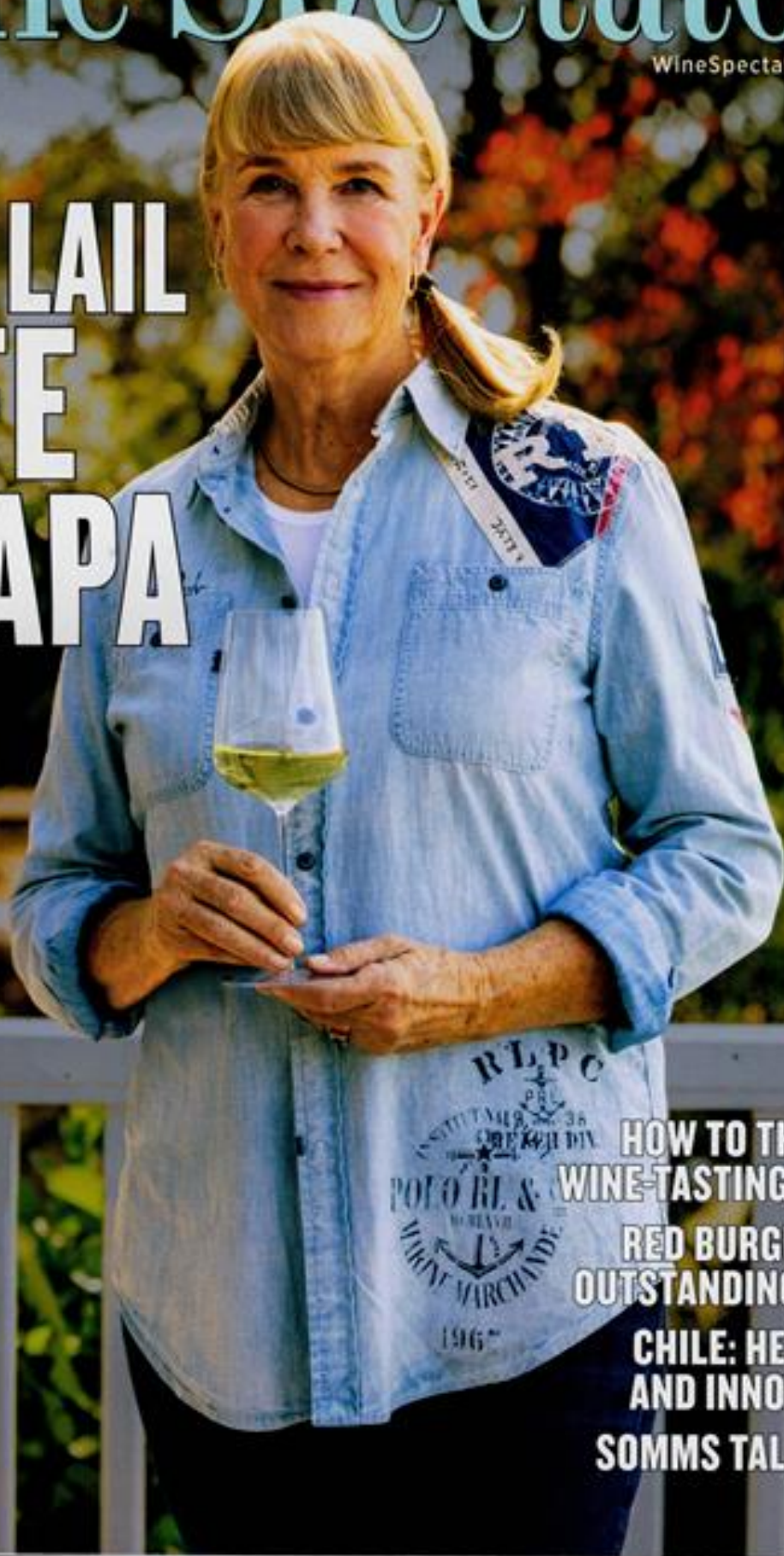


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ROBIN LAIL A LIFE IN NAPA



**HOW TO THROW A
WINE-TASTING PARTY**
**RED BURGUNDY'S
OUTSTANDING 2017s**
**CHILE: HERITAGE
AND INNOVATION**
SOMMS TALK ROSÉ

MAY 31, 2020
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If practice makes perfect, then there's no one better to advise on wine tasting parties than Aldo Sohm. He oversees the *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence-winning list at Le Bernardin in New York and also runs Aldo Sohm Wine Bar next door, so he brings classical chops but also throws a party every night.

For him, the purpose of a tasting party is not primarily to teach but rather to learn—about wine, about what you like and about the people around you. And fun is paramount: “People make it complicated; they overdo it,” he says. “Or too serious, like you're at the doctor or the dentist. That's never fun. Taste, eat and then talk about the important things in life. I'm passionate about wine of course, but if you only talk about one passion, it will diminish.”

For this tasting, he assembled three themed flights—sparkling wine, Sauvignon Blanc and aged Cabernet-based wines—and recipes, courtesy of Aldo Sohm Wine Bar chef Keyvin Adams, for small cook-ahead dishes to eat after assessing the wines. (Each flight also has a “pirate wine”: an outlier or rebel in that style.) Each flight shows a range of styles, but not just for instruction. What's the goal, then? “Figure out what you like,” Sohm says. “If you like glass number one, great. Glass number two? Great. You like what you like.”

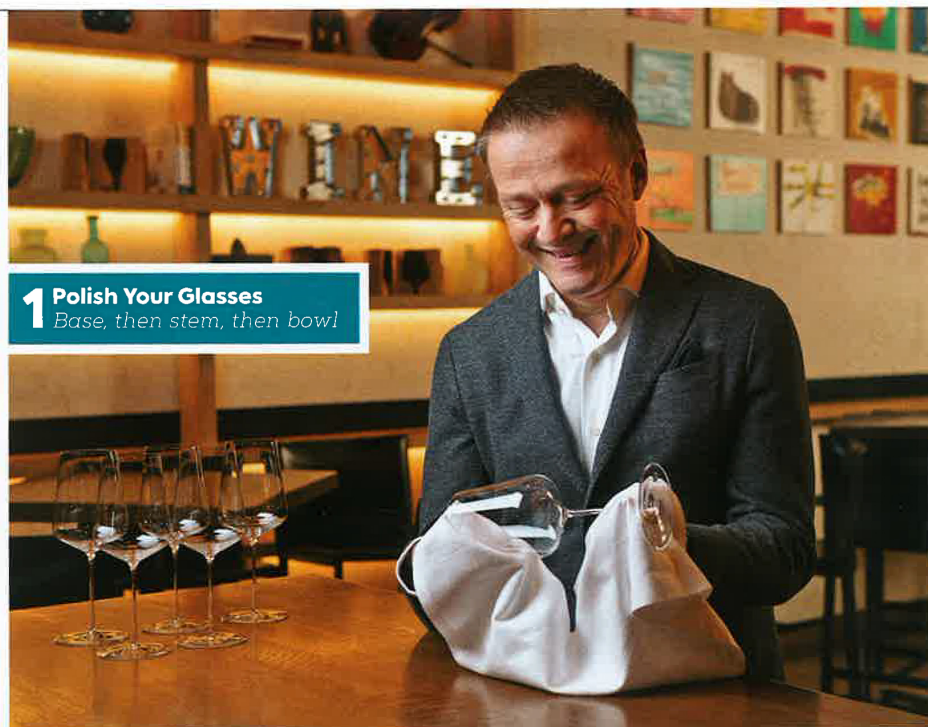
Where to Begin

Whether you're tasting all three flights or just one, you might begin as Sohm does most of his tastings: “The first thing I do is try to break them up. I pour the same sparkling wine into [two different-shaped] glasses. I ask them which they like better, get them talking. Then when I do the reveal and show it's the same bottle, they start laughing; they can't believe it. Then I can show how influential glass shape is. That's a segue into a very good evening. It takes the intimidation out and becomes playful.”

The theme of play comes up again and again. Making a game of tasting can help pull people in. Taste blind with your group and have everyone write down aromas, flavors and textural notes. Afterward, compare your notes to the ones provided in the following pages. For every characteristic that matches, you get a point.

How to Taste

This is the part that scares newbies. Tasting blind can feel like not having a parachute, but it's also freeing and fun. There is no wrong way, and there are often surprises and discoveries. Experienced tasters may draw on more knowledge and discipline, but their thinking can sometimes be cluttered. “Empty your mind and focus,” Sohm says. “That's what separates tasting from drinking. If you taste a wine



1 Polish Your Glasses
Base, then stem, then bowl



2 Uncork
Toss the foil



3 Bag It
Hide them in bags

and can guess what it is, that's good for your ego, but that's not the exercise. For me, the exercise is, how can I judge a wine neutrally? When I taste wine, personally I try to pull the switch off in my brain: What is the story of the wine? What is the glass telling me? Before I even sniff it, I put myself in a 5-year-old's position: no opinion, no nothing. I let it speak to me.”

Step one is to look at the wine. In some cases, this will not tell you a lot, but for sparkling wine, it can. Look for how many bubbles there are, how big they are and how quickly they rise, then taste and see what the correlation is. “A lot of people don't know there are different kinds of bubbles,” Sohm observes. “You don't want it looking like club soda.” The reds in this tasting should show a softening brick color at the edges. How do they differ?

Next, smell the wine. Sohm smells it once for the primary aromas, then again a moment later to flesh them out. Take

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First Tasting

Sparkling Wine Fried Chicken

Italy / Spain / Champagne

ALDO SAYS

“Champagne is one of the most food-friendly wines. You could do a whole menu with just Champagne. You can't do that with white Burgundy. Most people love fried chicken. Sparkling wine has sugar. The bubbles cut through the fat. The sugar kind of coats the fat, a little bit like foie gras. You take something that is typically a little heavy and you give it shine and brighten it up.”

Nino Franco Brut Vino Spumante Grave di Stecca 2012 | 90 | \$49

WS An aromatic sparkler, with rich minerality and hints of spice and tea rose to the green melon and lemon curd flavors. Finely knit and elegant overall, with a lasting finish accented by mineral and spice. Drink now through 2021. 917 cases made.—A.N.

ALDO To me, this is a creamier, sweeter, softer version of Prosecco. It's typically floral. It's a workhorse. Let's be honest—this is what a lot of people want when they order Prosecco.

**Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc Brut Blanc de Blancs
Vino Espumoso 2016 | 90 | \$25**

WS Delicate lime blossom, minerally spice and graphite aromas unravel through this elegant Spanish sparkler. Bright and balanced, with flavors of Meyer lemon, grilled nut and white cherry riding the creamy mousse. Drink now through 2024. 33,750 cases made, 7,313 cases imported.—A.N.

ALDO Fruit-forward, spice-driven, it has floral components, it's clean. Then I go back and I think, OK, I said floral. What flowers? White flowers. What fruit? It's citrus-driven but there's a lot of yellow apples too. There's a creamy texture. It has a lot going on.

Chartogne-Taillet Brut Champagne Cuvée Ste.-Anne NV | 91 | \$56

WS Fresh and aromatic, offering bread dough, floral, golden raisin and Gala apple notes, framed by bright, citrusy acidity. Well-meshed, with a fine bead and a subtle, spice-accented finish. Disgorged December 2018. Drink now.—A.N.

ALDO Citrusy fruit profile. Refined bubbles, polished and toasty. So you have to ask: Is it worth twice as much? How much more wine do you get for your dollar? If you like it, you like it.

**Pirate Wine: Artadi Brut Hondarrabi Zuri Vino Espumoso
Izar-Leku 2015**



Taking Notes
Record your impressions



Fried Chicken

½ cup fine sea salt
½ cup sugar
½ cup champagne vinegar
6 garlic cloves
8 thyme sprigs
8 oregano sprigs
One 3- to 4-pound chicken, cut into 8 to 10 pieces
2 cups flour
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
Fine sea salt and freshly ground white pepper, to taste
Canola oil

1. Combine sea salt, sugar, vinegar, garlic, thyme and oregano with 8 quarts water in a large pot. Stir well to dissolve the salt and sugar, then add the chicken pieces. Cover pot with a tight-fitting lid and transfer to the refrigerator to chill overnight.
2. Remove the pot from the refrigerator. Transfer the chicken pieces to paper towels and pat dry.
3. In a large bowl, add the flour, cornstarch, cayenne and

a large pinch each of salt and white pepper. Stir to combine. Add the chicken pieces and coat well. Shake off excess flour and transfer chicken pieces to a baking sheet or wire rack.

4. Place a large, high-sided skillet or Dutch oven on the stove and add 3 to 4 inches of canola oil. Heat over medium until a candy thermometer registers 350° F.
5. Using kitchen tongs, carefully add as many chicken pieces as will fit with room between them, skin side down to the pan. The oil should cool to 325° F. Adjust the heat as needed to maintain the temperature. Cook the chicken until golden-brown, turning every 5 minutes, for about 25 minutes total (smaller pieces will cook more quickly). Remove chicken from the pot and transfer to a wire rack set over paper towels. Sprinkle with fine sea salt and freshly ground white pepper. Repeat with remaining pieces.

Serves 4.