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17 TASTING ROOM TIPS

By Dezel Quillen, Founder, Photographer & Wine Writer, Virginia Vine Spot



(Photo courtesy of Dezel Quillen)

Spring is here, the sun is shining, and the flowers are blooming, and many of you will be coming out of hibernation and planning weekend trips to Virginia's award winning wineries to sample the new releases.

While it is largely up to the Virginia wineries to have a friendly and knowledgeable staff on hand to make you feel like part of the wine family, I decided to share some tasting room tips so you can have a great time while visiting Virginia tasting rooms this spring and summer.

1. Before starting your wine tasting adventure, limit or do not use any perfume, cologne, or lotions. They will definitely affect your ability to pick up the aromas of the wine, which will alter your perception of its taste.
2. Have a good breakfast or lunch and take along a few bottles of water. Packing a cooler with snacks and water is a very good idea.

3. Many Virginia wineries have limited hours, and some even go by appointments (especially for large groups and tours). Make sure they will be open and ready to pour.
4. Have a designated driver. This is a prudent decision for a carefree day of wine tasting. There are also many local tour services available that are fun and affordable. I recommend Deidra at www.vawineadventures.com.
5. If you plan to picnic, call the winery and ask if they allow baskets. You can also call the winery and find out what types of foods they offer.
6. When you taste, follow the flow from white wines to reds and then dessert. Wines are tasted from light, to drier, to sweet for a reason. You would not want to start off your tasting with a big tannic red and then try to fully enjoy a light fruity white wine - that big bad red won't allow it!
7. When tasting, refresh the palate with plain crackers and water if available.
8. Keep an open mind and open palate and try everything if it doesn't kill you or give you a migraine. You might just find something new that you like.
9. Very important: always look at your wine. The color can give hints about the quality and age. Always swirl, sniff, and sip every wine. Think about the color, aromas and flavors. Is the color attractive and brilliant, are you smelling apples, pears, apricots, cherries, or hints of vanilla, are the flavors consistent with the aromas?
10. Ask questions. This your opportunity to not only educate your palate, but to learn more about the wine making process. In most Virginia tasting rooms you will find a warm and knowledgeable staff, winery owners, and if you are lucky, the winemaker(s) themselves, ready to make your tasting experience memorable.
11. All wineries have a tasting sheet listing what is being poured. Take the time to review the tasting sheet and as you sample the wines, see if you can pick the suggested aromas and flavors out in the wines.
12. If you are on the bubble about a bottle purchase, ask for a second sampling. Usually after a tasting, your pourer will ask if there is anything you would like to re-taste. But if they do not, ask politely.
13. Do not feel pressured to drink all the wine in your glass, especially if you are visiting a number of wineries. Feel free to sip and spit or sip and swallow a little and throw the remaining wine in the dump bucket.
14. Some wineries have a tasting fee; usually a souvenir glass and great service is included with this fee.
15. Some wineries have a two tier tasting fee, one for tasting their everyday wines, and another fee for their reserve wines. Some wineries waive a tasting fee per bottle purchase, so be sure to ask about this before tasting.
16. Spring and summer are busy times for Virginia wineries so try not to crowd the bar. If you're in a tasting room that is obviously busy, back away from the bar after receiving your next tasting to give others a chance to progress in their tasting order.
17. Last, but not least, have fun while enjoying Virginia wine at the source this spring and summer!