

Decanting 101
By Scott Greenberg

What is decanting?

Decanting wine is essentially the process of pouring (decanting) the contents from one vessel (typically a bottle) into another vessel (typically a decanter). Usually the wine is then served from the decanter, but sometimes in a restaurant it is decanted back into the original bottle for service. The latter is referred to as double decanting and would never be used in Estate Planning.

Why decant wine?

Not every wine needs decanting, however decanting older vintage port wines or aged Bordeaux wines develop a lot of sediment as they age. Decanting separates the wine from the sediment, which not only would not look nice in your glass, but can also make the wine taste more astringent and bitter (it isn't fun to drink the sediment). Slowly and carefully decanting the wine ensures that the sediment stays in the bottom of the bottle so you can get a nice clear wine in the decanter, and your glass.

Secondly, and a more common reason to decant, is to aerate the wine. Many young wines can be tight or closed on the nose or palate. As the wine is slowly poured from the bottle to the decanter it takes in oxygen, which helps open up the aromas and flavors. Highly tannic and full-bodied wines benefit most from this – wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet blends, Syrah, and Syrah blends.

It's important to remember that air is both wine's best friend and worst enemy. Most wines improve with some exposure to air. A wine that has been decanted for, say, thirty to ninety minutes, will probably taste a little softer and rounder than if sampled straight out of the bottle. But too much exposure to air can over oxidize the wine and turn it into an objectionable beverage.

What about decanting white wine? Well, most people don't think about decanting white wine. However, there are quite a few white wines that can really benefit from it, particularly higher-end wines that can age, as these can sometimes taste a bit awkward or gangly when first poured from the bottle. Decanting helps to open up those wines as well. However, most everyday young whites do not need decanting.

2007 La Rioja Alta "904" Gran Reserva Rioja from Spain

Founded in 1890, La Rioja Alta is among the most traditional Rioja bodegas in Spain. Their "904" bottling contains 90% Tempranillo and 10% Mazuelo. It aged for four years in well-seasoned American oak barrels, with racking twice a year, and then further aging in bottle for three years before it is released. The nose has a bouquet reminiscent of spices, cherries, blackcurrants and plums. The palate features focused flavors of dried cherry, orange peel, vanilla, sandalwood, tobacco and spice. It feels balanced and elegant in the mouth, with fine-grained tannins and great acidity on the finish.

Rioja: Located in the Northern part of Spain, just south of the French border, at the southern foot of the Cantabrian Mountains along the Ebro river, the Rioja region benefits from a continental climate. The mountains help to protect the vineyards from the fierce winds that are typical of northern Spain. Most of the region is situated on a plateau, a little more than 1,500 feet above sea level. The area is subdivided into three regions; Rioja Alavesa, Rioja Alta and Rioja Baja. La Rioja Alavesa and la Rioja Alta, located closer to the mountains, are at slightly higher elevations and have a cooler climate. La Rioja Baja to the southeast is drier and warmer. Many of Rioja's vineyards are found along the Ebro valley between the towns of Haro and Alfaro.