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How to host your own wine tasting evening, with guidance from Victoria Moore

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Feed your guests, start slowly and pour small measures – no one will want to spit these out. Credit: GETTY IMAGES CONTRIBUTOR

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By Victoria Moore, WINE CORRESPONDENT

10 MAY 2019 • 11:22AM

I've obstetricians, one hospital doctor and an anaesthetist all walk into my kitchen. This isn't the start of a joke or a particularly messy scene in a medical drama. It's the beginning of an evening of wine tasting that involves one round of cocktails, a bottle of champagne, a preview of a soon-to-be-launched can of rosé (a triumph, judging by the response) and six bottles of wine.

If you are organising a tasting evening the first task is obviously to choose the wine. You could do worse than follow the template for this one (see the box for a list of the wines I poured), getting everyone to chip in to cover the cost. Food is clearly essential partly because who doesn't need to eat dinner, also because no one ever spits. I've learnt over the years that the less elaborate the food, the better. With half a dozen wines on the table you already have a lot of flavours to think about.

Presuming there's also some conversation, there won't be much attention left for anything else. I usually have a few bits to pick at when people arrive. Gougères (cheesy puffs) are good because they are very moreish and take only five minutes to make (another 20 to cook) but look as if more effort has gone in than that. There's a recipe in my book (*The Wine Dine Dictionary*; Granta Books, £20) or you can find one on Google. I also like the simplicity of breadsticks wrapped with good prosciutto.


The tricky thing is what to offer your friends to drink when they arrive. It's not exactly festive to stand around clutching glasses of water. But I know from many wine tasting evenings that the first drink people have is the one they will drink most quickly of all, followed by another (also quickly) and possibly another, and tasting acuity vaporises before your eyes. I deal with this by pouring something good but small (the smaller the measure, the more slowly it is likely to be drunk.)

I started the medics with a small (I'm talking around 75ml) glass of champagne and followed up with an English rosehip spritz. The spritz was bitter, more sippable than gluggable, and not too alcoholic. I made it by mixing three parts of sparkling wine with two parts of Sacred Rosehip Cup and two parts of soda water, then poured it over ice with a chunk of satsuma. It also helps people to pace themselves if they know what's coming: print a running order (people can also use this to take notes, or tick the wines they particularly like).

We started the proper tasting with a pair of rosés. Wine in a can is set to be everywhere this summer and I wanted to preview the new Atelier Mirabeau Pret-a-Porter (£3.49 for a 250ml canette, launching in Waitrose on May 20). It's a pale rosé, from the south of France, that tastes clean and pretty and says hello, summer as soon as you sniff it. "I'm placing an order for these the moment they hit Waitrose," was one response, "Can't wait to have them in my fridge." Mirabeau is owned by Stephen and Jeany Cronk, a British couple who had a YouTube hit with "How to Open a Bottle of Wine With Your Shoe." I meant to play the video but we talked too much.

I often hear the opinion that one pale pink wine tastes the same as another, so I deliberately paired the canette with a silk negligee among rosés, Secret de Léoube 2018 Côtes de Provence (France, Ocado, Daylesford Organic, £25-26). For those who choose rosé by colour, Léoube is about as shimmeringly pale as it goes. The brand is owned by the Bamfords of JCB and Daylesford Organic and the wine is made by Romain Ott. The wine does all the things I want a fine Provençal pink to do: it has a surprisingly ample presence but is also incredibly subtle and finessed, with notes of sandalwood. Would the tasters see the difference between this and the cheaper wine? Absolutely.

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WINE TASTING MENU



We then moved on to five reds. I opened with Domaine Jones Vieilles Vignes Fitou 2016 (France, Wine Society, £13.50) which I picked because it's a fantastic wine with a good story. Every wine tasting needs a story. Katie Jones certainly has one. A British woman from Leicestershire living in the craggy and remote wilds of the Languedoc, she has found superb old vineyards, fallen in love and had to deal with a local hate campaign. I have written about this before: suffice it to say that one year vandals broke into her winery and drained the white wine out of the tanks.

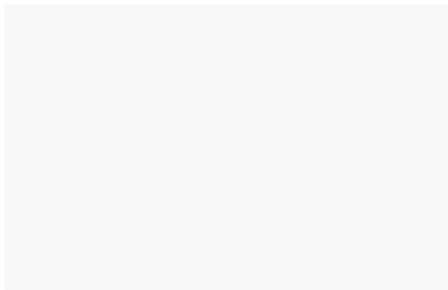
Next up came three syrahs, to show different incarnations of this grape around the world. We had a vivid and contemporary northern Rhône, unoaked and made to drink early – Gilles Robin Papillon Crozes Hermitage 2017 (France, The Wine Society, £13.95); a beautiful, very slightly smoky and chewy but essentially made with a light touch, syrah from a fashionable family producer in Stellenbosch – Boschklouf Syrah Stellenbosch 2016 South Africa (Waitrose, £19.99, 17 branches only and not available online); and finally a thickly cushioned Aussie shiraz – Bird in Hand Shiraz 2016 (Waitrose, £19.99, Canary Wharf and Belgravia only but also on waitrosecellar.com). Then we rounded off with a classic rioja, Contino Rioja Reserva 2014 (Spain, £24.99, Waitrose 18 branches only and waitrosecellar.com; also Morrisons 40 branches only).

The trick with so many wines and no one spitting is to pour teeny tasting samples, then put the bottles on the table for everyone to go back to with food – in this case a bowl of linguine with aubergine, chorizo and chilli sauce, topped with ricotta and rocket.

What were the wine winners? Honestly, every bottle was a cracker. The Contino had everyone sighing with contentment at first sniff – it's a gorgeous wine – but it was only the second bottle to be emptied. First was the Domaine Jones Vieilles Vignes Fitou, whose sumptuous flavours and weight were good with the pasta dish.

We finished off with a raspberry tart – not homemade, a £5.99 Picard one from the freezer – and a cup of lemon verbena tea. Perfect.

### Victoria Moore's wine tasting menu



Argentinian rosé wine (Waitrose, £19.99, 17 branches only and not available online) (£24.95, [sacredgin.com](http://sacredgin.com)) with grissini and prosciutto with gougères

**Rosés Mirabeau Prêt-a-Porter** (£3.49 for 250ml, Waitrose from May 20)

**Secret de Léoube 2018 Côtes de Provence** (France, [Ocado](http://Ocado), [Daylesford](http://Daylesford) Organic, £25-26)

**The Reds Domaine Jones Vieilles Vignes Fitou 2016** (France, [The Wine Society](http://The Wine Society), £13.50)

**Gilles Robin Papillon Crozes Hermitage 2017** (France, [The Wine Society](http://The Wine Society), £13.95)

**Boschkloof Syrah Stellenbosch 2016** (South Africa, Waitrose, £19.99, 17 branches only and not available online)

**Bird in Hand Shiraz 2016** (Australia, Waitrose, £19.99, Canary Wharf and Belgravia only but on [waitrosecellar.com](http://waitrosecellar.com))

**Contino Rioja Reserva 2014** (Spain, Waitrose 18 branches only and [waitrosecellar.com](http://waitrosecellar.com); also Morrisons 40 branches only, around £25)

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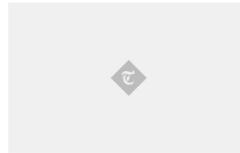


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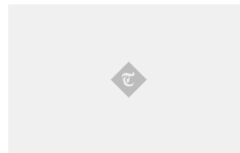
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