

THE RIGHT GLASS FOR THE RIGHT WINE

Selecting Stemware That Brings Out the Best in Your Cellar

BY ROBYN ROEHM CANNON

Wines of all varietals receive maximum aeration directly in the glass in the Superior Breathable Series by Eisch Crystal. *(Left to right)* Stems pictured are the Champagne, Bordeaux, Burgundy/Pinot Noir, Chardonnay/white wine, all-purpose stemless for red or white, grappa, and mineral water.



We are in the season of entertaining, meaning it's the perfect time to take inventory of your glassware. A most important aspect of entertaining family and friends is not only serving well-chosen wines with your turkey or prime-rib feasts, but also how you plan to serve them.

Which Glasses...and How Many?

Choosing the "right" glass is definitely based on more than just personal taste. Focus has shifted from using decorative crystal chosen for a wedding trousseau or inherited from a grandmother to glasses selected for how their shape enhances the unique characteristics of a particular varietal.

The glass you choose will become a "messenger" to bring those aspects to the forefront, not only in tasting the wine, but savoring its aroma as well.

Riedel Glassworks, the Austrian crystal manufacturer based in Kufstein, Austria, began production of fine glassware more than 250 years ago. Claus Riedel, in his 1961 catalog, was the first to introduce unadorned, delicate, and wine-specific glassware to the American public. He designed this original collection in response to the discovery that virtually every glass people used was too small to do justice to the wine.

Today, his grandson Maximilian Riedel is an eleventh-generation manufacturer, and, as CEO of Riedel Crystal USA, he spends much of his time educating consumers on the virtues of choosing the appropriately shaped glass for each wine.

Although his company now produces more than three hundred shapes, he recommends a few basic glasses to cover most of your bases when serving guests. "A core collection should be five glasses," comments Riedel. "First, a champagne flute to celebrate life. Then, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet glasses are all very useful. In general, you should have at least eight of each style and as many as sixteen if you give larger parties."

Richard Kinssies is one of the Pacific Northwest's most visible wine authorities. He is an internationally respected wine judge, NPR radio personality, book author, and a contributing editor to *Wine News* since 1976. As a former sommelier and the director of the Seattle Wine School, which he founded in 1981, he knows his way around wineglasses.

He prefers to serve Champagne in a more open glass than a flute, of the opinion that a flute is merely decorative and Champagne needs room to breathe, as would any other wine. He recommends either the Riedel WINE Series stem designed for Sangiovese and Riesling or the VINUM Series stem designed for Chianti and Zinfandel, both of which can also be used as a general-purpose glass for red or white wine if you can choose only one type of glass.

Is Your Glass Half Empty, or Half Full?

Slightly less than half full is best, agree Kinssies and Riedel. If you pour too much in a glass with a large bowl, it will become unbalanced in your hand and not allow enough space for aeration and swirling to fully enjoy the wine. "You should be able to create a vortex without sloshing wine out of the glass," comments Kinssies.

"A fifth of wine will easily yield six glass pours of between two and four ounces each," says Riedel. "An easy way to gauge is to pour to the depth of two fingers held horizontally next to the bowl of the glass."

A Glass That 'Breathes'

A relatively new glassware choice is available from Eisch Crystal, a German manufacturer whose family enjoys a long pedigree—300 years in glass blowing. After several years of research, the company claims to have engineered a secret oxygenation process that alters the molecular structure of its glassware and allows the wine to breathe through the glass, aerating the varietal to help open up the bouquet and flavors. Just two to four minutes in the glass is equivalent to an hour or longer in a decanter, the company says. Eisch's 25-ounce Vino Nobile Bordeaux glass is a gracefully shaped vessel that works well for a general red-wine glass. Does the process work? Many testers, including Kinssies—and this writer—believe that there is a discernible difference in side-by-side tastings. It's certainly worth a try.

When good wine is poured into a glass, it represents a celebration of friendship, Kinssies and Riedel agree. "There are so many beautiful glasses available now," says Kinssies. "So pick glasses you love, gather your friends and family around the table, and use them as often as possible." ☺☺

Some Tips for Sparkling Stemware

Many manufacturers state that fine glassware is dishwasher-safe, and Northwest wine expert Richard Kinssies is all for mechanical sterilization. "Just make sure that your glasses have plenty of room; are not mixed with plates, silver, or pots and pans; and the spray arm moves freely," he says, adding, "You can sometimes break more glasses when hand washing." If you do hand wash, he cautions against twisting the bowl, as it can pop from the stem if the two are blown independently.

Riedel Crystal does not recommend using soap for hand washing wineglasses. They suggest you swirl and rinse with very hot water (sponge soap on the rim only); drying with a lint-free microfiber cloth is preferred.

Particularly avoid detergent when washing Champagne flutes. Undetectable residue in the base of the glass will "kill" the sparkle and render it flat. Instead, rinse sparkling-wine glasses—even ones you've washed previously with soap—with hot water mixed with a small amount of white vinegar and again in hot water. They will be pristinely clean and ready for bubbles.