

In praise of day-old wine

'03 Hugel Gewürztraminer good the first day, better the next

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By and large, people view food and wine as opposites when it comes to aging. A basket of tomatoes a little past its prime just won't do for most, although there are those (like me) who love the idea of paying just a dollar for a pile of "yesterday's tomatoes," as one farm stand I know calls them, knowing that even with a few bruises they'll be fine for a delicious sauce.

Many wines, on the other hand, are sold and served too young, before they've had time to lose their rough edges and develop their potential in the bottle. Although it was an advertising gimmick for a budget brand, Paul Masson was on to something back in the 1970s when the California winery, using none other than Orson Welles, came up with the immortal line, "We will sell no wine before its time." And yet, so many do.

As most people know, letting a good red wine breathe for an hour or two will, to a point, help it to open and reveal its pleasures. The tastes will continue to emerge as you pour and swirl it. And I have noticed something else — that wine left over from a dinner, whether red or white, is sometimes even better the next day. All of this is based on the same principle: that exposure to air helps a wine soften by accelerating the aging process.

I found an unanticipated example of this last week with a bottle of the newly released 2003 Gewürztraminer from Hugel, a venerable wine house in France's Alsace region, which borders Germany.

I opened it with some Chinese takeout food. Gewürztraminer, with its herb and spice notes, is a classic white-wine accompaniment to spicy cuisine, and this one, at around \$20, certainly performed the intended function. At the end of the meal, with a few inches left in the bottle, I stuck the cork back in and returned it to the refrigerator for the night.



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The next evening, thinking that the leftover Gewürz would still make a decent aperitif, I poured a glass. Not only was it decent, it was lovely. Punctuated by slight touches of sage and rosemary, the wine had beautiful fruit, including apple, peach and orange that emerged fully as it warmed up a bit in the glass (serving white wines too cold can obscure their tastes). This is a light, gentle and accessible Gewürztraminer defined more by its enticing fruit than a strong spice component. Beyond Asian food, it would be a good companion to grilled fish and other assertive white-wine foods. Open it an hour or two before you serve it, and do save a little for the next day.

Frederick Wildman and Sons is the importer, www.frederickwildman.com.