

## Robert Russell: Wine tidbits that one should know

ROBERT RUSSELL | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

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Even if one has been to Florence, they may not have noticed that quaint Tuscan tradition, the Wine Window, called buchette del vino, and in English translated as wine holes.

Historically, wealthy landowners with vineyards, also had urban homes, or small palaces, and often sold wine from their cellars. This allowed the wealthy to dodge taxes, and sell directly to consumers, mainly the urban working class.

This exemption in 1559, was the brainchild of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici. Many have seen the five red balls and one blue one, on a

The Florentine Wine Window Association launched to draw renewed appreciation for these historical relics. See this interesting site <https://buchettedelvino.org/home%20eng/>

Last year one in a restaurant re-opened and since the Covid-19 pandemic, an additional half dozen or so have reactivated, dispensing soft drinks, coffee, sandwiches, and Gelato, thru the windows. One of the impetuses of the original wine window was the ability to avoid direct contact with customers, as the “Black Death” of 1347, swept through Europe periodically for centuries after. It was common to disinfect coins used for purchase, in vinegar, after transactions.

Wines produced by the Florentine elite, well-known ones, are still on the market today, including Antinori, a favorite in our house. Rick Steves, the travel guru, has a sequence in a travel video, where he visits a wine bar of perhaps 150 square feet, known as the Fratellini; the patrons stand on the sidewalk drinking wine and when finished set their glasses on a small shelved board for later collection by the proprietor. Located just a few blocks north of the Ponte Vecchio, it is an experience; one may want to repeat daily.

Ever wonder about those streaks of wine (tears) when the glass is swirled?

In a recent column in *Saveur* food magazine, Ella Quittner reported on an educational Zoom call. The phenomena, has been attributed to alcohol and relative viscosity in the past, and subject to debate by wine drinking scientists, for over 160 years.

The current theory is causation is by the “Marangoni Effect.” They say of course, wine is mainly water and alcohol. There is a surface tension differential between the two, and the alcohol climbs the glass at a faster rate, due to relative weight.

In that call, UCLA professor of mathematics, Andrea Bertozzi, explained the science that finds causation from three sources: the Marangoni effect, gravity, and bulk surface tension. The former is the most important. Low alcohol wines, say below 12% are not likely to show the streaks.

Shuttle. Analysis shows that the legs do not indicate quality in any way; they are merely an indication of a higher alcohol level.

Remember that saying, “Whiskey then beer, never fear-- beer then whiskey, very risky.” In the wine world, it goes something like this. “Beer before wine makes you feel fine, wine before beer makes you feel weird.”

This alchemy usually disputed by doctors, exists only because of cute rhymes. Biodynamic wine producers blame hangovers on the dozens of additives in commercial wine. Others think the color of the wine, beer, or whiskey is the culprit, darker ones being worse.

In a German study, a team from Witten/Herdecke University divided 90 testing subjects randomly into three groups. The first consumed a measured amount of beer-2.5 pints, followed by an equivalent amount of alcohol, in wine-estimated at three glasses, about 5.5 ounces each.

The second group received equivalent amounts of wine then beer, and the third an equivalent amount of either wine or beer. The subjects given an appropriate amount of water for consumption, based on their weight, slept under medical supervision. They each rated the hangover, with discomfort scored from zero to 56 based on factors including thirst, fatigue, headache, and nausea-among others.

A week later, they tested the same groups in reverse order, with the either beer or wine group also reversed. This allowed the groups to each have a control, and each individual had itself as a control. The results showed conclusively that the order of consumption had no impact on the intensity of hangover. Thus busting another urban legend, albeit one that apparently had a worldwide reach.

Nevertheless, this leads to a discussion on moderation. Irish Poet and playwright, Oscar Wilde enjoyed a drink or two, and said it well, “Everything in moderation, including moderation.”

Stay healthy, and Cheers.

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