

First choose your glass

31 Jan 2007 by JR

Wine is drunk out of glasses rather than beakers or other goblets because glass is inert, relatively thin and allows full appreciation of a wine's appearance. The perfect wine glass has a stem and a bowl that goes to towards the rim, so that the aroma is caught within the glass for easy sniffing. It is also made of clear glass so that the wine's colour, an important element in assessing and enjoying wine to the full, can be appreciated.

Wine nuts also like to commune with their wine as physically closely as possible, which means that the crystal is highly valued whereas thicker, patterned and cut glasses are not.

So that wine can be tasted without losing any liquid and so that there is space for the precious aroma or bouquet to collect in the bowl, the glass should ideally fill no more than half the available volume of the glass. Not filling up a glass is sensible, not mean.

A stem means that you can hold and swirl the glass without affecting the temperature of the wine with your own body temperature.

There is no real need for a range of glasses of different sizes except that we tend to need smaller servings of sweet wines and fortified wines. It has always seemed unfair to me that white wines are conventionally served in smaller glasses than red wines.

Tumbler may be used in party and especially party Italian restaurants, but the thickness of the glass and the difficulty of swirling the wine around in them makes them pleasure killers for wine enthusiasts.

The almost spherical 'Paris goblet' is one of the cheapest wine glasses available (you can be bought for the price of a bottle of very basic wine). It fulfils the criteria of having a stem and going in towards the rim, and is better than narrower 'tulip' shapes, but the glass is too thick to provide intimate or luxurious contact with the wine.

The ISO testing glass, like a large tulip on a short stem, was designed in the 1970s by the International Standards Organization advised by a panel of professional wine tasters including Michael Broadbent MBE. For a long time it was regarded as the standard professional wine glass. Machine-made versions are available and cost no more than the cheapest bottle of wine. (I'm around on the internet, as they're rarely available in wine shops, except around Christmas. It does the job but certainly wine no prices for glamour and more and more professionals find it just too small and dainty.

[Riedel](#) is a family company based in the Austrian Tyrol. It is by far the most successful and admired producer of glasses specifically designed for wine drinkers. Working on the principle that how the liquid hits the tongue affects how it will taste, the Riedel family of Austria have developed slightly different glass designs for wine types. These include, for example, young and mature red Bordeaux, non-vinegar and vinegar Champagne, vintage port and tawny port, Chianti Classico and Brunello di Montalcino etc. All of this is a bit much for most homes (including mine) but there are much more affordable, machine-made versions available which provide much more pleasure than the standard ISO glasses – and probably more than a Paris goblet. They recently launched and successfully created a fashion for a range of meditation glasses.

Riedel have now bought [Schlozer](#), once their main rival, although [Zwiesel](#) (owners of [Glenlivet](#))

and [Deussen](#).

[Stubs](#) and formerly part of Schott) is independent of them. Note that wine is such a growth area, all manner of outfits such as Waterford are becoming interested in expensive crystal specially designed for wine. Cristal d'Arques dominates the French glass business with Baccarat at the top end.

The only non-standard glass shape you might think of investing in is a tulip, this glass for sparkling wines (often called a flute), which allows maximal escape of the carbon dioxide dissolved in the wine which makes it sparkle, with you see a long journey for each bubble, and is a subtly generous shape in bowl. The old-fashioned coupe, supposedly modelled on Marie-Antoinette's breast, is easy to spill and encourages the precious carbon dioxide to escape as fast as possible. Riedel make a very versatile and responsive tulip-shaped champagne glass.

Specialist retailers of wine glasses in the UK include [Lalor](#)

in London W1 and [www.wineglasses.co.uk](#)

Glasses should be stored upright somewhere free from dust and strong smells. Aesthetically, glassware needs to be clean, and has the annoying habit of being extremely breakable and allowing every speck and bubble. The important thing as far as the wine is concerned is that the glass smells of nothing – not washing up liquid (which can stop the formation of bubbles in fizzy wine), and certainly not oily glass cloth. Many smart wine glasses, including the Riedel range, are happy in a domestic dishwasher and benefit from the high temperatures there. Wine has to be soft, however, and there is no need for detergent. Hand washing glasses achieves best results if glasses are washed in very hot water, rinsed in cold, and polished with linen too (cleanly reserved for the purpose – I'm told in an ideal world one would at least have unlimited supplies of new, the crystal glasses).