



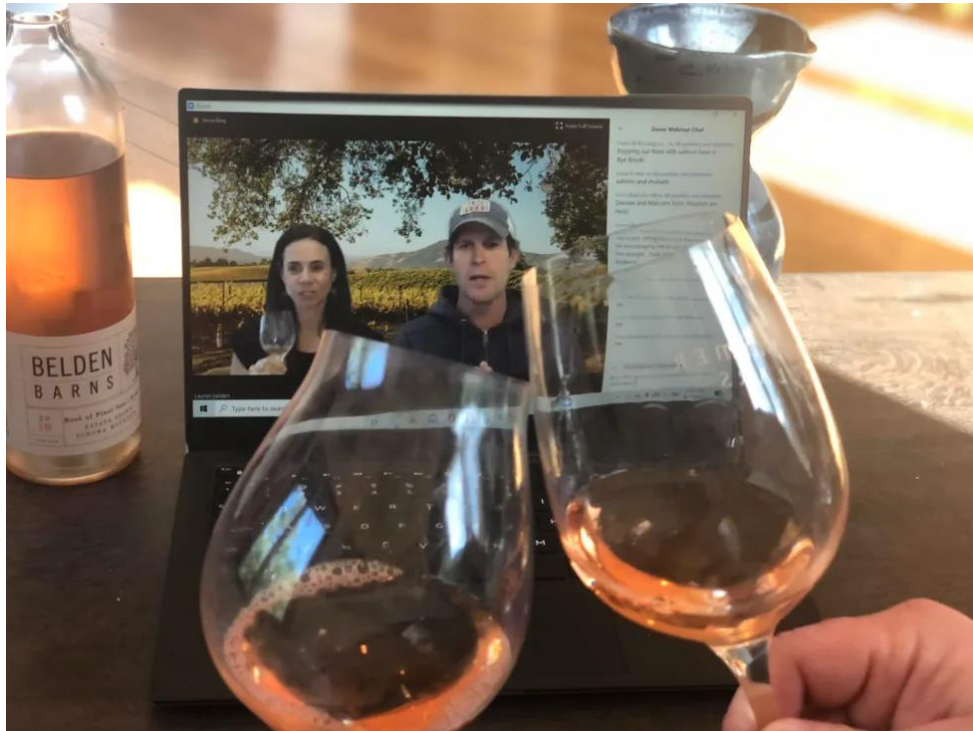
Bring Wine Country Home: Everything You Need to Know About Virtual Wine Tastings

By [Jess Lander](#) Apr 23, 2020

If you find yourself drinking a lot more wine than usual during SIP (raises hand), there's a new way to make your daily intake feel more productive, plus satisfy your craving for frolicking between vineyard rows in Napa and Sonoma: virtual wine tastings.

Wineries quickly adapted to our new normal and are bringing Wine Country right to our living rooms. Just like when you visit and have to choose from hundreds of tasting rooms, the sheer volume of virtual tasting options is utterly overwhelming. So, I took the weekend off of Netflix and spent it bingeing virtual wine tastings in order to give you the 411 on the three types available and what you can expect when sipping in your underwear.

Virtual Wine Tastings Open to the Public



Belden Barns is hosting fun and free weekly wine tastings on Zoom with a different theme each week. (Jess Lander)

It seems like almost every winery is trying this, so check your favorite winery's social media or website for details. Hosted for free on Facebook, Instagram, or Zoom, these public virtual tastings are pretty informal and off the cuff. They definitely vary in quality, education, and entertainment, but they're also low risk. The only money you'll spend to participate is if you choose to purchase the wine being tasted ahead of time. You can just as easily sip whatever you already have at home, and you're free to leave the tasting whenever you want, guilt-free.

It's here where wineries are getting the most creative. Sonoma winery [Belden Barns](#) is hosting Wines & Wishes tastings on Sunday nights. Last Sunday's tasting was rosé-themed and included trivia questions, suggested food pairings (oysters and salmon), a lesson on how rosé is made and consumed on a global scale, a giveaway, and the best part: a dance party. "We're going to do something a little weird," proprietor Lauren Belden warned, right before she and her husband Nate started dancing to Nelly's "Hot

In Here," performing a PG-rated strip tease to demonstrate how rosé often makes you feel hot when you drink it. It was a fantastic example of how wineries can use virtual tastings to strip away the pomp and circumstance and make wine, well, fun.

Some wineries, like [Bouchaine Vineyards](#) and [Cakebread Cellars](#), are hosting wine and cooking classes with guest chefs, while others are providing musical entertainment. Country music star Lucas Hoge surprised [Gamble Family Vineyards](#) viewers with a live performance during their last weekly tasting (held every Thursday), and [Tarpon Cellars](#) has launched a wine and music series on Instagram, pairing a bottle of wine with an acoustic set by a different indie rock musician each week. [Alpha Omega Winery](#) will take you right out to the sunny vineyard for a tour and tasting, and [Anaba Wines](#) is hosting a unique dessert wines tasting on May 1st. For Mother's Day, [Ehlers Estate](#) has planned [Namaste & Rosé](#), a yoga class followed by a wine tasting on May 10th.

One-on-One, Private Virtual Wine Tastings



Halleck Vineyards sent cheese and truffles to pair with their wines. (Jess Lander)

Private virtual tastings—where you're one on one with a winemaker, proprietor, Sommelier, or wine educator—are intended to transport you to Wine Country and replicate the tasting room experience as closely as possible. Napa Valley winery [Clos Du Val](#) went as far as to send along a pack of the very same breadsticks they offer in the tasting room. But unlike a real visit to Wine Country, there's no need to put on makeup and don a chic jumpsuit or flowy maxi dress (unless, of course, you're looking for any excuse to wash your hair and put on real clothes).

These tastings are perfect for people who love wine and want to learn more about it, including history, how it's made, and the ins and outs of the vineyard. Hosts can screen-share photos and maps that not only transport you to the tasting room or vineyard, but also provide context to what they're telling you. With each wine you taste, they can show you exactly where those grapes were grown.

My Clos Du Val host, Scott, said that many people are actually finding the virtual experience more personalized, focused, and intimate, and that they are more comfortable asking questions. "In a weird twist, this has become more engaging than that classic, formal tasting experience," he said. "It's refreshing. Customers are simply asking those questions that many want to ask, but seem afraid of asking in a formal tasting room."

Many wineries have multiple virtual tasting packages available at different price points (ranging from under \$100 to several hundred), and the wines tend to come at a pretty good discount. For example, my Clos Du Val "Ultimate Virtual Tasting Pack" is priced at \$385 but valued at \$515. Each tasting usually features three to five bottles, which can sometimes be customized to your preferences. Once you choose a date and time, the winery will ship you the wines; tastings typically last between one hour and 90 minutes.

I also did a private tasting with [Halleck Vineyards](#), an extremely small Sonoma producer that I was previously unfamiliar with (these tastings are a great way to discover a new favorite producer that you can look forward to visiting post-SIP). For their tasting, they sent along curated food pairings—two wedges of locally made cheese and a pair of wine-infused truffles—with a three-pack of wine. We tasted each wine with and without

the pairing and discussed how it impacted the flavors of the wine. Proprietor Ross Halleck also took us through his "Bong Hit Tasting" exercise (no bongs included, just a silly name), which uses slurping and chewing to get all of the wine's nuances to explode on the palate. "I want to debunk the idea that slurping is impolite," he said.

Private Virtual Wine Tastings for Groups



A group tasting with Clif Family Winery came with food pairings and recipes. (Jess Lander)

This is essentially what I described above, but with all of your closest friends. By far the best use, IMO, for these virtual tastings is to shake up your daily Zoom sessions with friends and family by inviting them all to join you on a wine tasting adventure. Simply find a time that works for everyone (we all have pretty open schedules these days, right?) and then each participant will order their own wine shipment.

Six couples from Houston were kind enough to let me be a fly on the wall, er, computer, of their group tasting with Napa Valley's [Clif Family Winery](#). This was much more casual than the one-on-one tastings and I felt like I was hanging with my own group of 30-something friends, for several of them had babies or young children in tow. Even if one

parent had to briefly leave the room to wrangle a tiny person, it didn't interrupt the flow of the tasting. Their host, Troy, did a good job of asking questions to get everyone engaged and talking, and participants definitely loosened up with each passing glass.

Clif Family also produces a line of artisan food products and so their tasting kit came with a slew of goodies for pairing, including organic maple curried nuts, dark chocolate truffle pistachios, and organic strawberry and fig preserves. They also sent recipes and spices that some people used to prep a full dinner beforehand as the tasting took place at 6pm.

4 Virtual Wine Tasting Tips

If your tasting includes any whites or rosés, make sure you chill them at least an hour before it's scheduled to begin.

Open your wines before the tasting starts, unless you plan on using a Coravin, the wine preservation system that enables you to pour wine without removing the cork, and thus keeps wine fresh for weeks after you've had your first glass. Both Clos Du Val and Halleck Vineyards have partnered with Coravin to include the [Coravin Model One Wine System](#) in their tasting packages for a fraction of the cost. This means you won't feel pressured to finish several bottles of wine in the few days following your tasting (though by all means, empty them all at dinner that very night or share with your quarantined neighbors).

Have at least two glasses for each person tasting, though one glass per wine is ideal. It's also helpful to have a spittoon or spit bucket, in case you don't like a particular wine or didn't finish before moving onto the next. Try to keep your pours relatively small (like in the tasting room) so you don't have to dump.

Check your internet connection and mic before starting to avoid technology delays. These issues are somewhat inevitable, so if they do happen, don't sweat. Your host will get you back up soon and, in the meantime, you have wine.

<https://www.7x7.com/virtual-wine-tasting-napa-sonoma-2645799071.html>