

Is the wine bad, or do you not care for it?

From our President, Carl Keinert, via email, November 14, 2025

First, let us accept that everyone has subjective preferences about quality and value. Such preferences can be particularly acute when wine is tasted and subjectively evaluated. That's why so many wineries exist today, providing many options to accommodate subjective taste and price preferences.

When people say a wine is bad, they oftentimes mean they don't like it. To help our members recognize a genuinely bad wine, here's a list of warning signs that clears the air.

1) **The wine is corked.** This is the flaw wine drinkers know about but oftentimes can't assess properly. Without getting into technical reasons why some corks are tainted, the result of a bad cork produces a musty smell, much like wet cardboard. Sometimes wines, particularly from Europe, have an earthy aroma that's indicative of varietals like Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Cabernet; but they're not corked. That earthiness is part of their natural aromatic profile. But if the wine has that wet cardboard smell, it is definitely bad.

2) **Volatile acidity** is created by certain bacteria developing in the presence of oxygen. The result: the wine smells like vinegar or nail polish.

3) **Exposure to heat** that forces the cork to push up against the seal and compromise its integrity causes oxidation. The wine's fruity aromas give way to a crayon-like aroma that lacks freshness or appeal.

4) **Brettanomyces** occurs in wine barrels that haven't been cleaned thoroughly, creating yeast spoilage that eventually overpowers earthy aromas and results in medicinal or barnyard-like smells that are very unpleasant.

5) **Reduction** happens when wine is exposed to insufficient amounts of oxygen during the winemaking or bottling process. An aroma of struck matches results. However, sometimes decanting a wine, particularly an older wine, rectifies this situation as exposure to air naturally dissipates the questionable smell. However, if the wine smells like rotten eggs, it's bad.

These are the definitive warning signs of bad wine. If you think a wine is bad when it doesn't show signs of these chemical flaws, the wine isn't bad; it just doesn't suit your stylistic preference. All of us have preferences.

That's why our board chooses a variety of wines from unique blends and esoteric varietals to recognizable big brand favorites. Some wines we feature intentionally appeal to different stylistic preferences at each dinner. It's a balancing act, designed to offer something for everyone, as often as possible.

We also offer a variety of price ranges for the wines we feature. Starting around \$10.00 per bottle and occasionally going up to \$35.00 or \$40.00 per bottle, most of the wines are priced between \$15.00 and \$25.00 per bottle. We're always looking for the best wines at the best prices so we can pass the savings along to you, regardless of the price range.

For our new members, it's important to note that whatever surplus we accrue from post-dinner bottle sales goes directly back into subsidizing the wine dinners: occasionally making courses like Filet Mignon and lobster possible.

Everyone on our board is committed to this club & works diligently to make every dinner and featured winery as enjoyable and satisfying as possible. We may not get everything exactly right, but we're always listening, learning, and making improvements.