

Wine

The Bottle Service Standard

Five steps from the order to the first pour of a bottle. The step most often skipped is the cheapest: reading the vintage back before the foil is cut.

Who

Sommeliers and servers who open wine at the table

When

Every bottle ordered, from the order to the first pour

You need

Polished glasses on a tray, a waiter's friend, an underliner, a napkin

Measured by Order read back with producer and vintage · Host's taste of about 50 ml · Glasses filled a third, never past half

1 Read back

Find the host, then repeat the order in full: producer, wine, vintage, bottle size. Write it on the order pad as you say it, so the cellar pulls the exact bottle the guest chose.

"The Vietti Barolo, 2019, a full bottle. I'll bring it straight over, Mr Okafor."

Common mistake Saying "the Barolo, lovely" and walking off. The list has three Barolos, and the cellar picks the one nearest the door.

2 Set the glasses

Bring the glasses on a tray, polished and smell-checked. Lay them from the host's left, going clockwise and ending with the host, in the same place at every cover, just above the knife.

"I'll bring fresh glasses for the red. Shall I clear the white ones, or will you finish them first?"

Common mistake Carrying glasses upside down by the stems between your fingers. It is quicker, and the guest sees you holding the rim.

3 Present and open

Show the bottle to the host, label up, and name the producer and vintage a second time. Cut the foil below the lower lip, draw the cork without a pop, wipe the neck, rest the cork on an underliner.

"Your Vietti Barolo, 2019, as you ordered."

Common mistake Opening the bottle at the side station, out of sight. The guest never saw it and cannot be sure it is the bottle they chose.

4 Host's taste

Pour about 50 ml for the host only, step back half a pace and wait in silence. If the host hesitates, offer a word about the wine. Pour for no one else until the host has said yes.

"Would you like to taste it first?"

Common mistake Pouring the taste and already moving round the table. You have told the host that their approval is a formality.

5 Pour and place

Guest of honour first, then clockwise, host last; tables of eight or more go straight round. Fill a third, never past half. Set the bottle down label facing the host and top up before a glass is empty.

"I'll leave it here and keep an eye on your glasses."

Common mistake Filling to the brim to look generous. The bottle runs out after the starter, and nobody has room to swirl.

The Bottle Service Spot Check

Thirteen things a supervisor can see from across the room while a bottle is opened. Watch one table per service and tick only what you saw.

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|--|---|
| ☐ Host identified before the order is taken | ☐ Foil cut cleanly below the lower lip |
| ☐ Producer, wine and vintage read back | ☐ Cork drawn without a pop |
| ☐ Glasses carried on a tray, never by hand | ☐ Neck wiped, cork placed on an underliner |
| ☐ Glasses polished and smell-checked | ☐ Host's taste about 50 ml, then a step back |
| ☐ Glasses laid clockwise, host last | ☐ Glasses filled a third, never past half |
| ☐ Bottle shown label up to the host | ☐ Bottle set down label facing the host |
| ☐ Vintage named a second time at the table | |

How to use this with your team

Brief two items at each pre-service meeting this week. The supervisor watches one bottle opened per service and ticks the card in front of the person who opened it. Anything missed is practised before the next shift.

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