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MY WAY INTO WINE

FROM CROWBARS TO CORKSCREWS

I drink wine. I love wine. I have no clue about wine.

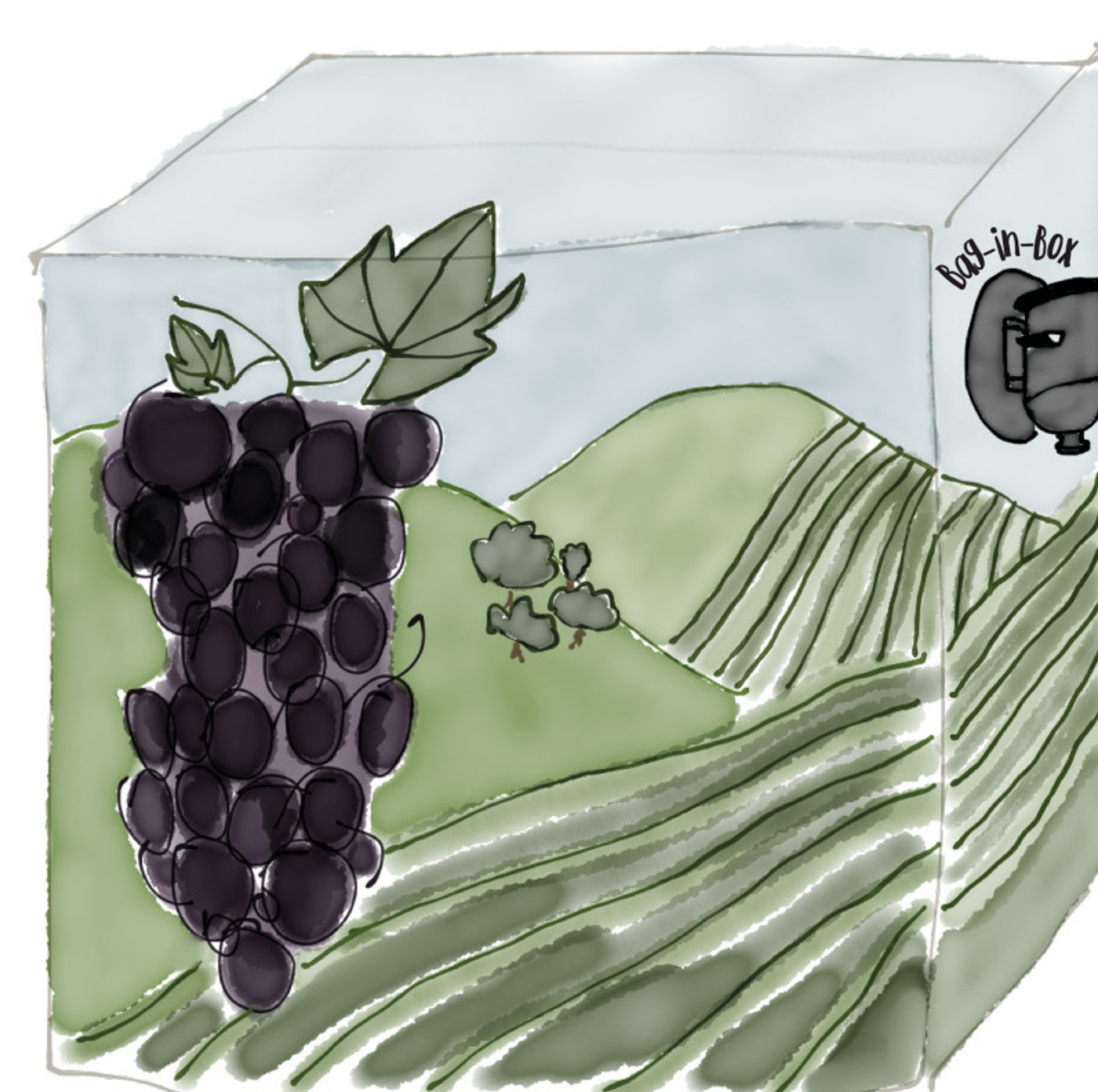
This is how my journey from wine amateur to wine expert got started—and the beginning of my story:

Growing up in a Swiss family in the wine trade, I spent my school vacations in wine cellars—wielding crowbars to open wooden crates, putting bottles on conveyor belts, slapping on custom labels, and filling bag-in-box cartons with cooking wine. I loved those jobs. And I particularly loved the smell of wine being bottled, and the cheery men in overalls, buzzing about on their pallet trucks, assembling the wine for our customers.



A few years later, wine became the subject of my bachelor's thesis, which dealt with the process of recognizing international wine trends. I traveled with our CEO to Europe's biggest wine trade fair, ProWein in Düsseldorf, Germany. While there, we met wine producers who saw their job as a passion and a calling. I caught the wine bug on the spot and knew that I would never want to work in any other profession. I completed assorted wine courses and got the chance to work at two California wineries as a hospitality intern. It was there that I also met my incredibly dynamic mentor, Lindsey, and, in the end, I really have her to thank for my career in the wine world. She presented me with new challenges on a weekly basis, pushed me to become a Certified Specialist of Wine, and constantly put me to the test. She was my greatest inspiration.

On the way toward this qualification, I very quickly realized that drinking wine is a lot more fun than learning about wine. The course material reminded me of an algebra lesson: rational, technical, and dry. What had happened to the joy—the passion? And how on earth was I going to remember all this information with a brain like a goldfish and the concentration span of a puppy?

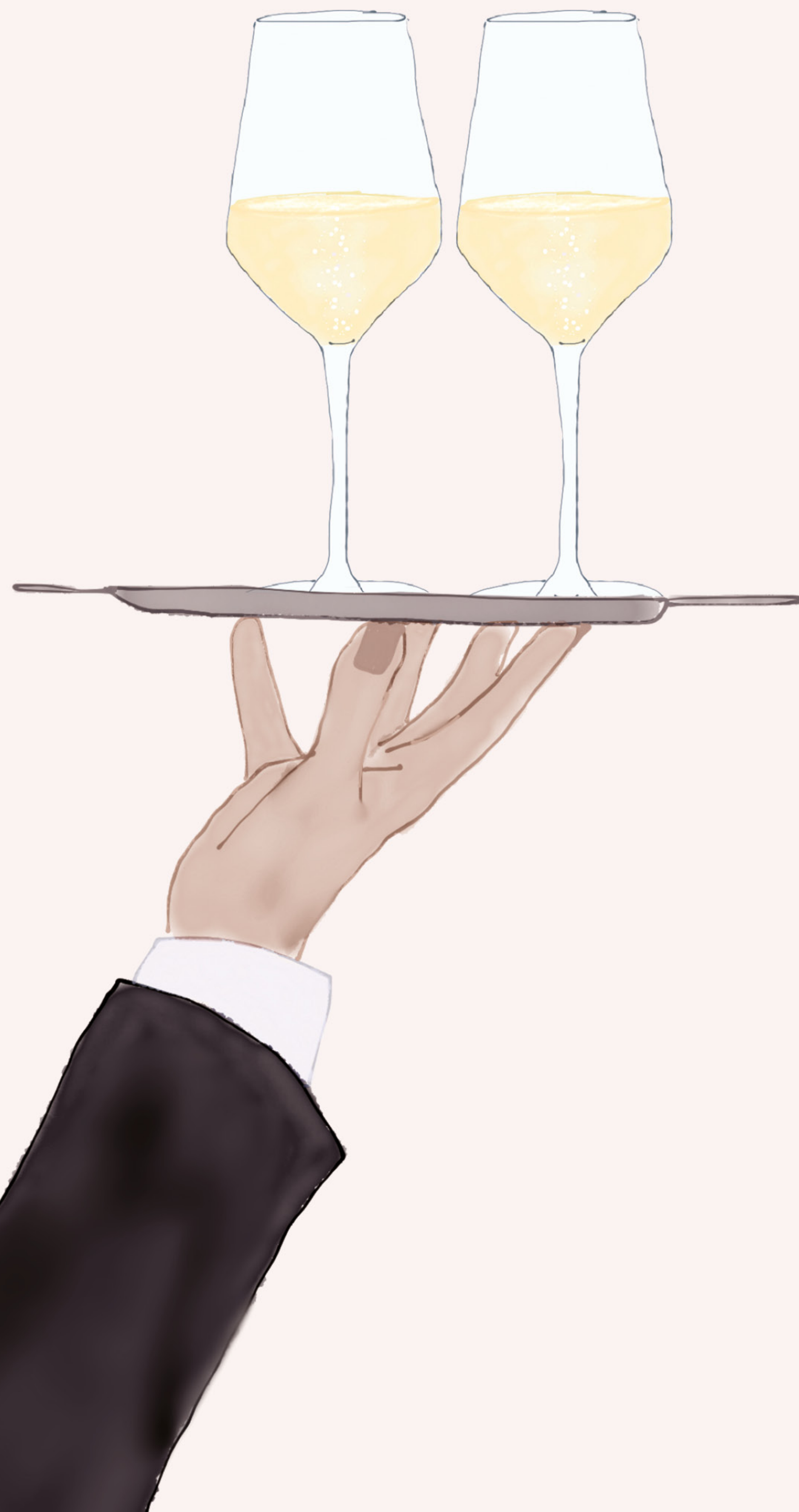


Well, thanks to an educational therapist I had in my teens, I learned I was no goldfish after all. I was taught to use colors and shapes to learn maps, words, and formulas by heart, and in the process I realized that I have a very visual mind—that's all! I was able to earn my bachelor's degree in business by sketching thousands upon thousands of multicolored, outsize mind-maps. And I couldn't shake the thought that there might be plenty of people out there who are just like me.

So I began sketching everything I'd learned about wine through illustrations. And I started thinking about creating a blog to share this knowledge in a fun and informative way.

When I led tastings at the wineries in California, I noticed

The Basics



I am assuming that you're reading this book because you like wine. So, you're primarily interested in enjoying wine, but you've realized that you have no clue about it. That's exactly why this book exists: It simplifies everything related to wine for someone like you. The only precondition is that you can open a wine bottle (or get someone to do it for you!).

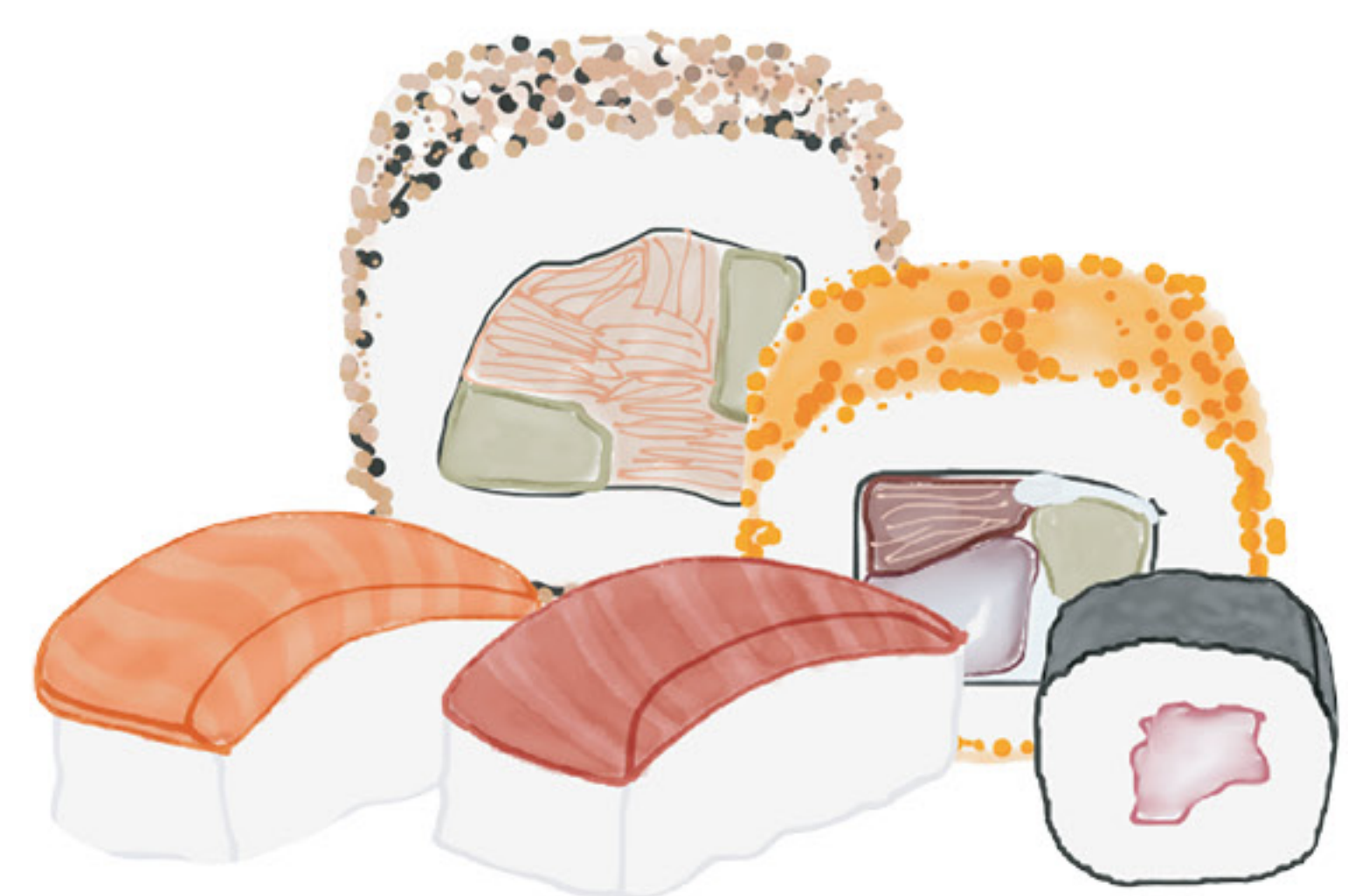
At this point, I should mention that I am not a sommelier and have no training in hotel management. Everything I know about hospitality I learned from Lindsey—my internship mentor who was an event manager.

It was an utterly unacademic way of learning, but entirely practical rather than theoretical. So, here, too, I've taken the liberty of breaking a few rules for one main purpose: practical applicability.

FOOD AND WINE PAIRING

FAVORITE FOODS

To make it easier for you to put into practice, here are a few very simple, crystal-clear suggestions for food and wine pairings.



Sushi: more powerful, punchier white wine, such as riesling *kabinett* with slight residual sweetness

Cheese ravioli: milder, rounder white wine, such as chardonnay

White meat: aromatic, refreshing wine, such as viognier

Red meat: heftier, more powerful red wine, such as malbec, syrah (or shiraz), or a Bordeaux

Veal scallopini: milder, rounder white wine, such as grüner veltliner

Spaghetti, pizza: rounder, softer red wine, such as merlot

Sausage: beer—let's not kid ourselves!



Fish, fried or grilled: milder, rounder white wine, such as pinot blanc

Fish, poached: crisper, fresher white wine, such as sauvignon blanc

Vegetarian dishes: milder, rounder white wine, such as garnacha blanca



Asian cuisine: lusher, fuller white wine, such as moscato d'Asti, or riesling with a slight residual sweetness



Shellfish: crisper, fresher white wine, such as Muscadet



Mexican cuisine: lighter, austere red wine, such as Chianti



But don't forget: Rules are made to be broken—as long as no one gets sick!

WINE GLASSES

One of the questions I get asked most often is whether the shape or type of a wine glass really has an effect, and whether you can genuinely taste a difference according to the glass. My answer is: Yes, and in a pretty big way! Try serving wine in a plastic cup. You'll find yourself booking an urgent appointment with your ear, nose, and throat doctor because the shape of the cup means you can't smell a thing.

There are dozens of shapes of wine glass, all designed to unlock the absolute maximum potential of a wine.



Burgundy glass

Bordeaux glass

For starters, I recommend a universal glass, which shows off both white and red wines equally well.

But if you want to get down to fine details, I recommend the following:

Red wine glass with a rounded bowl and a narrower top (triangle shape)

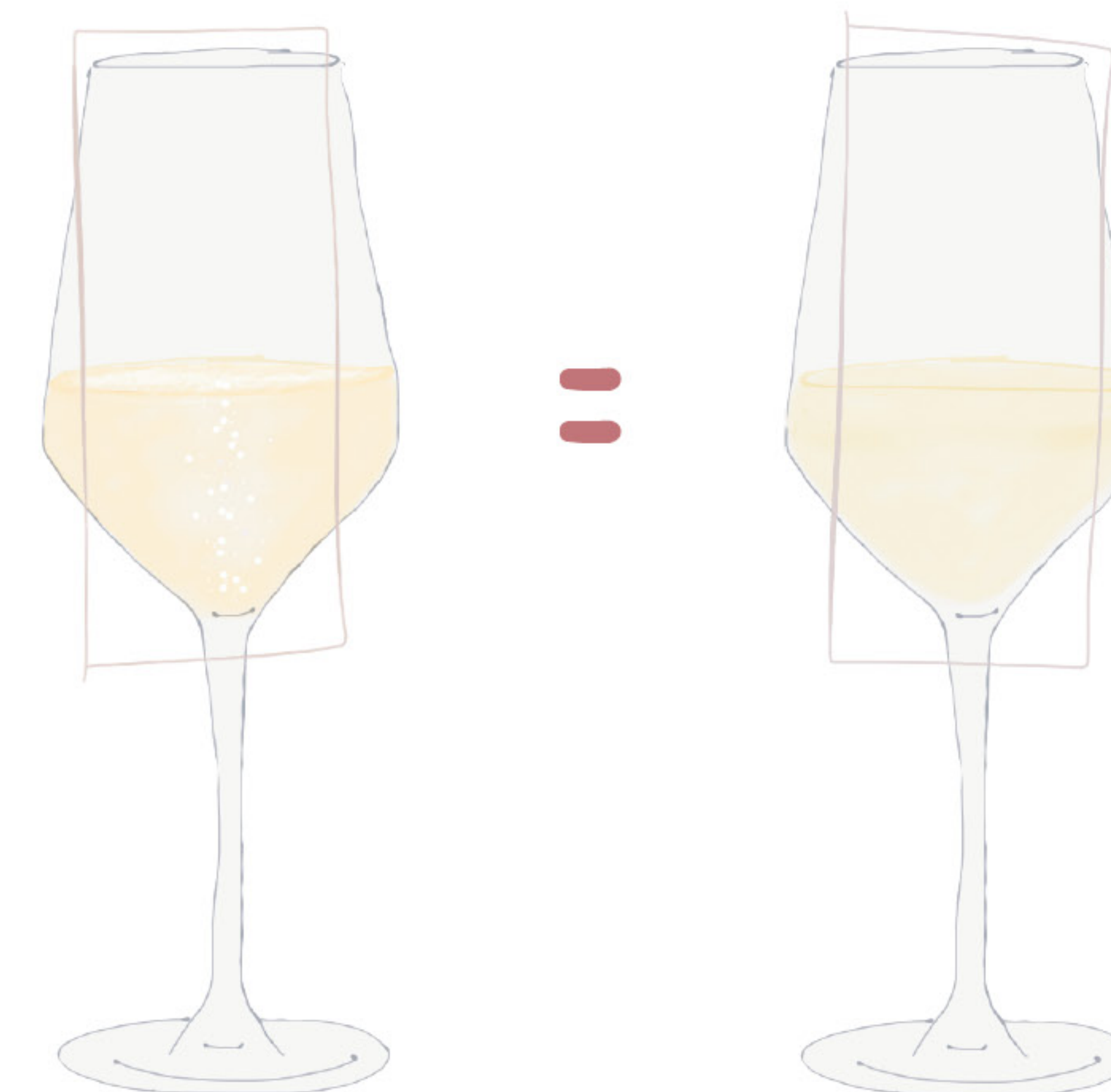
For wines with elegant, fine aromas and a somewhat lighter body, such as pinot noir or gamay. Swirling the wine in the glass opens it up nicely, and the narrower opening means that the aromas don't escape right away.

Red wine glass with bowl and top of similar width (rectangular shape)

For wines with a more forceful aroma and a more powerful or heavier body, such as cabernet sauvignon or merlot. The generous cup allows the aromas to develop on contact with air while ascending up and out of the glass. The wider surface enables any possible scent of alcohol to escape.

White wine glass with a slim cup and a narrower top

For practically any white wine, except heavy chardonnays, whose fuller body calls for a larger bowl. The tapering shape holds the floral aromas in the glass, and the acidity comes through nicely, enabling more aromas to unfold.



Sparkling Wine Glass

White Wine Glass

The difference between red and white wine glasses:

Red wines are generally more robust than whites, so their aromas and tasting notes are often better accentuated in a larger glass.

White wine glass for sparkling wine

Sparkling wines are fizzy, but they boast more than just carbon dioxide bubbles. Their aromas range from fruit to bakery-fresh bread. These scents can't develop in a narrow glass, known as flutes (or "test tubes" as I lovingly call them). We don't feel comfortable in a T-shirt that's too tight either. So I recommend using the same glass as for white wine.



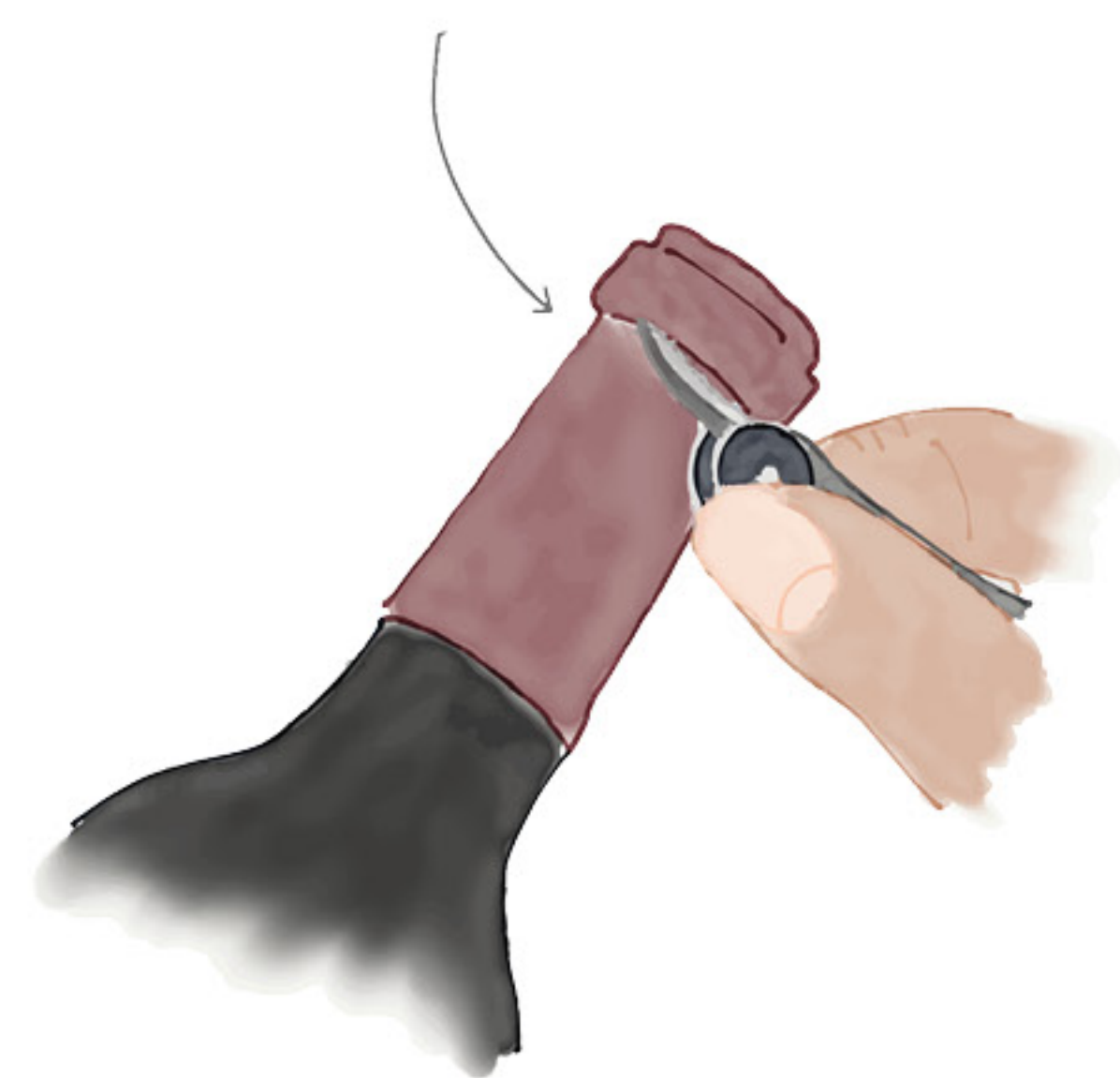
Universal wine glass

A universal glass looks something like this. Ideal for white and red wines alike.

HANDLING BOTTLES AND GLASSES

CUT AWAY THE CAP AT THE BOTTOM EDGE AND REMOVE IT.

To keep the wine from flowing over the foil. Prevents drips.



AS YOU POUR, TURN THE BOTTLE 180 DEGREES CLOCKWISE.

Don't rest the bottle on the rim of the glass.



HOLD THE BOTTLE IN THE MIDDLE.

Pour 5 ounces (150 ml), which is about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a glass.



THE GLASS HAS A STEM FOR A REASON.

Hold the glass by the stem, not the bowl.

Otherwise, the wine will get warm.

SHELF LIFE

Apparently, there are admirable people who don't always finish a bottle of wine in one sitting.

I don't quite understand it myself ... nevertheless this section is for all those virtuous, disciplined wine lovers.

Ground rules for good storage:

White wines

- Close with the original top.
- Pop it in the fridge.
- Keep it upright.

Red wines

- Close with the original closure or a wine stopper. Keep it in a dark place away from sunlight or in the fridge.
- Keep it upright.

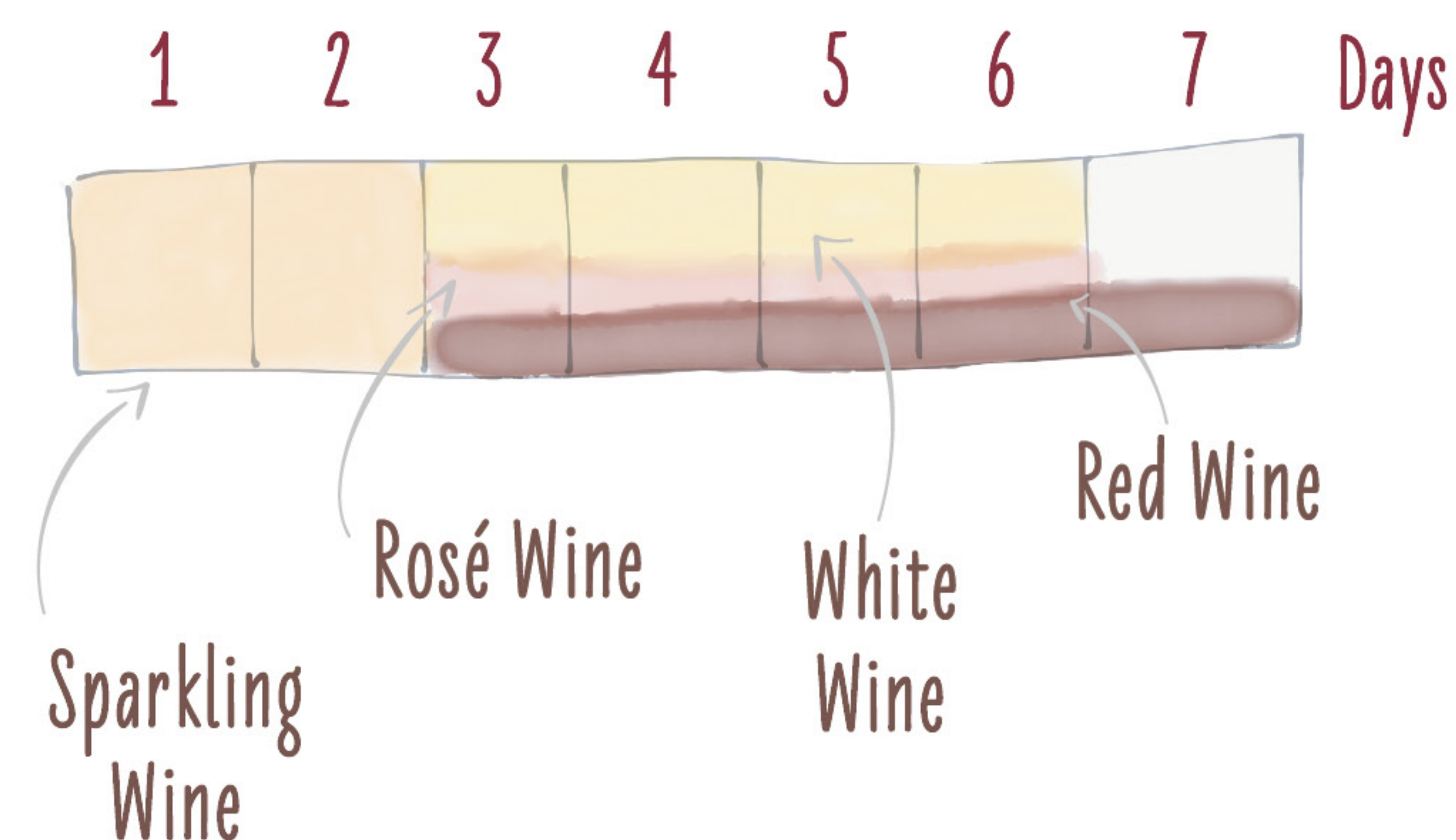
Sparkling wines

Always use a specialized sparkling wine stopper!

To withstand the high pressure from the carbon dioxide, these stoppers have a larger diameter and thus also a larger capacity than the ones for still wines. They're also secured with a clamp.

- Pop it in the fridge.
- Keep it upright. Don't lay it down.

By the way: Does the trick about sticking the handle of a teaspoon in an open bottle of sparkling wine keep the fizz alive? Nope. You might just as well place a fork on a slice of bread to keep it from drying out.



Good to know

An opened bottle of wine will generally keep for about three days. But there are always exceptions.