

Wine

The Decanting Standard

Five steps for decanting at the table, from the question to the last pour. A bottle stood upright for a day decants clean; one fetched from the rack does not.

Who

Sommeliers, and servers trained to decant

When

Every bottle decanted, at the guest's request or our suggestion

You need

A decanter rinsed and smelt, a candle or torch, a cradle, an underliner

Measured by Host asked before any wine is decanted · Wine tasted before it is decanted · Bottle and cork left beside the decanter

1 Ask the host

Suggest decanting for old reds with sediment and young reds that need air, and for any wine the guest asks. Ask the host first, say why in one sentence, and never decant a fragile old bottle unasked.

"This 2008 has some sediment, Mr Moretti. Shall I decant it, so the last glass is as clear as the first?"

Common mistake Decanting every red because it looks impressive. A fragile old wine can fade in the decanter within the hour.

2 Prepare the bottle

If you know in advance, stand older bottles upright for 24 hours. If not, carry the bottle from the rack in a cradle, at the angle it lay. Rinse the decanter, smell it, set the light on the side table.

"Table 12, 19:30: Brunello 2008 standing since yesterday. Decanter rinsed and checked."

Common mistake Picking the bottle up by the neck and turning it upright on the way. The sediment you meant to leave behind is now in the wine.

3 Taste, then decant

Present the bottle label up and open it in the cradle where you can. Pour the host's taste before decanting, or taste a few drops yourself, so a faulty wine never reaches the decanter.

"Your Brunello di Montalcino, 2008. I'll let you taste it before I decant."

Common mistake Decanting first and tasting afterwards. If the wine is corked, the decanter is tainted and ten minutes are gone.

4 Pour over light

Pour slowly in one steady movement, with the bottle's shoulder over the light. Stop as soon as the sediment reaches the neck. The last 2–3 cm stay in the bottle, because that is where the sediment sits.

"The last few centimetres stay in the bottle. That is where the sediment sits."

Common mistake Stopping and starting to check the light. Each time the bottle tips back, the sediment rolls forward into the wine.

5 Leave the bottle

Pour the first glasses from the decanter in the usual order. Leave the empty bottle and its cork on an underliner beside the decanter, so the table can see what they are drinking all evening.

"I'll leave the bottle here beside the decanter, so you have the label."

Common mistake Clearing the empty bottle with the foil. The guest is drinking from a glass jug and cannot show anyone what it was.

Decant or Not

When the team suggests decanting, when it doesn't, and the reason to give the host in one sentence. When in doubt, ask.

The wine	Decant?	Why
Old red with sediment, 10 years or more	Yes, just before pouring	To leave the sediment behind; it fades fast
Young, powerful red	Yes, 30–60 minutes ahead	Air softens a closed wine
Vintage port	Yes, always	Heavy sediment that needs separating
Light red, such as Pinot Noir	Only if the guest asks	Air can take away its fragrance
Full white or orange wine	Sometimes, if it smells closed	Lets a struck-match smell blow off
Sparkling wine	Only if the guest asks	Air softens the bubbles

How to use this with your team

Brief one row per pre-service meeting for six days, with a bottle from your list for each row. The head sommelier signs off each server after watching one full decant, from the question to the last pour.

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