



More than one wine in a bottle

■ Kenneth Koch doled out some good advice in his poem “One train may hide another”; we should wait a moment to see what else is there (apologies to Koch fans for oversimplifying), and it is true for wine. If we pause to allow wine to draw breath, one wine may be shown to hide another.

Rick Staff
with a remit to sniff, taste,
and spit his way around Nanjing
and disseminate the drinkable.

POINT SYSTEM
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WINE EXPRESSION



It should not take the brains of a Shenhua fan to see that simply unplugging a bottle will have little effect on a wine, with such a small surface area exposed to the air, but the habit lives on (although opening a wine will release any “bottle stink”, an unpleasant eggy aroma that occasionally accumulates at the neck in older wines). To really allow a wine to breathe, or aerate, it needs to be poured into a much broader vessel; a decanter.

Just how much breathing is actually beneficial is the question. Thankfully wine never stands up to overly clinical analysis, but, roughly speaking, full-bodied, tannic and youthful wines tend to respond well to being left for an hour or two in a jug. France’s Bordeaux and weightier Rhône wines and Italy’s powerful Barolos are all good decanter candidates, but after ten years or more bottle-age they should be served pretty swiftly, within twenty minutes. A very old wine may disintegrate before you in the glass, let alone sitting in a decanter, although there is sediment to consider in older bottles, and with vintage port of course, although with increasing wine filtration sediment is rarely now a problem. Normally a no-no to red Burgundy; too light on its feet, but some youthful white Burgundies may benefit from decanting and some say they merit it if just for the aesthetically pleasing golden hues glowing through the glass, while others find them so redolently medical that such a thing should not go anywhere near a dining table.

Not just the domain of the complex and expensive, Portuguese Dao wines for example, may morph from grippy, tannicly enjoyable but unrefined BBQ fare into something far suaver and sleeker when decanted over four hours or so. Timing can be crucial; I have found some expensive Bordeaux’s to have a “dumb” period at about two hours (that is about the time a sommelier at a posh restaurant will serve up), but then open up wonderfully after three hours. The next day can yield something else entirely, either heading directly for the sink or for the lunch table. Follow the instructions below with one for any table.

At a very good price for the class (¥168, Metro), the 100% Tempranillo Rioja reserva Viña Pomerol 2006 is a deep and dense red, parading blackcurrant drenched richness. Its satin texture, supple with soft integrated tannins and slivers of casis, glances deliciously through the coppice of dark fruits. But, hold on, an hour’s decant and the wine becomes much more gorgeously integrated; somehow silkier, with vanilla more to the fore and as serene as a still lake. Smooth indeed. The wine held steady at this apparent apogee for approximately three hours, at which point the effortless softness showed hints of sourness; the final dregs were quaffed quickly thereafter through terror of losing something special. Who knows how five hours may have played with the wine or how it would have fared the next day; my feeling is this wine is a triumph for a one to three hour decant. You will be drinking a better wine than before, or later (scores 17 -18.5 points). Get some glassware and have a go yourself. **N**