**Here are the components of the wine flavor to pay attention to when tasting:**

• *Dry/Sweet - Is the wine dry or sweet?* Whether a wine is dry or sweet refers only to whether it has residual sugar in the bottled wine. Most table wines are fermented totally dry and have no residual sugar. Some wines, especially dessert wines, have some sugar left which makes the wine sweet. Part of the confusion comes from the fact that tannins (particularly in heavy red wines) have a drying feeling in the mouth. This does not mean that the wine is dry. It may have a dry feel to it, but it has nothing to do with the sugar or lack thereof. Even some dessert wines like Port which are sweet can have high tannins and therefore feel "dry". In regards to the sugar, notice if the wine is completely dry or if it is off dry with a bit of sweetness or is it sticky sweet?

• *Body* - The body of a wine's flavor refers to the weight of the wine in your mouth. Does it feel large, heavy and thick or is it light. Does it weigh on your palate or is it weightless? Body is usually described on a scale in terms of lightness or heaviness, ranging from very light to very heavy or full-bodied.

• *Acidity* - You all know acidity from other tart foods. Vinegar and lemon juice are high in acid and thus taste tart and acidic. Wine normally has acid in it as well, although it can vary. Acidity is part of what is considered the wine's structure. It helps hold the flavors together and give them thrust and power. Too little acid and the wine is flat and flabby. Just the right amount can make the wine feel lively and fresh. However, too much acidity can make the wine excessively tart and even seem lean and pinched. Ideally, you want acidity to hold the wine together and give it presence but it should be in balance with the other components of the wine. Different types of wine will vary as to their natural acidity.

• *Tannins* - Tannins are polyphenol chemicals that are naturally occurring, particularly in the skins of red grapes. While most wines have some tannins, they are most noticeable in heavier red wines. People usually describe the tannins as causing a drying, astringent feeling inside their mouth. Tannins vary depending on the ripeness of fruit. It is normal for young red wines to have tannins but they should not be excessively astringent. Rather they should be soft and silky, integrating nicely with the rest of the wine. However, tannins can also be bitter and astringent, feeling harsh, hard and chunky in the mouth, detracting from the elegant mouthfeel of the wine. Describe how noticeable they are as well as if they feel soft or astringent and hard.

• *Flavor Intensity* - This is a measure of how powerful the wine flavor is. Does it kick you in the face with an intense flavor or is it watered down and weak? While this can go hand in hand with the body of the wine, even lighter styled wines can be intense and powerful. Think not about how "big" it feels in your mouth but rather how intense the flavor jumps out at you.

• *Specific Flavors* - Most wine tasters like to search for descriptors to describe the specific flavors a wine reminds them of. Like the wine aroma, this can vary from fruit flavors to just about anything else, like spice, chocolate, oak, and others. There is no right and wrong. From your experience, simply think about what it reminds you of. Cherries? Sweet tobacco? Lemons? It also helps to explore whether the fruit flavors seem ripe and sweet or if they seem under-ripe and green. Even if a wine is dry (has no residual sugar) it can have ripe fruit which gives the impression of sweetness. If you are having trouble coming up with descriptors or picking out the subtle, complex wine flavors you taste, you can consider trying out a Wine Tasting Wheel to guide you.

• *Mouthfeel* - The mouthfeel of a wine is an overall sense of how the wine feels in your mouth. A great wine should feel good in your mouth. It should not be harsh or clunky. It should be silky or velvety. It should caress the inside of your mouth and feel good going down your throat. This is one of the hard to define characteristics about wine flavor, which set apart a good wine from a great one. The greatest, most noble wines have a great, flawless mouthfeel, lending the wine a sense of elegance and finesse.

• *First impressions* – What are the first impressions the wine makes on your palate when you first put it in your mouth. Does it jump out at you and knock you over or is it stealthy, hardly making an impression?

• *Midpalate* - The midpalate is the flavor profile and feel of the wine in your mouth after the initial taste of flavor and before the finish. Some wines may jump out initially, but then fall flat and lack a midpalate. A great wine should be consistent, making a good impression throughout the tasting process.

• *Finish* - The finish is another aspect of the wine flavor that often goes overlooked for novice wine tasters yet is one of the most important characteristics that set off the greatest wines in the world. Great wines have a long, lingering finish, which is flavorful, balanced and entices you to go back for the next sip. Pay attention after swallowing or spitting the wine. Does the flavor drop off immediately (short or no finish), does it linger but have an odd or unpleasant aftertaste, or does it reverberate on your palate with beautiful flavors that last a long time (long finish)?

• *Balance* - Wine should be balanced, meaning that all of its component parts are harmonized into one cohesive whole. In other words, each of the aspects to the wine flavor fit together beautifully without anything sticking out awkwardly. The tannins, acid, body and flavors should all be noticeable and pleasant but not overpowering. If anyone of these is dominating and getting in the way of your appreciating of the other components, then the wine is out of balance. Perfect balance is another important hallmark of a great wine.