



A guide to storing, opening 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.

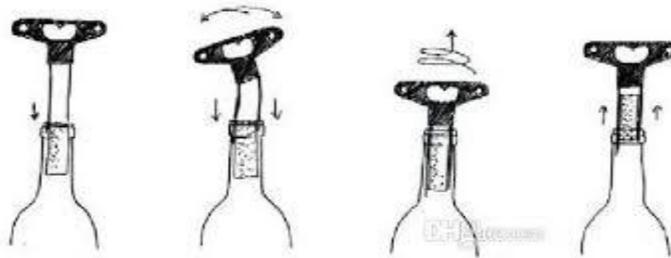


1. The regular corkscrew opener: We recommend those with screws at least the length of one of the corks in our current vintage wines, i.e. at least 50mm or 2 inches long: these longer screws are more likely to remove corks whole.
2. 2-prong cork-pullers (pictured left).

Uncorking bottles

Uncorking an old vintage bottle requires careful thought and planning.

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 assessed to determine which bottle opener is best suited:
 - a. **If the cork is held tight in the bottleneck and neither loose nor wet, we recommend using 2-prong openers** to open the bottle. 2-prong openers have the highest rate of success in opening wine bottles, in particular old vintages with difficult corks that can break or be brittle when using a corkscrew. The only risk of 2-prong openers is to push the cork into the bottle as you insert the 2-blades between the cork and the glass, hence the necessity to first assess the cork's stability inside the bottleneck. If the cork is deemed secure enough in the bottleneck, insert the 2 blades between the cork and the glass by pushing each blade down sequentially using a left side then right side downward pressure. Once the 2 blades are inserted till the bottom of the cork, turn/rotate the handle while pulling it upwards (see illustration below). The 2 blades will hold the cork as it gets pulled out of the bottle.



b. If the cork is slightly loose or wet and likely to fall in the bottle when inserting the 2-prong blades, then use a corkscrew and insert the tip of the corkscrew slowly while exerting sideways pressure on the corkscrew/cork towards the glass rather than downward pressure. This will reduce the likelihood of the cork dropping in the bottle. Insert the corkscrew to its full length until it reaches the bottom of the cork before starting to pull the cork out.

i. If the cork falls into the bottle while inserting the corkscrew, don't panic as short term additional exposure to the cork is unlikely to affect the wine. Proceed to decant as usual. If small cork pieces have fallen into the bottle, a stainless steel wine sieve can be used to filter these out. If possible, avoid using a cloth filter as this might affect the taste of the wine.

ii. Once the corkscrew is inserted till the bottom of the cork, start pulling the cork out. If the cork starts to break as you extract it or becomes brittle because it is stuck to the glass, then either switch to a Durand opener (thedurand.com) or use a double-opener approach: insert a 2-prong opener next to the already inserted corkscrew, even if the 2-prong is at a slight angle inside the bottle neck and requires a slightly firmer push. The already inserted corkscrew will hold the cork and ensure it does not fall into the bottle. Ideally the prong's blades should reach the bottom of the cork. Turn/rotate both the corkscrew and 2-prong opener together while pulling them upwards to extract the cork.

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