

Wine Sense Book Club Questionnaire

Welcome, everyone, to our book club meeting! Tonight, we're diving into Steve Shipley's *Wine Sense: The Art of Appreciating Wine*. This book promises to take us on a journey from simply drinking wine to truly appreciating it, emphasizing that wine enjoyment is a multi-faceted experience accessible to everyone.

First, let's set the stage with a brief synopsis of *Wine Sense*.

Book Synopsis

Steve Shipley's *Wine Sense* serves as a pragmatic guide for wine enthusiasts and consumers, whether they are beginners or experienced drinkers, aiming to enhance their wine drinking enjoyment and confidence. The book seeks to demystify the complex world of wine appreciation by breaking it down into easily understandable concepts and simple steps to sophistication.

Shipley, drawing from forty years of personal experience and research, functions as an expert who unlocks the secrets behind appreciating wine. He argues against the myth that wine tasting is only for those with innate abilities, asserting that almost anyone can significantly improve their wine drinking through knowledge, practice, and experience. The core of the book revolves around sensory mastery, explaining how all five human senses—sight, smell, taste, feel, and even sound—interact with wine to create a holistic experience. While traditionally taste and smell are considered primary, Shipley delves into how each sense contributes to “tasting” wine, which he distinguishes from merely “drinking” it by adding layers of assessment, reflection, and evaluation.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to practical advice, ranging from decanting and temperature control to glassware and food pairing, all designed to elevate the everyday wine experience. Shipley also encourages readers to look behind the label, providing insights into how to buy good wines at good prices, challenging consumers to drink with confidence by trusting their own palate rather than solely relying on “experts” or marketing gimmicks. He addresses the philosophical debate surrounding the objectivity versus subjectivity of wine appreciation, concluding that while personal preference plays a role, wine characteristics can be objectively evaluated through training and practice. Furthermore, the book touches upon the hidden art of wine, viewing it as an aesthetic pursuit that fosters mindful indulgence and connects to deeper experiences and aromas of memory. Ultimately, *Wine Sense* offers a comprehensive pathway for readers to transform from amateur to connoisseur, making wine a more fulfilling and joyous part of their lifestyle.

Now, let's open up the discussion with some questions designed to spark a lively conversation. I've sequenced them to build on each other, and we can spend about five to ten minutes on each. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers!

Discussion Questions

1. The author states his two main objectives for *Wine Sense* are to **“enhance your wine drinking enjoyment and experiences”** and to **“provide you with enough knowledge, understanding and confidence to buy good wines at good prices”**. Did the book achieve these objectives for you? What was your most significant learning or takeaway from the book's overall message?
2. Shipley places great emphasis on **“sensory mastery,”** explaining how all five senses (sight, smell, taste, feel, and sound) contribute to the wine experience. Before reading *Wine Sense*, how consciously did you engage all your senses when appreciating wine? Which specific sense do you now feel you pay more attention to, and why?
3. A key theme in the book is the debate around whether wine tasting is **objective or subjective**. Shipley argues that with knowledge and practice, wine tasting can be evaluated objectively. Do you agree with his conclusion, and how has this perspective challenged or affirmed your own beliefs about wine judgment?
4. Chapter 5 highlights **“The Role of Language in Wine Appreciation,”** emphasizing how vocabulary can “rewire the brain” and enhance enjoyment and communication. Were there any specific wine terms or concepts presented in the book that you found particularly useful or confusing? How might improving your wine vocabulary change your future experiences?
5. The book offers numerous **practical tips** for enhancing the wine drinking experience, from proper decanting and temperature control to glassware and avoiding impediments. What was one practical tip you found most surprising, insightful, or immediately applicable to your own wine habits? Did you try implementing it, and what was your experience?
6. Shipley encourages “tasting” wine with **“attention and contemplation”** rather than just “drinking” it, aligning with the trope of **“mindful indulgence”**. How does this concept resonate with your personal approach to wine? Has the book encouraged you to integrate wine more thoughtfully into your lifestyle or social interactions?
7. Regarding **“buying and storing wine,”** Shipley shares his own experience of overpaying and over-accumulating, advising readers to trust their own tastes and research **“behind the label”**. What aspect of the advice on smart buying or cellaring resonated most with you? What's one change you might consider making to your wine purchasing or storage habits moving forward?
8. The author delves into **“Wine as an Aesthetic Experience,”** suggesting it can be viewed as an art form or an “aesthetic pursuit” due to its complexity and ability to

evoke deep reflection. Before this book, did you consider wine to be an art form? How do the arguments presented (e.g., balance, complexity, intentional creation) shape your view now?

9. Shipley acknowledges the risk of **“over-analyzing”** wine and potentially decreasing enjoyment, but he believes knowledge ultimately enhances the experience. Where do you draw the line between informed appreciation and “over-analysis” that might detract from the simple pleasure of drinking wine?
10. The book details a journey from **“amateur to connoisseur,”** emphasizing that continuous learning and experience are key. What stage of this journey do you feel you are currently? What’s one specific action, inspired by the book, that you might take to continue your personal wine education or practice?

If time permits, here are five optional questions for further discussion:

Optional Questions

- Shipley weaves his personal anecdotes throughout the book, from his father’s homemade wine to his realization about his bodily senses after his father’s stroke. How did these **personal stories** impact your engagement with the material or your perception of the author’s credibility?
- The book explicitly aims to **bust common myths** and prejudices, such as the idea that wine tasting is purely subjective or that certain wines (like those with screw caps) are inherently inferior. Did the book challenge any of your long-held beliefs or habits regarding wine?
- Shipley discusses how our **mood and attitude** can significantly impact the wine drinking experience. Have you ever noticed your mood affecting your perception of a wine’s quality? What strategies might you employ to ensure your mood enhances, rather than detracts from, your wine enjoyment?
- The author notes how elements like **wine labels, bottle shape, and even the appearance of “tears”** in the glass can create “stimulus errors” that influence our perception of quality, sometimes leading to overpaying. Can you recall an instance where you might have been influenced by such external factors when choosing or judging a wine?
- The **“Where to Next?”** section provides a wealth of resources for **further wine education**. After reading this book, is there a particular type of book, course, or experience (e.g., wine movies, advanced training, working in the industry) that you are now more inclined to explore?