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Shines a magnifying glass –
on wine glasses

Choosing the right wine glass

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Take any wine group and the talk eventually turns to stemware. Recently, in Bangalore, there was a flurry of discussion, and much hand-wringing, about how to preserve and use wine glasses. People complained with “crying face” emojis about how household help was breaking their precious wine glasses. They recalled heart-stopping moments in parties when errant and drunk guests tipped over a favourite Schott Zwiesel glass. So what’s your trick, dear reader? How do you enjoy wine without breaking the bank, or for that matter, your wine glasses?

Well, the first thing to do is accept the pain of breakage, and then take steps to mitigate it. Devesh Agarwal, founder of The Wine Connoisseurs (TWC), for instance, uses Lucaris stemware at home. “I have Reidel and other brands but when they break, your heart breaks with them,” he says.

Friends who are serious about their stemware refuse to let their staff near it. Nitesh Gulhati, a Bangalore-based wine investor and collector, fills up the wash basin like he does at his Oregon home and hand washes every single wineglass himself, even after a party.

The other thing to do while buying stemware

is to ask yourself a series of questions along the lines of a Socratic inquisition.

- Glass or crystal? Crystal is sturdier.

Machine made or hand blown glass? Can you tell the difference? If so, buy hand blown.

- Universal or varietal-specific? If you can sniff out varietals, by all means, buy your Bordeaux, Burgundy and Chardonnay glasses separately and specifically. But for most of us with tiny kitchens, a universal glass makes the most sense.

- Stemless or not? Most people prefer glasses with a stem for the look and stemless for the low-maintenance.

Stemless glasses, they say, are bad, because having your hands around these glasses warm the wine and change the flavours. But you know what? They are easier to store, take less space in kitchens, and are easier to handle. So for everyday drinking, stemless is fine.

Rim size is important if you want to put your nose in to smell the wine – and this depends on the size of your nose also. Generally a rim of at least 2.5 inches diameter is necessary.

The volume of the glass is important because you generally need to swirl the wine nicely before imbibing. A minimum of 420

ml volume is a good place to start. You can, if you wish, go up to 720 ml glasses but then, when you pour, your guests might think you are stingy because the wine fills only a fraction of the glass.

The most important thing for home drinkers is cost and this leads to another line of questioning. Do you really need to buy those Zalto wineglasses or can you be content drinking from them at restaurants? Do you want to buy the standard brands like Riedel and Schott Zweisel or do you want to splurge on custom made stemware by experts such as Jancis Robinson (who has created a glass line with Richard Brendon called JR+RB “1” line).

Most people use the standard format. They have two sets of wine glasses, one for formal sit-down dinners at home and the other for everyday drinking.

Uma Chigurupati of KRSMA wines, for instance says, “We use Riedel wine glasses for the regular drinking. We use the red wine (Burgundy type) and white wine glasses. But not the varietal specific. The above mentioned are both with stems, of course. I like their O glasses (stemless) for serving water. On some special occasions we use their Sommelier series glasses. A couple of years back we got glasses designed by Jancis Robinson, which are interesting. They are meant for both red and white wine. They look elegant.”

Not all of us may have access to JR+RB glasses. Beginning drinkers may prefer to start with JoyJolt, Amazon’s top selling wineglass brand at \$15 for 4 stemless glasses. There is only one problem though. Once your taste in wines goes up, so does your taste in stemware. I am no longer able to drink – even everyday wine – from inexpensive Ikea Irvig glasses, not because they are bad, but because they are hard to find and replace in India. If you lived in America or Europe, you would have reasonably priced choices aplenty such as brands like Libbey and Gabriel-Glas (a little



The Desire range of wine glasses from Lucaris. Lucaris is good crystal at a decent price

more expensive). If you go to the Amazon.com international site, the top 50 bestsellers in wineglasses only include Schott Zweisel’s Tritan line. Reidel doesn’t even feature.

Most Indians love Riedel. It is widely available in India. For everyday drinking at a slightly lower price, Lucaris and Nude are choices. I bought Lucaris at my local Shopper’s Stop years ago. They are good crystal for a decent price. Plus, I don’t fuss when one breaks. Out of my set of 12 bought 6 years ago, I have three left. I use the Tokyo Temptation series but the Hong Kong Hip is taller.

Nude is a Turkish company with an outlet in Bangalore. Their limited edition decanter designed by Ron Arad is a thing of beauty. They use 96-year-old fashion icon, Iris Apfel as the model for their elegant stem-zero glasses, which begin in the four-digits (in rupees) per glass.

Some time ago, I bought wine glasses in pewter by a Malaysian company called Royal Selangor, but they were unsuitable and unsatisfactory. Visual elements are a big part of wine drinking, which is the attraction of glass. Until they invent unbreakable crystal or glass, we have to make do with careful handling and hand-wringing when the wine glass tippeth over and breaks. ❖

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