

Properly transport your wine and it'll be as good as it should be

By Bill Garlough

June 13, 2007 – As published in the Naperville Sun and Beacon News

What started my interest in wines some 20-plus years ago were several memorable meals where the wine was the star. While the nuances of the food-wine pairings were certainly evident, the wine moved me.

My recent moving experience was more literal as my wife and I just completed our household move. Along with the furniture, cookware, foodstuffs and countless boxes was my personal wine collection. It's amazing how a collection can build if, during your travels, your souvenir from a trip is a couple bottles of wine. I have several hundred bottles of wine on hand as it is fun to experience the varied wines of the world and share the experience with friends over dinner.



Back in the day

As far back as 4000 BC, wine has been transported from wine producing regions to other markets, in the form of early trade. The evolution of shipping containers went from wine skins to amphora terra cotta jars to large glass bottles and eventually to large wooden casks. Wooden casks were advantageous as they could store wine for longer periods of time. Bulk wine had its drawbacks, as unscrupulous merchants substituted inferior wine or even added water to increase profits. Baron Phillippe de Rothschild is credited with bottling wine (in the current size bottle) on premise to control quality and protect the winery's good name.

Today, wine is exported in cases with glass bottles in refrigerated containers. Domestically, wine is shipped from the winery to the consumer in sturdy corrugated boxes, with the wine housed in Styrofoam inserts. Depending on the nation's temperature, arrangements can be made for delivery in either two- or four-day increments via UPS or other common carriers.

One of the considerations for a wine collection is that wine is a living beverage that will have its peak and begin to deteriorate over time. White wines tend to be consumed young while reds, with more tannins, can last longer. However, improperly stored wine will speed up the aging process, and negatively affect the flavor of the wine.

Environment is key

Important considerations for properly storing wine include:

Darkness: Store wine out of direct sunlight. Excessive light breaks down molecules, and the wine loses flavor.

Temperature: Store wines between 50 and 60 degrees. While colder temperatures slow down the aging process, this also allows the wine to age properly. Higher temperatures (70 to 80 degrees) cause premature aging.

Humidity: The ideal humidity level is between 60 to 80 percent. A low humidity level dries out the cork, which affects the seal. Oxidation of wine can occur if the cork loses its seal.

Your home's basement offers the best solution to these storage considerations, as it is typically dark, offers a cool, consistent temperature and tends to have a higher humidity level than the rest of the house. If you do not have a basement, a dark closet on the first floor would be your best bet.

The biggest challenge in moving your wine collection or properly storing it is temperature stability. When transporting wine, it is best to make direct trips with wine and place it in a temperature and (ideally) humidity-controlled environment as soon as possible.

Fluctuations in temperature affect the cork's seal, as it is the give point. When wine warms up, the wine and air in the bottle expands and can trigger the cork to move. When wine is in a colder environment, the wine and air

contract inside the bottle, drawing air into the bottle. As we know, oxidation leads to accelerated aging and quality loss.

Lastly, when wine is transported, it should be allowed to settle for three to seven days before consumption.

Please consider these practical tips when you purchase and transport your wine. Try not to leave it in a hot car or moving van as it will affect the flavor and its ability to age long term

While my collection was moved and returned to my wine cabinet in only 24 hours, it still went from 58 degrees to over 70 degrees. While care was taken, time will tell on my moving experience.

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