

THE RARE WINE CO.

Old Wine & The Rewards of Patience



A wine that has reached its plateau of maturity can be simply magical—offering nuances and textures unimaginable in a young wine.

Such perfection may take decades to achieve, as the wine slumbers in a cool, dark place, awaiting the moment for which all great wines are born: to be enjoyed by someone who will appreciate all that it has to say.

For more than two decades, The Rare Wine Co. has searched the world for majestic old bottles, purchasing them only after careful inspection and knowledge of the wines' provenance. And we pack and ship them with equal care.

But even after these prized bottles are delivered to our customers, we ask their patience. Just a short trip by Federal Express or UPS is enough to disturb a wine's sediment, upsetting its balance for days or weeks. To uncork your bottle just after arrival can be a disservice to the wine ... and to you.

Inside this booklet, we will suggest some steps to allow your wine to show at its best ... and to maximize your enjoyment of it.

Old Red Wines

If you've just received a bottle of old red wine from us, **and you plan to drink it soon**, leave it standing—to allow the sediment to settle to the bottom and for the wine to regain its equilibrium.

The wine's age determines how long this should take. A 20-year-old red should recover its poise within a week or two of arrival, while a 30-year-old wine may need up to a month. For a red wine that's upwards of 40 years old, it's a good idea to let the bottle

stand quietly for four to six weeks—or until the wine becomes perfectly clear.

In fact, no old wine should be opened until it's brilliantly clear, and the sediment completely settled. To check the wine's clarity, shine a small high-intensity flashlight—such as a Maglite®—through the bottle.

Because wines settle from top to bottom, we suggest checking the clarity at different levels. A wine that appears perfectly clear at the shoulder may still have sediment suspended in the lower third of the bottle. With time, this, too, will fall clear, and the sediment will be where it belongs: at the bottom of the bottle.

Decanting Red Wines

We usually recommend that you decant an old wine, because it permits you to pour off the clear wine, leaving the sediment in the bottom of the bottle.



Decanting old wines is a skill easily acquired through experience, but the basic technique is to hold a light under the neck or shoulder of the bottle, watch the wine flow through the neck, stopping when you start to see sediment.

We find a Maglite® to be great for this. But in the old days, a candle was the light of choice.

Whenever possible, it's a good idea to stand up an old wine for several days before opening and decanting. If it's not possible to do so, and the bottle has been lying in your cellar, remove it from the bin gently.

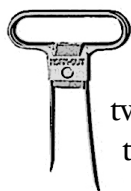
You then have two choices. You can rotate the bottle from horizontal to vertical gradually, so that the sediment is disturbed as little as possible. Or you can keep the bottle horizontal, and pour from this position, but you may want a carrier ►

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► or cradle you can buy for this purpose.

If you're struggling with too much sediment in the wine, or the cork crumbles, you can always pour the wine through unbleached cheesecloth or muslin—or a funnel with a built-in sieve.



You may also want to have on hand a two-pronged 'Ah-So' cork puller for corks that either fall apart using a corkscrew or stubbornly stick to the glass.

Should an old red wine breathe?

Some Burgundy lovers argue that old red Burgundy is too fragile to breathe, and shouldn't even be decanted. Experienced Nebbiolo drinkers go the other way, recommending at least an hour or two in the decanter for top-quality, well-stored, 30+ year old Barolos and Barbarescos.

Old Bordeaux, Cabernets, Tempranillos and Rhône's should also usually be decanted, and they often also benefit from breathing. But in deciding how early to decant, be guided by past experience—and, above all, what makes you comfortable.

Old Madeiras

Just-shipped Madeiras should also rest—standing up, of course. For how long depends less on the wine's age than when it was bottled.

As casks of very old Madeira gradually vanish from the island, fewer old Madeiras are being bottled. Those that are bottled increasingly carry a bottling date on the back label. If your Madeira's label shows that it was bottled within the past four or five years, the wine may

need only a few days to recover from shipping. But an old Madeira that's been in bottle for decades may need months to regain its clarity and balance after shipping.

Madeira & Air

Madeiras love oxygen, and so early decanting is often important—not just to remove sediment, but for breathing. Because of the decades they spend in the oxygen-rich environment of a barrel, Madeiras respond to air unlike other wines. They tend to shut down when bottled, and the longer they're in bottle, the more air they need to open up again.

An old Madeira customer once suggested this useful rule of thumb: for each decade the wine has been in bottle, give it a day in the decanter. A Madeira that's been in bottle for just two or three years will show superbly with just a few hours breathing, but a wine bottled in the 1970s would ideally be decanted three or four days before serving.

And don't worry about giving an old Madeira too much air; once open, it will drink beautifully for months, if not years. Just put a cork in the bottle, and revisit it again and again.



Storing Madeira

While almost all wines should be stored long-term on their sides, Madeira is different. It should be stored standing up. Madeiras tend to destroy their corks, and far too many great old Madeiras lying in bins have lost their contents when their corks gave out.



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