

# GRAPE STUMPERS

ANSWERS TO THE WINE QUESTIONS YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK.

Ever been perplexed by a burning question about wine? We've all been there. So we polled

Bob Bertheau, head winemaker for Washington's Chateau Ste. Michelle; Jay Youmans, Master of wine; and Andrew Stover, director of wine marketing and sommelier for Washington, D.C.'s OYA Restaurant & Lounge, for answers to common queries overheard at restaurants and tasting bars:

## 1. Does a bottle with a deep punt signify a higher-quality wine?

Not necessarily, says Youmans. While a noticeable indentation on the bottom may add significantly to a bottle's production and marketing cost, it's completely unrelated to the quality of the wine inside. A punt adds to the structural integrity of the bottle itself. Lots of great wines come bottled with shallow punts or none at all. A deep dimple and heavy feel do increase perceived expectations, however, and unfortunately some wines don't live up.

## 2. Why does only red wine or only white wine give me a headache?

Different theories exist, explains Stover. Some believe that tannins from the skins of red grapes cause the release of serotonin, and high levels can trigger a red wine headache. Others believe pain is related to levels of histamines (found mostly in reds) or sulfites (generally in larger amounts in sweeter white wines).

## 3. Why does wine always seem to taste better when I drink it out of a thinly rimmed glass?

"Liquids flow more evenly and easily over a thin rimmed glass than over a thicker one, leading to an often more pleasurable experience," says Stover. Youmans points out that a delicate lip renders a wine's feel more concentrated, which alters the tactical sensation, but not actually the flavor.

## 4. If a wine has blackberry or raspberry flavors, does that mean the winemaker

## added those fruits when making the wine?

No, unless you are talking about a wine actually made from apples or other fruit. Different grape varieties contain various proportions of flavor compounds, which affects a wine's aroma and taste. Bertheau notes a taster comparing Chianti to red cherry pie, for example, gives him common ground to describe a wine. And Youmans says propagation of the species also factors. "Grapes developed certain aromas and flavors similar to fruit in order to attract birds and animals."

## 5. I've had a bottle of wine on my rack for years. How do I know if it's still good?

The vast majority of wines are not intended for long cellaring, but if the wine has been temperature controlled there is a decent chance it's still drinkable. If it's been hanging around a hot kitchen, though, you may want to keep it as decoration, says Bertheau. But the only truly reliable way to find out is to crack it open and take a sip!

## 6. I know the concept of "white wine with fish and chicken" and "red wine with red meat" is outdated, but what are some wine and food matches that I may want to avoid?

Avoid pairing really spicy foods with tannic reds, which exacerbate the heat, suggests Stover. He also recommends steering clear of big reds with seafood high in iodine—like cod, haddock and mackerel—or the fish will taste metallic. But wine and food pairing is very subjective, and experimentation is key to finding your own perfect match. —KELLY MAGYARICS

