

With some exceptions, you only need one glass to get through a tasting



Wine

DAVE
MCINTYRE

When you visit a winery's tasting room to sample its wines, do you pay attention to your glass? Wine fiends do. After all, we don't want a few drops of that last merlot to skew the taste of

the cabernet. This sounds pretentious, like much of wine ritual, but there's some logic to it.

Joseph Ferguson of Silver Spring wrote to me about his recent visit to Napa and Sonoma counties in California. "With the exception of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, the six other wineries we visited provided a single glass to taste multiple wines," he said. "Even though there were fees charged for the tastings, clean glasses were not provided for each wine. It seems clear to me that residue from prior samples will distort, to some extent, the taste and flavors of the current sample, giving an erroneous impression of the wine's quality and flavor."

Ferguson wrote to the wineries he visited to complain about their stinginess with clean glasses. Most did not respond, but Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma and Artesa in Napa did. Both said their standard practice is to provide each guest with a single glass, but to offer a "rinse," a splash of the next wine to swirl in the glass and pour into the dump bucket, before pouring the full taste.

"Rinsing your glass with a splash of the next wine to be tasted is a great way to prepare your glass for each new wine without tainting the nuanced

flavors of the wine," responded Tosha Norris, of Buena Vista's customer service department. Ferguson shared her response with me; Norris did not respond to my request for comment.

Artesa, in an unsigned response, echoed Norris's thoughts. Both cited ecological reasons for not swapping glasses for each taste. "Washing a new glass for each sample for each guest would result in our using five times the water we do now," Norris said, reflecting California's water shortage. While Buena Vista and Artesa refused to change their policies, both said they would honor a customer's request for a clean glass with each taste.

To be honest, I side with the wineries, given the economic and ecological considerations in managing their winery tasting policies. But the type of tasting the winery is offering does matter. If it's "here's our chardonnay, here's our cabernet," as most tastings are, this approach is reasonable. Some wineries have higher expectations.

At Stag's Leap, a tasting costs \$45, but includes tastes of single-vineyard cabernet sauvignons the winery wants you to compare side by side. "We use a fresh glass for each wine of our tastings because we want our visitors to truly experience and understand the differences in our estate vineyards and what they bring to the wines," says Jennifer Scott, a publicist for Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, which owns Stag's Leap.

Tasting the Fay and SLV cabernets together "shows how different the two vineyards are, despite the fact they adjoin each

other," Scott says. Customers are also given a taste of the Cask 23 cabernet, which blends wines from the two vineyards.

This is a different type of tasting, one that justifies the cost and expense to the winery to provide the extra glasses for each taste. To put both into perspective from the winery's point of view, I asked Kirk Wiles, co-founder of Paradise Springs Winery in Clifton, Va. Wiles is also making wines under the Paradise Springs label in Santa Barbara, Calif., and plans to open a tasting room there.

"If you're pouring two wines, it can be nice to have separate glasses to taste side by side," Wiles said. "But if you're offering seven or 10 wines, it doesn't make sense."

It also depends on the wines. "Norton affects any wine that comes after it," he said, for example, referring to the Virginia grape with such a distinctive taste that it can easily affect how other wines come across on the palate. Paradise Springs will also offer a fresh glass for its California pinot noir wines, he said.

So when you are exploring a winery's offerings, feel free to ask for a clean glass with each taste. Most wineries will accommodate you. But if the winery does not offer a fresh glass with each pour, don't worry. The winery may be thinking of the environment as well as its bottom line.

food@washpost.com

McIntyre blogs at dmwineline.com.
On Twitter: @dmwine.

