

Wine Over Water is fun, but tasting wine can also be a valuable learning experience -- one that can greatly enhance your knowledge of wines and the pleasure you derive in drinking them. So here are some ways that you can take advantage of your wine tasting experience on the historic Walnut Street Bridge (constructed in 1890 and saved by Cornerstones in 1989). Click here to print a PDF of this page.

Do a little homework before you get there.

The Internet is a great way to find out about the world of wines. For example:

Wine Varietals:

Here are a few links that describe some of the more popular wine varieties. They don't reveal much detail -- just enough to get you started. But you'll be able to fill in the blanks from your experience as you begin to taste the wines and form your own impression.

www.cellarnotes.net

www.winepros.org

www.wine-information.info

How to taste wines:

www.wineloverspage.com (Be sure to check out some of the other links on that page)

Red, red wine

And just for fun, find out how red wine is made: www.winereader.com

On the Bridge

During the Wine Over Water event you will find approximately 25-30 wine tents across the Walnut Street Bridge. In fact, some 300-500 different wines will be available for your tasting. They represent wines from about a dozen different countries and many different states in the U.S., including not only traditional California but also Washington State and even Idaho and Tennessee.

Choosing in Advance

With so many wines to choose from, it's clearly impossible to taste them all. Walking the full length of the bridge is, in its self, a challenge. So, rather than starting at one end and seeing how far you get, you may find it more rewarding to choose your wines and testing destinations before you even come to the bridge.

Our web site provides you with the tools to help you do so. When you click on the "2009 Wine Program" you'll be able to see what country or state the wines are from and what winery produced them. There are more wines than you can possibly taste in the available time and you will have to make some agonizing decisions. But at least when you do, your choices will be based on your own criteria rather than mere happenstance.

Mixed Drinks

While there are some who would argue to the contrary, many people find that mixing red and white wines leaves them with a headache the next morning (or maybe even that night). So just to be on the safe side, choose one type or the other and stick with it the rest of the night.

Sampling Defined

During the wine tasting event, you'll be served "samples" of your choices of wines. If you have never been to a tasting, the small amount of wine that is poured may be shocking – and seem almost rude. But don't be disparaged. There is method in this madness. The serving is designed for you to see the color and clarity of the wine, to smell it and to taste it. If you don't particularly like it, pour it out! (In this setting, it's not impolite to do so). There are small plastic buckets provided by each tent for that purpose. Then ask for your next choice. If you do like what you tasted you may ask for more. But if your wish list is long, you might move on the next tent and come back to the first later.

Take Notes

As you taste the wines, be sure to record your impressions on a piece of paper. Your printed program usually provides ample space to do so or you can use your own computer printout of the wine listings (if you remembered to bring it). Do not rely on your memory. The wine samples may be small, but two or three hours of sampling will let you remember only the happy times - as it should be. But the notes you take will be invaluable the next time you head to the wine shop.

Water – A good friend

As you sample the wines and begin to consume a modest amount of alcohol, it's nice to know that water provides a buffer that can slow the rate in which the body absorbs the alcohol. Carry a bottle of water with you or occasionally fill your glass with water from the spring water dispensers located across the bridge. Bottled water is available. In addition to drinking water, try to keep some food in your stomach. Many local restaurants will be represented at the festival and festival goers can sample the fine local and regional dining available in Chattanooga. Also, take advantage of the complimentary fresh-baked breads by Niedlov's Breadworks and the Bluff View Bakery.

Going Home

The Wine Over Water event is a festive occasion made all the more fun by the great wines that are served. But wines do temporarily impair our judgment and slow our reflexes, making driving extremely dangerous, not only to us but also to others. So, even before you leave your house, it's a good idea to plan an exit strategy and find a safe way to get back home. If you have not already established a designated non-drinking driver, call a cab (phone numbers are provided in your program) or take advantage of special hotel rates offered by some of the downtown hotels (prior reservations required). Alternatively, spend some time away from wine until your body has had a chance to metabolize the alcohol.

Memories

When all is said and done, the most important aspect of your Wine Over Water experience will hopefully be that you have had a good time. Even if you wrote nothing down or lost your notes, the fond memories of the event will likely spur you on to make wine an important and pleasant part of your life.