

WINE EXPERIENCE

The Wine Recommendation Standard

Five steps for selling wine to people who are afraid of wine lists — which is most people, including the ones who order confidently.

1 Ask the budget without asking

Never say a number and never make the guest say one. Open the list, put your finger on a region, and let the price sit silently in front of them. They will point at where they are comfortable and nobody has been embarrassed.

“There are two or three around here I’d happily drink tonight — shall I tell you about them?”

FAILURE MODE “What sort of price were you thinking?” The guest now has to declare their budget to a stranger in front of their guests.

2 Narrow to three

A two-hundred-label list sells less wine than a thirty-label one. Length was meant to signal quality and it produces paralysis instead. Your job is not the list, it is the shortlist.

Three bottles, three price points, all of which work with what the table has ordered.

FAILURE MODE Handing over the book and walking away. The guest flips, panics, and orders the house red or a bottle of water.

3 One sentence each

No tasting notes. Nobody has ever ordered a wine because it had notes of gooseberry. Say what it is like to drink, or who makes it, and stop.

“This one’s from a family who’ve farmed the same four hectares since the war. It tastes like the place.”

FAILURE MODE Performing knowledge. Every extra sentence moves the guest further from deciding.

4 Anchor to the dish

Always tie the recommendation to what is being eaten at that table tonight. A wine recommended in the abstract is a guess; a wine recommended against the order is a service.

“You’ve got the lamb — I’d go with the middle one. It’s built for it.”

FAILURE MODE Recommending your own favourite. The guest can tell, and it doesn’t help them.

5 Pour and stay

The first pour is where the trust is made or lost. Stay for it, watch the face, and be ready to change the bottle without a discussion if it isn’t right. That willingness is worth more than the bottle.

“Take your time with it. If it isn’t what you wanted, we’ll open something else — no ceremony.”

FAILURE MODE Pouring and leaving. The guest who is disappointed now has to complain, and most won’t.

Your Three Bottles

Every member of your floor team should be able to sell these three without the list in their hand. Fill this in for your own cellar and brief it this week.

THE HOUSE POUR Producer & wine _____ Price _____ One sentence _____ Order it goes with _____	THE STEP UP Producer & wine _____ Price _____ One sentence _____ Order it goes with _____	THE ONE WORTH THE STORY Producer & wine _____ Price _____ One sentence _____ Order it goes with _____
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How to use this with your team

Re-do this card whenever the list changes. If a server cannot say all three from memory by Friday, the problem is the briefing, not the server.

*This standard is drawn from the Wine Experience masterclass —
filmed on property with the sommeliers who run it. Seven
masterclasses, taught by the people doing the work.*

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