

# CALERA

**WINE OFFERING** FALL 2001

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## **HOT WINE and What You Can Do About It**

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By Josh Jensen

We Americans typically serve and drink our wines at the wrong temperatures, the whites too cold and the reds too hot.

In our spring 2001 mailer, I wrote about white wines and how we usually drink them too cold. If your significant other threw away that masterpiece before you had a chance to study it, just let us know. We'll be happy to mail you another copy

Let's turn our attention to the opposite phenomenon: wines (almost always red wines) that are served too warm, even hot.

Why in the world, you might reasonably ask, would anyone knowingly mistreat fine red wines? Why would they mistreat fine *people* -- such as friends, guests and fellow wine lovers -- by serving too-warm red wines?

The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind.

No, check that. The true answer is that all the world's wine experts have been telling us since at least the 17th century that red wines are supposed to be served at room temperature, *chambre* in French.

That was good advice in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the temperature in the rooms of most houses, including those owned or frequented by wine experts, was cool by modern standards. I'm talking about the European countries from which we Americans over the past few hundred years have taken our lead on the subject of wine -- France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal as concerns wine producing countries, and England, whose wine experts and authors have influenced us greatly over hundreds of years.

Two to three hundred years ago, none of these countries had the modern, made-in-the-U.S.A. type of central heating systems that we have nowadays, with thermostats you can set high or low to get practically instant gratification. Rooms back then, whether they

were in a grand royal palace or a simple stone house, were downright chilly by today's standards, especially during long English and French winters.

The rooms might have been 50° or at most 55° F, even with roaring fires in the fireplaces. That's why they had to wear all those ermine robes, capes and formal attire you see in paintings hanging in museums. At any rate, even during the spring and fall seasons, the temperatures inside these palaces, castles, manor houses and even simple farmhouses might have risen to as much as 55° or 60°, but no warmer. And in summer, in London and Paris, most of those big old stone houses remain pretty cool, say 60° F, for all but the few hottest weeks of summer.

So *those* are the "room temperatures" wine experts have talked about all these centuries, and *those* are the correct temperatures for serving and best appreciating red wines, that is, 50° to 55°, and certainly not more than 60° F. That's what the old-timers meant when they wrote "at room temperature" all those years. They didn't mean 68° or 72° or even higher, although these hotter temperatures are the ones at which most American wine drinkers maintain their houses these days, and therefore at which we tend to drink our red wines.

And I'm here to tell you that 68°, 72°, 75° and the like are too darn hot.

What, you may ask, is so bad about drinking red wines at those warmer temperatures? I would first answer that question with another question: Are there any beverages you like to drink at the temperature of a warm room? The only drink that even comes to mind is water, good old **H<sub>2</sub>O**, the most-neutral tasting but necessary of all God's beverages.

Now, most people would prefer their water cool, or cold. If there are any of you who drink soda pop, do you ever ask for it slightly warm? The mere thought nauseates me. But then the thought of drinking *any* soda pop at *any* temperature nauseates me. When I was a kid I was told that drinking warmed-up Cola was an effective emetic.

There certainly is a whole universe of hot drinks, a fine, diverse and distinguished category of beverages. But I don't know of any beverage that people specifically choose to drink slightly warm.

But speaking in generalities about drinking slightly warm drinks hasn't answered my question: What's so bad about red wines at slightly warm temperatures?

If we think about how a red wine presents itself to our taste-buds when it's a little warm, the answer becomes clear. When red

wine is served at those warmer temperatures, most, if not all, of its charm and balance go out the window. The flavors of this particular beverage become coarse. A wine's alcohol, even if it's only 12 percent, will start to become obvious, to "jump out at you," as the wine becomes warmer. The tannins, which are more abundant in reds than in whites, begin to stand out, too, disturbing the wine's overall harmony and grace if the wine gets too warm.

Finally, and this may be more off-putting than all the above reasons, any flaws in a wine will become more obvious at warmer temps.

It's for precisely this reason that heavy-duty, big-league international wine buyers who work for the major international trading and import houses always make sure the candidate wines they are evaluating for possible purchase are slightly warm when they taste them. If there's a flaw in a wine, they absolutely want to know about it.

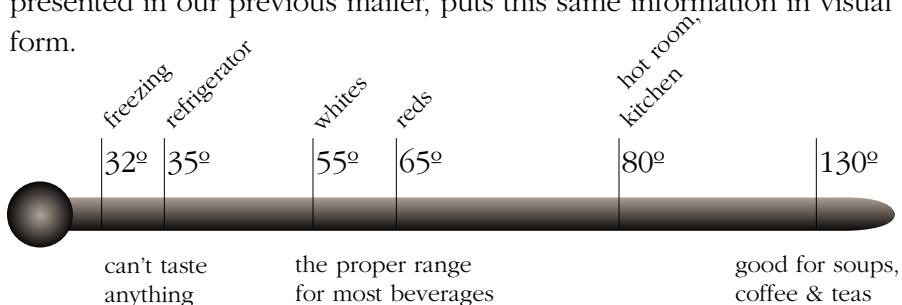
I hold these heavy-hitter buyers in particular esteem. For you or me, going into a wine shop and trying to decide whether to buy this or that wine to take home for dinner, or even to add it to our collection, usually we're talking under a hundred dollars, or maybe a few hundred at most. So we taste the wine, if we have a chance, and make our decision.

The people who work for the big import and trading houses, on the other hand, can commit \$30,000 or \$50,000 or more on a single wine -- and that may be just one of dozens of wines on which they spend their firm's money that particular day. They have nothing other than their own palates to rely on, in making decisions that will cost their firm hundreds of thousands of dollars. So if a given buyer loads up too many wines that turn out to be less than stellar, he'll soon be out of a job. He needs nerves of steel, and he always wants to taste these samples a little warm, so he'll be able to detect any imperfections in each wine, and how serious the imperfections might be.

It's an act of pure professionalism for big-hitter international wine buyers to taste their samples warm. But for you and me at home or in a restaurant, it's a crying shame. You certainly don't want to highlight any imperfections there may be in a wine you are serving to family or guests, do you? You don't want to serve them a wine in which the alcohol and tannins aggressively jump out of the glass at them, I wouldn't think. You don't want to serve them a wine that would have been well balanced at a proper, cooler temperature, but

instead has become unbalanced and disagreeable simply because it's too warm, do you?

To sum up: Red wines should be served cool, around 60° Fahrenheit. Whites should be served just a little cooler – not cold – say, around 55° F. The chart below, slightly different from the one I presented in our previous mailer, puts this same information in visual form.



You might be able to tell from the above visual that I have a built-in bias not only against beverages, such as wine, being served too warm, but also against those that are served too cold. For the life of me I can't figure out why most Americans fill their glasses with ice, and then pour the beverage over the top of all that ice. I think we have an ice fetish in this country. I don't get it.

I might have been influenced by the two years I spent in England and by the two I spent in France in my youth, because people in those countries can't really figure out why in the world most Americans want to have their drinks so freezing-cold. One or two ice cubes in a glass of most beverages will drop the temperature sufficiently to where it will be cool and refreshing. But an ice cube can come in handy for fixing the temperature of a red wine that's too warm. Read on.

## Troubleshooting, part I: What to do in your own home

There will be times, unfortunately a lot of times for most of us, when in spite of our best efforts and intentions, we're confronted with a bottle of red wine that's warmer than we want it to be.

But just how can you tell it's too warm? There are wine thermometers you can buy, believe it or not. Some models are designed to be dipped right into the wine. Others wrap around the outside of the bottle, but I've never wanted to spend the money on them. I just touch the bottle. You know, put my hand on it the same way you put

your hand on a child's forehead to see if he or she has a fever. You'll get dialed in pretty quickly as to how a bottle of red wine should feel -- whether it's too cold or too warm, and whether its "cool" feel to the touch is just right.

So let's say that in spite of all your best efforts you find yourself holding a too-warm bottle of wine, and it so happens that's the bottle you want to open and drink. There are any number of ways it might have got that way. Maybe you just bought the wine, and it had to sit in your warm car on the way back from the wine shop. Or, more commonly, the bottle might have been sitting out on the counter in the kitchen. Or, even worse, on top of the fridge. Those are usually pretty warm places in a house, and they're also where a lot of people keep their wines. Hey, I'm not pointing fingers here. I'll be the first to admit that most houses and apartments don't have ideal wine storage setups. I say this because my own wine storage is far from ideal.

The solution is easy:

1. Take the bottle from the top of the fridge.
2. Put it *into* the fridge for a few minutes. Five minutes, or at most 10, should do the trick in most cases, depending on how often you and/or your significant other are opening and closing the door of the fridge, etc.

3. Put it in the freezer. This works *faster*. Just don't forget you put it in there, which can happen if you're serving several bottles that night. Then you would find a frozen bottle of wine in your freezer the next time you open it. I speak from experience.

4. An ice bucket is the fastest way to cool it down, if you're in a super hurry. Depending on how warm it started out, the wine will need only a few minutes in the bucket to bring it back to a charming, delightful temperature.

Attention ice-bucket users: Always remember that an ice bucket should contain mostly water, plus enough ice to keep the water very cold. If you put nothing but ice into an ice bucket, most of the time you can't cram the bottle down into the ice, so the bottle just sits on top of the ice, where the heat transfer will take a long time.

If you put a bottle of red wine into an ice bucket and take it out one minute later, the glass bottle will feel cool, even cold, to the touch. But the temperature of the wine *inside* the bottle hardly will have changed at all by that point. So you just have to guess-timate how long to leave it in the bucket, or take it out for a few minutes and then check by touching it with your hand. You also can open the bottle, pour a small sip and see if you got it right, and then put it back in the ice bucket if it still needs more cooling.

## **Troubleshooting, part 2: What to do if you're a guest in someone else's house**

Here, I think, your hands are tied. If your host serves a white wine that's freezing cold and follows it with a red that's way too warm, there's really nothing you can do. Suggest an ice bucket? Your host would take offense. My advice is just to enjoy the food, the conversation...and the wine, to the extent you can.

I also recommend resisting the temptation to say, "Well, I see you like your red wines on the warm side." Nobody likes a wise guy.

## **Troubleshooting, part 3: What to do in a restaurant**

Here you can do something because you're paying. When a waiter or sommelier presents the red wine bottle I've ordered, I'll often just reach out and put my hand on the bottle to "take its temperature." If it's too far to reach, or if my touching the bottle might seem awkward, I'll ask him or her if I may feel the bottle. That might make him or her think I'm weird. But so what? I'm the customer. And maybe I am weird.

Restaurants, even the very best ones, never seem to have enough storage space for their wines. In fairness to restaurant owners, they have about a million other things to worry about. Far too many restaurants store their wines in any space that is left over when all the kitchen's needs, the office's needs, and all the other possible needs have been taken care of. So wine might be stored in a hallway. Or in a large, warm converted closet. Or even – heaven forbid! – in a hot kitchen near the stove or refrigerators, which, we know, give off heat. That's just the way it works out in more restaurants than you'd care to know about.

Of course, even those restaurants put their white wines, those bottles they figure might be ordered that night or in the next few days, in the fridge, so they'll be cold when they're brought to your table -- usually too cold. But the reds are brought out to the customers at so-called "room temperature."

OK. Here's what I do when that happens to me. If I find out the red wine is too warm, and it's way before we'll be drinking it anyway. So I ask the server to put the bottle in the fridge for 10 minutes or so. But if, as is usually the case, it's a wine we're ready to start drinking, I'll ask for an ice bucket and put the red wine in it. Often, this will elicit gasps, even warnings such as, "But, sir, this is a

red wine. Red wines are meant to be served at room temperature.”

All you have to say at that point, without going into a lecture, is something like “I prefer my red wines a little on the cool side.”

#### **Troubleshooting, part 4: Ice cubes**

Ice cubes are a measure of last resort, but one I resort to all the time. Let’s say I’m in a restaurant or wine bar. I’ve ordered a red wine by the glass. It turns out to be slightly warm. I’ll just take an ice cube from my water glass and drop it into the red wine. One small cube usually is all it takes. You have to do this surreptitiously though, or the waiter or other diners will spot you and perhaps lose all respect for you. Then you might have to waste time telling them all about proper wine serving temperatures and 17th century stone castles and the tannins, alcohol and flaws of red wines all becoming too noticeable and obtrusive at warmer temperatures, and so on.

I used to think I was the only person in the world who employed the ice cube remedy. But my good friend and colleague Doug Nalle, whose excellent Zinfandel winery of the same name is in Healdsburg, Sonoma County, recently told me he does the same thing in restaurants. Doug also told me he’s starting to make Pinot Noir. Hmmm.

Although the ice cube bit sounds heretical and is guaranteed to send wine snobs into paroxysms of self-righteous indignation, I make no apologies for it. Granted, it’s not the best of all methods for cooling down a glass of red wine. But if it comes down to either drinking the wine warm or coaxing it down to the right temp and in the process diluting it by perhaps 4 or 5 percent, I say go to the ice cube. Even the greatest of red wines will taste better that way than if you had to drink them too warm. They’ll give you more pleasure.

And that’s what it’s all about.

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## RECENT PRESS REVIEWS AND ARTICLES:

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Wine & Spirits Magazine loved our 1999 Calera Viognier Mt. Harlan – so much they named it one of the 100 BEST WINES OF 2001. “The white peach flavors and buttery texture bring Condrieu to mind when tasting this fresh and beautifully balanced Viognier. There’s a cedary scent and a full concentration of flavor....”

Two other Calera wines were chosen as TOP 100 WINES of 2001 (Nov. 4, 2001) by the San Francisco Chronicle. Calera 1997 Jensen Vineyard Pinot Noir: “Elegant, complex black cherry and spice aroma, boiled tea accent; supple, silky flavors; rich fruit; long complex finish.” Calera 2000 Viognier Mt. Harlan: “Aromatic rose petal and mineral; lush, rich texture, bright fruit, ripe peach notes; long, spicy finish.”

TIME Magazine (!) published a great piece on vineyards and wineries of the Central Coast in its September 17 issue, complete with a photo of yours truly. We are enclosing a copy of the article in this mailer, in case you missed it.

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## GREAT NEW BOOK:

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The English wine writer (here we go again; no, really, this fellow knows the score) Patrick Matthews has written a marvelous new book entitled *Real Wine: The Rediscovery of Natural Winemaking*. It was published in 2000 by Mitchell Beazley, London, is 288 (small) pages in length, and lists for \$25. Matthews writes at length about Calera’s – and numerous other wineries’ – approach to winemaking. *Real Wine* is an easy to read, entertaining and highly informative small book. If you can’t find it in your local bookstore, you can order it from us. See the order form at the end of this brochure. We also are continuing to offer for sale *The Heartbreak Grape: A Journey in Search of the Perfect Pinot Noir*, by Marq de Villiers, HarperCollins Publishers, 1993, for \$23. De Villiers tells the story of Calera to 1993. (Time for a sequel, Marq?) You will find both books listed on our order form.

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## STANDING ORDERS:

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Yes, we still have the Standing Order Program! With this program we hold in our database the quantities of any of our wines you would like to have shipped to you when we offer each new vintage. We remind you of what your order would be at the time of the offering, and you can modify it, or even cancel it, at this time. Call us at (831) 637-9170 for more details or to place your standing order.



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## ON AGING WINES;

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Or, Everybody Talks About Aging Wines, But We All Want The Other Guy To Do It.

The Mt. Harlan Pinots Noirs and Chardonnay we've been offering you this year are from our 1997 vintage, which makes them just over four years old. We are one of a handful of wineries in the world that takes the time, effort and expense to age certain wines for that many years before selling them. Most wineries sell their wines much younger.

Why do we age our wines so long? The reason is simple: Our classic, made-for-aging wines receive so little handling and aeration during the winemaking process that they are usually quite restrained and tightly wound for the first two years after bottling. But with the passage of a couple additional years, they typically will begin to round into shape, and to show their opulent structure and complexities. It just takes time. We also know that many wine lovers do not have ideal long-term wine storage facilities, so we've made the decision to do the first four years of aging for you. Calera's Mt. Harlan wines are not inexpensive, but they have been aged several years for your benefit and your increased drinking pleasure.

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