



Julian Calascione gives us

A crystal clear guide to using the right glass

“Something of a challenge” I thought to myself after recovering from the slightly uncomfortable prospect of having unthinkingly accepted an invitation to write about drinking glasses. How does one write about such banal articles that aren’t all too plainly obvious?

Then I remembered how much better tea tastes out of fine quality bone china than out of any other material (melamine is ok for orange squash, I suppose) and the better the quality the tea the more noticeable the improvement.

That is so also for drinking vessels made from glass. Just think of wine - and the procedure of doing justice to a top-quality claret by keeping it warm in the hand. The most important thing about a drinking glass is that it is practical to use. I don't mind stating the obvious - it should not be too heavy to hold; nor too cumbersome that it is difficult to drink from easily. Vessels with trumpet-flare brims are best for that - and usually also pleasing to the eye.

The other parts that go to make up good design play a large though often unwitting part of the satisfaction to be had in handling and using a well-designed drinking glass, contributing to a more relaxed occasion and 'nutritive' or even 'medical' value of whatever liquid is there to allow our watery metabolism to do its stuff. The most-used shape for wines is the tulip bowl stemmed type.

What is crystal clear is that classical designs and shapes have become so precisely because they succeed in every way, both in practical terms and aesthetically. The latter, if they are antiques of known provenance, would fetch anything between 200 and 1200 (you name the cash) for the less rare pieces.

TEST THE QUALITY OF CRYSTAL GLASS, PINCH THE BRIM WITH THE INDEX FINGER NAIL TO PRODUCE A PINGING SOUND

Modern lead crystal of traditional shapes, whether tumblers for shorts or stemmed wine glasses, can be very expensive to buy – but that certainly does not mean that they should be left in the vetrine. If you want to test the quality of crystal glass pinch the brim with the index finger nail to produce a pinging sound – the higher the tone and longer they sustain the higher the quality; but don't risk doing this if the glass is not yours to experiment with!

Size (liquid capacity), at least in stemmed glasses, does not matter - whether the glass is designed for hock, Burgundy or fortified aperitifs - the shapes, delicateness (appropriate thinnesses or thicknesses of sections) and tinting or embedded colour design in the piece are the things that up the value.

Sometimes, just to be polite, we have to tactfully tolerate prized 'must have' shapes that fall short in the usefulness rankings, making satisfactory noises about so-and-so's 'cool' ideas about design whilst privately wondering how best to hold those inexcusable lop-sided tumblers from the northern hemisphere that have to have exaggeratedly weighted bases just to stay upright when filled.

Standard proven shapes can be of any volume in the range, whether for aperitifs or long drinks, for example there are flutes for sherry (10 cl) as there are also for carbonated beverages (25 or 30 cl) – but mugs or steins for beer can be anything from 50 cl to 100 cl.

Velvety reds may be taken in large glasses, whilst dessert wines need a smaller internal surface area to channel the aroma.

A proper drinking glass is about channeling a scent not for quenching your thirst – for that any old billycan would do nicely. 🍷



Julian Calascione, has experience, dedication, qualifications and a specialisation in fine dining, including a 2 Michelin-starred venue. Since then he has set up restaurant management styles for various restaurant venues and is sometimes consulted by the leisure industry. Leisure time is dedicated to family, seaborne activities and nature-watching.

How to keep your glasses clean

Don't use the dishwasher. Your dishwasher is designed to remove baked on food and this is way too rough for delicate glassware. If you must use a dishwasher, don't use the rinse aid. As the role of the rinse aid is to help dry the dishes. Water on plates and cutlery or any polished surface will form a 'bead'. So when it dries, it leaves the outline of the 'bead' on the plate. The role of rinse-aid is to break down the surface tension in the water so it runs off the plates and doesn't 'bead' on them. So rinse-aid is especially wine glass unfriendly as it leaves a coat of 'detergent' on the glass.

Wash glasses by hand in hot water. The best possible clean is to rinse your glasses in hot water and let them dry naturally and don't wipe. While your glasses are still hot from the rinse, put them upside down and let them air dry. Even the cleanest tea towel will leave some fibers on the glass.

Use as little detergent as possible. Remove lipstick on the glass by giving them a scrub before rinsing several times.

How to get rid of the white grey film

This will affect your crystal glasses most, but the solution is easy. Soak in a weak vinegar solution for an hour or two – the vinegar eats away the clouds – rinse properly and air dry as above.