



The End of the Special Relationship?  
REVIEW

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The New Style Icons  
OFF DUTY

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# OFF DUTY

## A Harley That Doesn't Roar

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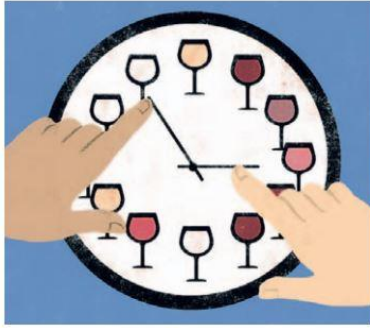
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## EATING &amp; DRINKING



ON WINE / LETTIE TEAGUE



## Exactly What Time of Day Is Wine O'Clock?

**THERE ARE SO** many myths surrounding wine: White must be consumed before red. The more expensive the bottle, the better. Wine should never be consumed before 5 p.m. I've heard that last maxim from a surprising number of wine drinkers, including, just last week, my cousin Susan, when she and I met at a wine bar in Midtown Manhattan. "Why 5 o'clock?" I asked? Susan maintained that drinking wine before that hour signals a problem.

This got me thinking about the notion of drinking wine (or not) at a particular time of day and all that might imply. Why might other oenophiles choose to wait until an appointed hour to drink a glass or open a bottle? I decided to ask a diverse group of drinkers—casual wine lovers as well as wine pros—what time they thought wine should, or should not, be enjoyed.

One of the first people I asked was my longtime family doctor, Martin Feuer. He cited the 5 o'clock hour as well, even while conceding that alcohol doesn't really affect the body differently at different times of the day. "From a health point of view it

actually doesn't make any difference," he said.

The 5 o'clock hour is, of course, the time-honored "cocktail hour" aka "happy hour" that signaled the end of the workday in the 1960s and '70s. It's a quaint concept, no longer applicable for many professionals who essentially work around the clock, per-

**He recommended a shared half bottle of Champagne for optimal breakfast-time drinking. 'That's one and a half glasses apiece.'**

petually available via electronic devices. Several states no longer allow bars or restaurants to advertise "happy hour" specials, citing concerns about public health.

A number of wine drinkers I surveyed named noon or lunch as a time when one might consider drinking a glass, yet almost all of them added that they, personally, would not, lest it impair their productivity during the rest of the

day. The word productive came up a lot in assessing when to drink wine and when to avoid it. Drinking wine at lunch was widely deemed acceptable under certain conditions: if one were, for example, on vacation and in the company of others, or at a business lunch. Drinking alone at lunch was roundly dismissed as unwise and/or unthinkable.

Drinking wine at breakfast, meanwhile, proved a particularly divisive idea. Some oenophiles considered it an inconsequential act, especially in the case of Champagne, alone or mixed with orange juice, as in a Mimosa. One friend said she'd drink Champagne at breakfast "because it's not really wine." A few respondents considered drinking any sort of alcohol at breakfast a very bad ideal; to Dr. Feuer it signaled "a sad downward spiral."

I'd never thought about drinking wine at breakfast, and I've never done so. But I also tend to eat toast or cereal, neither of which, one friend pointed out, pair well with Champagne—though she thought a breakfast of eggs and toast would make a suitable pairing. Unsurprisingly, wine

professionals were less troubled, on the whole, by the idea of drinking Champagne with breakfast, even if some of them stressed that they do so only on special occasions, or their days off.

Caleb Ganzer, wine director and managing partner of Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels, a wine bar in Manhattan, even matches specific types of coffee with specific Champagnes. For example, he suggested pairing rosé Champagne with a fruity lighter roast, and a sweeter Champagne with a darker roast. He recommended a shared half bottle of Champagne for optimal breakfast-time drinking. "That's one and a half glasses apiece," he noted.

He pointed out that Champagne is also appropriate at the end of the night. Although Mr. Ganzer generally doesn't drink before 7 p.m., he said, he might drink wine or Champagne quite late. He finds the latter is often the choice of restaurant professionals who turn up at his bar late.

Aldo Sohm, wine director of Le Bernardin and wine director and partner of Aldo Sohm Wine Bar in Manhattan, tastes wine all day long but rarely drinks a glass until

the evening. "If I start drinking at 10 o'clock in the morning, what kind of shape would I be in at 5 p.m.?" Mr. Sohm said. (The one time he had wine for breakfast, he was working the harvest in Burgundy. Breakfast-time wine drinking during harvest is pretty much the norm there.)

Vanessa Rea, wine director and sommelier at the Boston restaurant Eastern Standard, said she serves some of her clientele wine very early in the day indeed. Eastern Standard opens at 7 a.m. and lies in close proximity to several hospitals in the Longwood Medical district. Doctors and nurses often drop by after all-night shifts for a glass of Riesling or Cava or a Mimosa, she said. (Ms. Rea's breakfast drink, when she imbibes, is Riesling or Champagne.)

Though drinking wine early in the day was clearly controversial among the wine drinkers I talked to, no one seemed to think it's ever too late for a glass of wine. If the company is good, and/or dancing is involved, and/or the wine is great, then why not?

Chris Dunaway, wine director of the Little Nell hotel in Aspen, Colo., recounted the story of a couple who came to dinner along with a friend, ordered a few bottles from the list and later, guided by Mr. Dunaway, repaired to the hotel wine cellar, where they drank a few more great bottles. It was 4:30 a.m. by the time they finished. "I had to get on a plane to Australia," Mr. Dunaway recalled. (For the record, Mr. Dunaway, will open a bottle of Champagne while cooking breakfast on his day off.)

I've never drunk wine until the wee hours of the morning, not even in college, and I only occasionally drink wine at lunch (and never by myself). And while I often taste wines before 5 p.m., I always spit them out. I wonder if this means I'm missing out.

For example, what would it be like to drink Champagne with breakfast? Would it be like taking a small vacation—or a detour into dissolution, as Dr. Feuer might say. When I floated the idea past my husband, Roger, he was resistant.

"I have to be productive," he insisted. (That word again.) But I bought a half bottle of rosé Champagne anyway—a fruity Deutz non-vintage brut rosé (\$35)—and he made a big dish of eggs. I poured the coffee and then the Champagne.

It was delicious, Roger conceded, and quite festive—maybe because the Champagne was pink? The fruitiness of the Deutz made it seem as if we were drinking juice "but better," as I said to him. The bubbly went surprisingly well with coffee, too, as Mr. Ganzer had promised. But after less than half a glass apiece, we both admitted defeat. It wasn't that pleasurable; in fact it was a bit tiring. I put the bottle away and put the rest of the glass into the refrigerator to drink later—after 5 o'clock, naturally.

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