



By Kelly A. Magyarics

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Practice Makes Pour-fect

From Tacky to Tasteful: Choosing a Winning Wine-Pouring Technique

Some servers use fill-line etches on glassware. Others employ mini carafes poured tableside. Still others simply free pour and eyeball it. There is no shortage of techniques used in pursuit of the perfect wine pour. But not surprisingly, each brings with it varying perceptions of service and value. I polled wine professionals and consumers to get their takes on best practices that are cost effective to operators and palatable to customers.

Across the board, subtlety is key. "I prefer using a discreet approach — seeing too much measurement behind a bar rubs me wrong," notes Babak Bina, co-proprietor of BiNA Family Hospitality's three locations

in the Boston area. "That said, consistent measurements are crucial to the profitability of any food and beverage program." At Bin 26 Enoteca and BiNA Osteria, wines are served in three sizes: 100 ml, 250 ml and 500 ml. Servers use pre-filled carafes as a handy measuring tool, and pouring wine tableside has become an integral part of the restaurants' concepts.

Lara Creasy, beverage director for JCT Kitchen & Bar in Atlanta and No. 246 in Decatur, Ga., also likes mini-carafes. She believes customers appreciate knowing that they're getting their money's worth and their portion is being controlled.

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Certainly, the current propensity toward oversized glassware, touted by professionals and guests alike for its sleek appearance and ability to open a wine's aromas, **PROVES CHALLENGING FOR OPERATORS WHO NEED TO ASSURE CUSTOMERS THAT THEY ARE GETTING A FAIR SHARE.**

bad as underpouring," she says.

Still, the carafes don't have universal appeal. I conducted an admittedly unscientific poll on Facebook to get friends' and colleagues' opinions on pouring methods. One respondent pointed to carafes as a sign of owners not trusting the bartenders, likening their usage to measuring stoppers seen at some airport bars. Yikes.

But consumers and wine directors were even more vocal in their distaste of another pouring method, deemed "cheap," "cheesy" and "tacky." "I have worked at other bars and hotels where they have the awful line on the glass markers," admits Michael Scaffidi, wine director of Plume at the Jefferson Hotel in Washington, D.C. "So much of what we do is about making people happy through wine. I think customers appreciate it when the server pours the wine into a glass without the use of electronic devices or etched markers."

While the etched line is undoubtedly accurate, it also can be considered terribly gauche. A few sly techniques can render the same result, however. Operators who purchase custom-etched glassware can use the top or bottom of their logo to hit the mark, notes Bina. Creasy cites an ingenious method at the Brick Store Pub in Decatur, where servers place glasses next to a mark on a brass railing in the service bar area and pour to the mark. She also recalls a former stint where servers used wine glasses filled with soda or water as a fill template — a necessity thanks to the large-bowled Riedel stemware used. "We had to be able to prove we measured six ounces."

Certainly, the current propensity toward oversized glassware, touted by professionals and guests alike for its sleek appearance and ability to open a wine's aromas, proves challenging for operators who need to assure customers that they are getting a fair share. "I think some guests have a different perception of value with glass pours; some people think a lot of wine in the glass is a great value," says

Scaffidi, who goes on to add that "heavy pours are certainly not for fine dining."

At Plume, guests are served 5-ounce pours in glassware that ranges from 18 to 22 ounces. Plume's staff undergoes intensive wine training to be able to accurately — and consistently — free pour. But if a guest asks for a splash more, they will honor that request. When servers are practicing pouring with water, Scaffidi will place a drop of grenadine in the glass as a visual reminder of what the "right" pour looks like. He also explains how too much wine in the glass translates to sloppy and uncomfortable swirling.

According to several consumers in my poll, eyeballing the pour looks professional and shows staff confidence. But it requires dedicated, well-trained employees with a keen eye for detail. Creasy free pours, but isn't very optimistic about the practice in general.

"Eyeballing it just doesn't work," she says. "Bartenders always overpour to avoid guests thinking they got cheated." This method may be venue-dependent.

No dissection of pouring techniques would be complete without a mention of the Enomatic system, which dispenses and preserves different wine amounts at the touch of a button. Scaffidi believes this technology has a time and a place — such as a wine bar offering 50 or more selections by the glass — but doesn't think it ever can replace the romance of hand-pouring wine. Creasy says she would rather create a wine program where by-the-glass options sell out daily, negating the need for preservation.

Bina, on the other hand, is a strong proponent of the way in which the Enomatic has allowed his venues to serve a wide variety of expensive, interesting and esoteric glasses of wine. "The landscape of wine in America has drastically changed because of that," he notes.

No matter the pouring technique, it seems the trick is making guests think you aren't using one at all. NCB