

About Colour and Tannin Precipitation in Red Wines

1. What is it?

During the aging process, some red wines may deposit a thin dusting of solid precipitate on the inside surfaces of the wine bottle.

2. Where does it come from?

Contrary to what some people may think, this precipitate is not the result of poor filtration, spoilage, re-fermentation of the wine, or any sort of winemaking faults. It is a result of the natural aging process. The same process that makes wine smoother with age causes the precipitate. Tannins, compounds that make some red wines taste astringent in their youth, combine with natural pigments in the wine and precipitate out of the wine as a solid. As the tannins precipitate, the red wine becomes smoother.

3. Does the precipitation adversely affect the quality of the wine.

No. The precipitation is not a defect in the wine. The wine actually improves and becomes smoother as a result of the precipitation. The wine will remain clear as long as the bottle is not shaken excessively.

4. Are some red wines more likely to develop precipitate than others?

Although any red wine can precipitate tannins, in general, the fuller bodied, darker coloured, more age-worthy wines will precipitate more than lighter, younger-drinking reds. Usually, higher quality wines will be more prone to throwing a precipitate.

5. What can be done to prevent this precipitation?

Commercial wineries tend to hold their wines in bulk and at refrigeration temperatures for at least 1 year, allowing much of the precipitation to take place before bottling. This is the only good preventative measure for bottle dusting. Filtration, fining and other treatments will not prevent the precipitate from forming.

6. What is the best method of serving this wine?

Usually, the precipitate will adhere to the inside surfaces of the bottle, and the wine can be safely poured into glasses. If there is a heavy precipitate, decanting the wine prior to serving is recommended.

Sources:

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