

Wine

The Wine Pairing Standard

Five steps for serving a wine pairing course by course. Each wine reaches the table a minute before its dish, so the guest smells it before the first bite.

Who
Sommeliers and servers on a tasting menu

When
Every table that orders the pairing, from order to last course

You need
Tonight's pairing sheet, measured pours, the kitchen's timing, spare glasses

Measured by Each wine poured before its dish lands · Pours measured, the same at every cover · No glass cleared with wine left unasked

1 Brief the pairing

Before service, taste each pairing wine with its dish and agree the pour: about 75 ml a course, 50 ml for sweet wine. Write course, wine, glass and pour on one sheet for the station.

"Course 3, turbot: Savagnin 2022, Jura. White wine glass. 75 ml."

Common mistake Learning the pairing from the sheet during service. The first table hears it read aloud from a card.

2 Ask first

When the pairing is ordered, ask about any wine the guest avoids and how much they would like to drink. Offer half pours, and an alcohol-free pairing where you have one, to the whole table.

"Is there a wine you'd rather avoid, Mrs Kowalski? We also do half pours and an alcohol-free pairing."

Common mistake Pouring the full pairing for a guest who drinks little. Half of every glass goes back to the kitchen.

3 Wine first

Pour each wine 1–2 minutes before its course arrives. Agree the signal with the pass: the kitchen calls the course, the wine goes, then the plates. Name the wine in one sentence as you pour.

"Before your turbot: a Savagnin from the Jura, a little nutty, very good with butter sauces."

Common mistake Pouring after the plate lands. The guest has eaten half the dish before the wine meant for it arrives.

4 Clear with care

Clear a glass only when it is empty, or ask first when wine is left in it. Keep no more than two pairing glasses at a cover at once, so the table never becomes a row of half-finished glasses.

"May I take this one, or would you like to keep it for the next course?"

Common mistake Taking a half-full glass because the next wine has arrived. The guest was saving it, and now has to ask for it back.

5 Close the pairing

After the last course, ask which wine the table would drink again and note it in the guest profile. Offer the wine names on a card, and record any glass sent back so the pairing can be changed.

"Which of tonight's wines would you pour again, Ms Varga?"

Common mistake Ending the pairing with the last pour. The table's favourite goes unrecorded, and the next visit starts from zero.

When the Table Changes the Plan

Six things that change a pairing during service and what the floor does each time, without checking with anyone first.

The table	What to do	Why
One guest takes the pairing, one does not	Offer the other wine by the glass	Both still share each course
Guest asks to skip a wine	Swap it, or pour water or a soft pairing	They decide how much they drink
Guest does not drink alcohol	Offer the alcohol-free pairing at once	No one should have to ask twice
Guest prefers one wine all evening	Suggest one bottle that suits most courses	Some enjoy one wine more than six
Kitchen changes a dish mid-service	Re-taste and change the wine before serving	The pairing is for the dish on the plate
Course running late	Hold the pour until the kitchen calls	Wine poured early warms in the glass

How to use this with your team

Brief one row a day at the tasting menu briefing. The head sommelier picks one row per service, watches how it is handled and gives one sentence of feedback before the next service.

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