Tasting Mastery

Tim Gaiser, MS

SWE Conference
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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.
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
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
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
Exercise II: recalling a wine

• Visual

• Olfactory

• Palate
• 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
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?
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
  - Deep/heavy/brilliant/dim/bright/brilliant/blazing
- Color:
  - Reds: purple/ruby (burgundy)/maroon/brown
  - Whites: clear/green/yellow/gold/brown
- Concentration: low/medium/high
- Rim Variation: color/tint of rim/edge
- Gas Evidence
- Sediment/Particles
- Viscosity: low/medium/high

NOSE
- Flavors
  - Corkiness, H2S, volatile acidity, Brett, oxidation, etc.
- Intensity: delicate/moderate/powerful
- Age assessment: youth vs. maturity
- Fruit: primary and secondary
- Non-fruit aromas
  - Flowers/spices/herbs/hot/feather aromas
- Earthiness
  - Mineral/shale/clay/mineral/mushroom/barnyard/musty
- Wood
  - Old vs. new - French vs. American - large vs. barrique

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

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WSET® LEVEL 3 SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TASTING WINE

**APPEARANCE**

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

**NOSE**

| Condition | clean – unclean / fault oxidised – out of condition – cork (split – other) |
| 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**

| 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?
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 is huge – then reset; make it tiny – reset: changes?

• **Proximity:** movie it far up – reset; move it behind you – reset

• **Brightness:** make it incredibly bright – reset; make it dull – reset
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 is huge – then reset; make it tiny – reset: changes?

• **Proximity**: movie it far up – reset; move it behind you – reset

• **Brightness**: make it incredibly bright – reset; make it dull – reset

Instructions

8/15/2014
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
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!
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

KJ Highland Estates - Napa Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon

8/15/2014
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
• 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. terpines
• 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?
Acidity: lower vs. high
Alsace
Appellation Alsace Contrôlée

 Domaine
Zind Humbrecht

Mise
1658

Gewurztraminer
Appellation Alsace Contrôlée

750 ML
Alc. 14% by Vol.

Léonard et Olivier Humbrecht Prop. Vitic. A Turckheim (Haut-Rhin) France

Content des Sulfites / Contains Sulfites (E220)
2012
Riesling
GG
trocken

KARThÄUSERHOFBERG

Gutsabfüllung
Trier-Eitelsbach
an der Ruwer
Alcohol: low vs. high
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
Tablas Creek Vineyard

2006 Viognier

Grown & Bottled On The Estate Paso Robles

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.

Catherine & Pierre Breton
2010

Mis en bouteille à la propriété par
CATHERINE ET PIERRE BRETON SARL
LES GALICHETS 37140 RESTIGNÉ - FRANCE
www.domainebreton.net

Grapes grown biodynamically

Val de Loire  CABERNET FRANC  CHINON  Beaumont
2011
Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc
Terpenes
The Riesling in your glass!
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 ...
White wine

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


Andante con moto.
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
Thanks to ...

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• Madeline Triffon MS
• Emily Wines MS