



## A guide to storing and serving our older wines

This sheet provides useful information on how to store, prepare, open and decant Chateau Musar wines, as well as what to expect when tasting them.

### Introduction

The wines of Chateau Musar are made as naturally as possible, from grapes grown on Mounts Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon and the high-altitude Bekaa Valley separating them, and home to the vine for thousands of years. As with many other fine wines with significant cellaring potential, Chateau Musar Reds are bottled without fining or filtration. Constantly-evolving, the wines tend to produce entirely safe, natural deposits in bottle as they mature: these are easily removed by careful decanting. Up to seven years in the making, with lengthy oak and bottle ageing before release, these patiently-crafted, richly-textured wines deserve thoughtful preparation if they are to show at their best.

### Storage

As with any bottles destined for lengthy cellaring, and to preserve the wines at their best, Chateau Musar bottles should be stored on their sides in optimal conditions: dark, cool and slightly humid.

**Light:** The storage area must be dark, excluding ultraviolet (UV) light. This damages wine by degrading otherwise stable organic compounds which contribute to wine taste and structure.

**Humidity:** Very low humidity during storage can dry out corks leading to sealing problems, increased evaporation and leakage. It is important to store bottles in moderately humid environments (70/80%).

**Temperature:** Wines age in bottle due to chemical reactions taking place over time. Each occurs at its own pace and can be affected by temperature changes. It is now believed that wines develop most harmoniously if stored at around 15°C / 59°F, with as few temperature fluctuations as possible.

### Preparing bottles before serving

If a bottle has been shaken by transport or movement, it should ideally be kept on its side for 2 weeks in optimal cellar conditions before being opened to allow the wine and any sediment to settle. Two days before opening, the bottle should be stood upright to allow sediments to gather at the bottom (around the 'punt') and kept in a moderately humid environment to avoid excessive drying of the cork.

### Bottle Openers

There are several types of bottle openers that can be used depending on cork condition.



1. The regular corkscrew opener: We recommend those with screws at least the length of one of the corks in our current vintage wines, i.e. at least 50mm or 2 inches long: these longer screws are more likely to remove corks whole.

2. 2-prong cork-pullers (pictured left): the prongs are inserted between the cork and bottle's glass neck. Corks are removed with an upward spiral movement.

3. Air pressure bottle openers (pictured left): these use hollow needles that are inserted down through the cork, through which air is pumped, pushing the cork out. We generally do not recommend these as they may over-expose wines to oxygen, but they may be useful for corks liable to brittleness or breaking.

### Uncorking bottles

Uncorking an old vintage bottle requires careful thought and planning. There are 5 main stages:

**1. Keep the bottle upright.** The bottle must upright in order to avoid disturbing any sediments.

**2. Remove the capsule.** Cut around the top of the capsule to clear the cork top, and wipe the area clean.

**3. Assess the cork.** The cork should be checked to determine whether it requires special attention:

**a.** Is the cork hardened like wood? In this case, apply pressure on the cork towards the side of the bottle rather than downwards: too much vertical pressure may cause the cork to drop into the neck.

**b.** Is the cork stuck to the glass? To free the cork, insert a thin metal blade or prong between the glass and around the cork. This reduces side pressure and the risk of cork breakage when removing it.

c. Is the cork loose and likely to drop in the bottle under pressure? Insert the first cm of a corkscrew into the cork at 45° angle to secure the cork tightly and reduce downward movement. Keep it in place and insert the 2-prong bottle opener to either side of the cork, then remove the corkscrew, and lift the cork out with an upwards spiral motion of the prongs. An air pressure bottle opener could be used, but make sure the cork is secured diagonally with the corkscrew before inserting the needle as the needle alone may push the cork into the bottle. Alternatively, you can use a bottle opener available on [www.thedurand.com](http://www.thedurand.com) which combines a corkscrew and a 2-prong cork-puller for optimal results

**4. Insert the corkscrew.** If the cork does not require special attention, insert a corkscrew slowly from the centre of the top of the cork to its full length, exerting sideways rather than downward pressure. If the cork falls into the bottle, don't panic: the wine has been in contact with the cork for over a decade, so short term additional exposure to the cork is unlikely to affect wine quality. Proceed to decant as usual. If small cork pieces have fallen into the bottle, a stainless steel wine sieve or funnel/sieve (obtainable from specialist wine shops) could be used to filter these out, but may accelerate airing of the wine, ending the 'opening up' phase early. Do not use a cloth filter as this affects the taste of the wine.

**5. Pull the cork out.** With the corkscrew inserted to the full length of the cork, pull the cork out slowly. You need to assess by look and feel if the cork is brittle and likely to fragment. If the cork starts to break, it is possible that the cork may still be stuck to the glass, and you should repeat procedure **3.b** to resolve this. If the corks starts to break in the middle as you pull it out, try exerting sideways pressure as this will focus pressure on the sides of the cork which are likely to be stronger. If the cork still shows signs of being brittle and unlikely to emerge whole, use one of the techniques described in **3.c**, using the tip of the corkscrew at a 45° angle to secure the cork followed by a 2-prong opener, or the Durand.

### **What to expect when the bottle is open**

Our older wines, on opening, are like creatures awakening from hibernation, needing time to shed their stuffy state. During the first 5 minutes following the opening of a bottle, you might detect aromas of undergrowth, earth and mould as the wine adjusts to its new environment. These facets are transient: remember that the appealing and unpleasant are part of life, the yin and the yang, so be patient. Once the wine starts to shed these characters, it will open up and develop over hours, sometimes days.

### **Decanting**

Because our wines are never fined or filtered, they develop deposits in bottle as an integral part of their evolution, contributing to their specificity and longevity. Both old Chateau Musar Reds *and* Whites should be served at cellar temperature, and decanted to separate out deposits, ensuring clarity and giving the wines time to breathe before drinking, creating optimal tasting conditions. Decanters must be dry, free from aromas and rinsed with a little wine from the bottle about to be poured. All inside surfaces of the decanter must be covered with rinse wine to remove dust, and the rinse wine discarded.

A bottle containing an older vintage should be placed over a white area or light source, and the wine poured slowly from it into the decanter. When tilting the bottle, the downward side of the bottle should be that on which it was resting in the cellar on which sediments have accumulated. As wine flows past the neck of the bottle, and the bottle empties, watch for sediments starting to appear in the upper parts and shoulders of the bottle. Red wine sediments typically show up as a darker, 'grainier' plume within the main flow of the wine. White wine sediments consist of tartrates: harmless crystals that are natural by-products of the winemaking process. When sediments reach the neck, stop decanting and leave the remaining wine and sediments in the bottle. Avoid decanting a bottle halfway and putting the bottle upright, then attempting to decant again: this might mix sediments with the wine left in the bottle.

### **Enjoying the wine**

Chateau Musar wines are known for their tendency to change after they are opened, a process lasting between a few hours to several days. Each person will experience and enjoy the different stages of this process in their own way. It is difficult, therefore, to suggest a specific decanting period. We would, however, recommend decanting and allowing wines to breathe for at least an hour before drinking.

We hope you enjoy the wines  
The Chateau Musar team