

The Nashville Wine Auction (L'ete Du Vin) was fantastic this year. We had an awesome panel of French wine makers. As is usual at these events, there were half drunk and two-thirds drunk bottles of wine. Because many of these wines are rare and expensive, a discussion as to the best method of preservation developed.

I am sure we all have had leftover wine - wine we'd like to save and drink another day. So here in "lies the rub." How do you best preserve wine to be drunk another day?

Oxygen is both the friend and the enemy of wine. Oxygen in small or controlled doses can help wine. Oxygen can soften the tannins in big red wines. The cork is porous so even the best sealed bottle lets some oxygen in if it's sealed with a cork. This porous cork lets the wine age slowly. Decanting the wine ages the wine more rapidly, and most times lets the wine develop its fullest aromatic and taste potential.

However if there is too much oxygen, the wine becomes flat, stale, undrinkable. By the way, this wine can still be okay to cook with. That's why old wine with lots of ullage is usually shot. It's also why when you open wine sometimes the wine is flat. Usually, the cork didn't provide a good seal. This is also a warning not to buy wine with a low fill without realizing the risk of it being bad or oxidized. If you don't know, oxidized red wine tastes like iron, burnt, walnuts, etc. Oxidized white wine tastes like there is no fruit, burnt with almonds.

So there are basically three choices when resealing a partially finished bottle of wine:

- 1) Stick a cork in it as is
- 2) Put gas on it to displace the oxygen
- 3) Suck the air in the bottle out and --create a vacuum

The first method (put the cork in the bottle) does the least to protect the wine from oxidation. It does nothing about the air in the bottle, and a reinserted cork is less than perfect to prevent new air from entering the bottle. Most research, informal at best, suggests you use a professional stopper designed to give you a tight seal and place the wine in the refrigerator. The colder temperatures are supposed to slow down the chemical reaction. When you re-serve the wine, let it warm up. It will be better. As part of this method, I have many times put the leftover wine in a half bottle that has been cleaned and dried. That way there is less air to react with the leftover wine.

A second method is to lay a film of inert gas down on the surface of the wine. This gas is heavier than air and forms a seal against oxidation. The gas comes in a couple of different formats. The best I've found is in a spray can with a long plastic nozzle that inserts into the bottle. Frankly, I quit using this method because it seemed to take aromas out of the wine and make it taste different. The taste and smell had a metallic element to it as if the gas had picked up the flavor of the container it was in.

The last method is a vacuum pump which tries to remove oxygen from the bottle before sealing it. There are lots of these on the market. Don't get the cheapest if you use this method. Having tried several of these, I stopped. It seems I was vacuuming all of the pleasant aroma out of the wine when I took out the air. I still preferred this over the gas.

So what would I do? Personally, I'd drink the wine so there were no leftovers. However, the first method (a professional stopper in the half-full bottle placed in the refrigerator) seems to give me the most pleasant results. My panel of experts agreed that at least 50% of the time using this method, the wine was better the next day. However, Decanter magazine recently reported that the layer of gas kept "the wine fresher longer."

This month think about what Ben Franklin said. "Wine makes daily living easier, less hurried, with fewer tensions and more tolerance."