no oak
- Phenolic bitterness vs. tannin
- Pyrazines vs. terpenes

Major challenges to ID wine

- Structural elements:
  - Alcohol: how much?
  - Tannin: how much?
  - Acidity: how much?

Major challenges to ID wine

Calibrate with extremes using visual  
cues = label

Old world vs. new world style?

---

**ROMBAUER**  
VINEYARDS

Carneros  
**CHARDONNAY**

*ALCOHOL 14.4% BY VOLUME*

Rombauer Chardonnay: new world  
style, ML, higher alcohol, residual  
sugar, & NEW oak

What would be the opposite?



# Chablis Premier Cru

## Butteaux

APPELLATION CHABLIS PREMIER CRU CONTRÔLÉE

ALC. 13% BY VOL.

PRODUCE OF FRANCE

Mis en bouteilles à la propriété

DOMAINE FRANÇOIS RAVENEAU & CHABLIS FRANCE

VINFOLIO



Acidity: lower vs. high

ALSACE

APPELLATION ALSACE CONTRÔLÉE



DEPUIS

1658

DOMAINE

Domaine

Zind Humbrecht

MISE

GEWURZTRAMINER

APPELLATION ALSACE CONTRÔLÉE

750 ML

ALC. 14% BY VOL

INDICE 1

LÉONARD ET OLIVIER HUMBRECHT PROP.-VITIC. A TURCKHEIM (HAUT-RHIN) FRANCE

L. 170

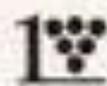
CONTIENT DES SULFITES / CONTAINS SULFITES (E220)

2012  
Riesling  
GG  
trocken



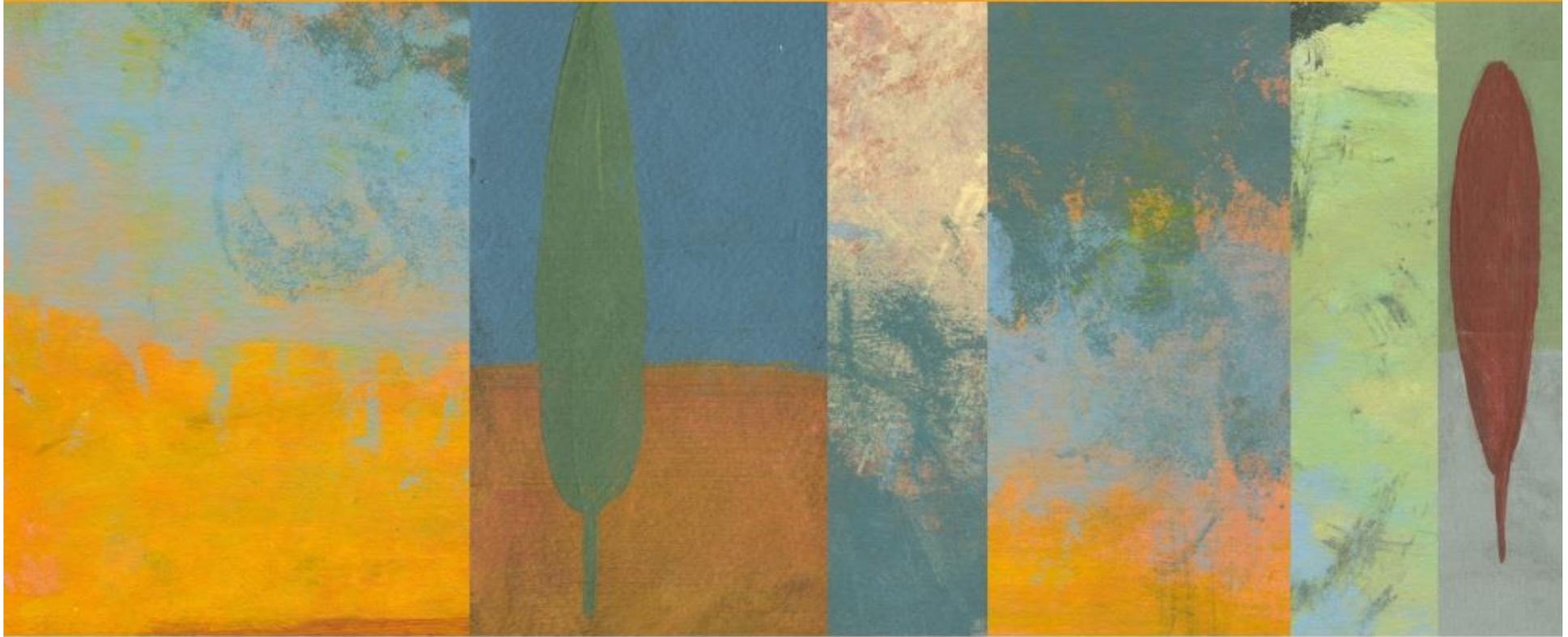
KARTHÄUSERHOFBERG

Gutsabfüllung  
Trier-Eitelsbach  
an der Ruwer



Alcohol: low vs. high

# CASA DI ROCCO



## MOSCATO D'ASTI

DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA E GARANTITA  
PRODUCT OF ITALY



**FONSECA**  
**PORTO**

**VINTAGE PORT**  
**2011**

FONSECA GUIMARAENS • PRODUCT OF PORTUGAL  
BOTTLED BY QUINTA AND VINEYARD BOTTLERS VINHOS SA, OPORTO, PORTUGAL

**BOTTLED IN 2013**

Phenolic bitterness vs. tannin



---

T A B L A S

---

C R E E K

---

V I N E Y A R D

---

2006  
VIOGNIER

---

G R O W N & B O T T L E D  
O N T H E E S T A T E

---

P A S O R O B L E S

---

750ML • ALCOHOL 14.3% BY VOLUME



CICALA®

BAROLO

DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA E GARANTITA

2001

PODERI

ALDO CONTERNO

Pyrazines



**CHINON**

Appellation Chinon Contrôlée

**RED WINE**  
ALC. 12% BY VOL.

*Mis en bouteille à la propriété par*  
**CATHERINE ET PIERRE BRETON SARL**  
LES GALICHETS 37140 RESTIGNÉ - FRANCE  
[www.domainebreton.net](http://www.domainebreton.net)

Grapes grown biodynamically

**Catherine  
&  
Pierre  
Breton**

**2010**

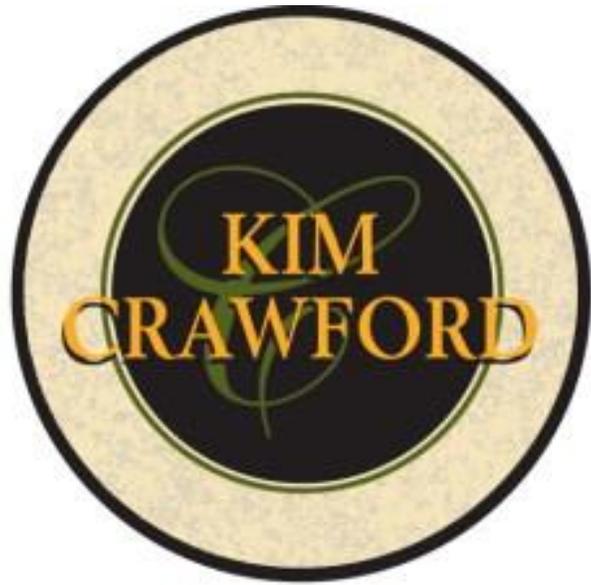
*Vienne*

Val de Loire

CABERNET FRANC

**CHINON**

**Beaumont**



2011

*Marlborough*  
*Sauvignon Blanc*

# Terpenes

The Riesling in your glass!

A 3D perspective view of a grid of cubes. The cubes are arranged in a regular pattern, with some being red and some being black. Each cube has a white cross-like pattern on its top surface, consisting of two intersecting lines. The lighting creates highlights and shadows, giving the cubes a three-dimensional appearance.

# VIII. Using a decision matrix

- A sequence of deductive reasoning
- A series of “if – then” questions

What is a decision matrix?

Sight: the appearance of a wine should build instant expectations ...

- Light/pale color =
  - Youth
  - Possible cooler climate
  - Cooler vintage
  - Stainless steel or neutral fermentation vessel
  - Lack of new oak aging

White wine

- Deep yellow or gold color =
  - Warmer climate
  - Riper vintage
  - Possible oxidative winemaking
  - Overall age
  - Possible extended aging in new oak
  - Possible botrytis

White wine

- Thin skinned grape
- Cooler climate / vintage
- Red fruit dominant wine
- Less overall ripeness
- Higher natural acidity
- Possible lower alcohol
- Less tannin
- Less potential for new oak

Red wine with *lighter* color

- Thicker skinned grape
- Warmer climate or possible warmer vintage
- Dark fruit dominant wine
- More overall ripeness
- Higher alcohol
- Lower natural acidity (potential for acidulation)
- Possible higher tannin
- More potential new oak

Red wine with *deeper* color

Decision matrixes also used for  
nose and palate

# IX. Lieder ohne worte ... songs without words



Lieder ohne Worte.  
Chants sans paroles — Songs without Words.

Mendelssohn, Op. 19. No 1.

Andante con moto. *cantabile*

1.

*ten.* *p.* *ten.* *dimin.* *1. 5* *2. 5* *2. 5* *3. 5*

Lieder ohne worte ... songs without words

Tasting practice using  
associative rehearsal

- Using all that we have examined today:
  - Grid work
  - Basic set
  - Wine map
  - Visual calibration of structure
  - Decision matrix

Lieder ohne worte: bringing it all together

Always using best  
examples of wine types

**Use extremes!**

“Owing” a wine ...

Q&A

- Matt Citriglia MS
- Brian Cronin MS
- Doug Frost MS MW
- Peter Granoff MS
- Evan Goldstein MS
- Yosh Han
- Gilian Handelman
- Alyssa Harrad
- Tracy Kamens Ed.D., DWS, CWE
- Sur Lucero MS
- Peter Marks MW
- Alan Murray MS
- Thomas Price MS
- Roland Micu MS
- Emily Papach MS
- Madeline Triffon MS
- Emily Wines MS

Thanks to ...