What to Do With an Opened Bottle of Wine?

Back to Winemaker's Notes

An evening meal without wine would be incomplete for many of us, but there are certainly times you really don't want a second glass.* That can leave some wonderful (and expensive) wine in harm's way.

Air exposure degrades wine noticeably within a day or so in a partially filled bottle. The more delicate the wine, the faster it suffers. After 3-4 days, most wines really lose their charm.

I'll share my personal opinions about "workarounds" to keep that fine wine from going down the tubes.

- The very best way: Open your new bottle and immediately, gently pour half of it into a 375 ml half bottle. Fill it nearly full so that you leave very little air space, and cork the little bottle right away. Red wine, especially young red wine, will keep for at least a week and usually longer, particularly in the refrigerator. White wine will stay fresh for a week in the refrigerator.


- Private Preserve is a brand-name spray can filled with nitrogen, available in most wine shops. It feels like there's nothing in it, but don't be deceived. 4-5 sprays into a partial bottle will slow down the bad effects of oxygen on the wine. I'd trust this for 3-4 days for reds and 1-2 days for whites in the frig. It's handy for extra virgin olive oil, too.
- The vacuum devices, in my experience, don't work much better than a plain cork. The vacuum sucks out some of the aromatic intrigue from the wine. The vacuum often doesn't hold well over days and days, allowing the air space to refill with oxygen-rich air. Many people have had fine results, but I'm not an enthusiast.
- Don't even consider this for really old, rare, special wines. Those need to meet their destiny within a few hours after you pull the cork.
- This is a curve ball: Make vinegar on purpose. Really good wine vinegar can only be made with really good wine. It's not hard to start a 3-5 gallon container with a "vinegar mother," a bacterial culture that converts alcohol to acetic acid. You can add unfinished portions to the vinegar barrel, and periodically tap off enough for killer salad dressings and red sauces.

Wells Shoemaker MD, Winemaker

* Footnote: How much can and should you drink in a sitting? The United States government's definition of moderate consumption is 1-3 glasses of wine per day for a male and 1-2 glasses for a female. Obviously, males and females come in different sizes, and wines have varying amounts of alcohol, but this is a sensible guideline. One bottle of wine for a normal couple pushes that upper limit.

(831) 685-0321
newt@cruzio.com
108 Don Carlos Dr.
Aptos, CA 95003