

# The Care and Handling of a Mature Wine

By Cantiga Wineworks



It is increasingly rare, these days, to find a wine over three years of age. In most cases, it is necessary not only to have a cellar, but also to find a wine capable of aging and to exercise the patience to let it rest for a few years. (Most modern wines are incapable of aging, so knowing which wines to put down can be a challenge.)

At Cantiga, we have the cellar, the product and the patience. When we started our company, we resolved from the beginning to put a portion of our wine down and make it available, upon reaching maturity, to our wine club.

Mature wines differ from young wines in some significant ways. They are more fragile and susceptible to abuse. They can show the effects of spoilage more dramatically than young wines. They often require decanting and special handling. However, when properly stored and served, they can blow your mind with their complexity and beauty.

We receive many questions about the care and handling of our mature wines. We thought we would share some of our responses with you, so that you may enhance your enjoyment of our special Library offerings.

## **How long should I wait to open a bottle after shipping or transporting?**

This depends on how long it was in transit, but particularly for a mature wine, it is best to let it rest for at least 2-3 weeks (preferably a month) if you have the facilities to store it properly. A wine can be "beat up" from the trip, particularly on a multi-day trip or in high or low temperatures. Give it some time to recover.

## **What is the best way to store wine?**

It is best to store it either on its side or with the cork down. Your wine cellar should ideally be between 55 and 60 degrees. If you don't have a cellar or a basement, an infrequently accessed closet can do the job. Temperature stability is key. If you cannot insulate the space, then consider covering your wine collection with a quilt or other insulating material.

## **What is the best way to open a mature wine?**

The cork of a mature wine may be dry or brittle. We have found that the best opener is an "ah-so" style opener. This is a two-pronged device that slides in on either side of the cork by rocking it back and forth. This releases the static friction on the cork, allowing a soft cork to be removed without breaking or ripping through the center. You then use a gentle twisting motion to remove the cork, intact.

For a demonstration of how to use an ah-so, visit:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ila1A8VMRIY>

### **Should I decant a bottle of wine?**

With a mature wine, gentle decanting can often help volatiles blow off and open the wine up. Be careful not to splash or over-oxidize the wine. Aerators are NOT recommended for older wines. As soon as you open the bottle, smell the cork, pour a taste of wine into your glass and smell and taste it immediately to detect any cork spoilage such as TCA (trichloroanisol), which has a musty or moldy smell. Decant the remainder of the wine, then allow it to sit for a half-hour before drinking it.



### **What are the crystal-like deposits or goo on the cork?**

With age, some of the tartaric acid in the wine precipitates onto the cork in the form of crystals. These are safe and natural. You might also notice tartrates in the form of a cast on the inside of the bottle, or a sludge on the cork. These are simply signs that the wine is mature. If some of the residue becomes suspended, you can pour the wine through a fine stainless steel mesh or screen strainer to remove the particles. Be advised that the last mouthful from a bottle will most likely be gritty.

### **How can I tell if the wine is spoiled?**

Sometimes a mature wine will take a while to "open up." If you suspect a spoilage, try decanting and waiting a bit. Often times, the volatile compounds will dissipate and the wine will be fantastic. Remember that mature wines often possess some subtle oxidative notes as part of their complexity. A slight brownish hue is also not uncommon. If the wine still tastes unpleasant by the next day, chances are it went through some sort of spoilage.

### **If I do not finish a bottle in one sitting, how do I preserve it for later?**

The best way to keep a wine fresh after opening is to squirt an inert gas into the bottle and push the cork partway into the neck of the bottle. You can purchase bottles of gas marketed for this purpose, such as "Private Preserve" or "Bev Gas." Otherwise, an evacuator cork and pump that removes air from the bottle can work, but somewhat less effectively. Store the opened bottle in your cellar or wine fridge.

If you have any questions we have not addressed here, please feel free to contact us! You can reach us at (530) 621-1696 or [info@cantigawine.com](mailto:info@cantigawine.com).

Cheers, and enjoy!

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