Guglielmo Rocchiccioli
Sommelier

guglielmo.rocchiccioli@gmail.com
www.sommelierguglielmorocchiccioli.com/blog/

14. Wine Tasting

The components found in wine produce a variety of stimuli that travel as signals form the eyes, nose, and mouth through the nervous system and allow the taster to evaluate the wine and the consumer to accept or reject it. A wine's organoleptic characteristics are a set of substances with smell, taste, or texture that are recognized through the brain's interpretation of the sensorial stimuli that result from tasting the wine.

In medical terms these are called the neurophysiological mechanisms of tasting. Wine tasting activates a series of sensorial stimuli that are the sapid (flavour) and smell components of the wine. Certain molecules or fractions of molecules are able to excite the nerve endings, and a current of excitation passes from the neurons of the sense nerves to the brain, producing a sensation.

This sensation is therefore said to have a smell or taste. The synthesis of this information takes place in the brain's olfactory or gustatory center, which tries to decipher it and compare it with information the taster has memorized from past experiences. When there is recognition, there is perception, a real interpretation. Sensation is unconscious, while perception is conscious. An unknown sensation cannot be interpreted and passes unnoticed or is confused with a neighbouring sensation. For an olfactory or gustatory sensation to appear, sufficient stimuli is necessary; and even greater concentration is required for perception, that is, to recognize the stimulus and identify the sensation. People vary in their abilities to detect and identify taste, so the threshold of perception is useful in selecting the abilities for tasting.

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Trained tasters often have different thresholds for certain substances and tastes, but they are trained to act correctly on a balance of flavours or analogy of smells. This means that they smell and taste in the same way, just as most people see and hear in the same way.