

by David Hulley

### **Crayons, Modelers' Paint Brushes and Wine Tasting**

As I rounded the top of the stairs in the loft of the historic Inniskillin Winery barn and wine boutique, the sight of the individual wine tasting place settings stopped me cold in my tracks. Alongside the usual wine glasses, water, and spittoons were a box of crayons, a thin modelers' paint brush, and an outline of a tongue staring back at me.

The leader of our session, and best selling author Shari Darling, must have noticed my puzzled look and energetically strode over to greet me. "Are you ready for some advanced colouring", she playfully asked. My thoughts automatically flashed back to the last "art session" that I enjoyed with our two-year-old, Katharyn. I knew my primary colours! Wait, what does that have to do with wine tasting?

Shari, with her engaging wit and warmth carried on to explain that the tasting was about self discovery. In conjunction with the release of her new food and wine pairing book *Harmony on the Palate* that can be found at Chapters and other fine book stores, Shari has developed a simple method to 'map' your tongue. With a better understanding of how we taste as individuals we can better create combinations that work for ourselves and for our invited diner guests.

As we have discussed previously, there are four basic taste sensations: sweet, sour, salt and bitter. There is also the newly recognized 'umami' sensation but it has little or nothing to do with wine. Now, the misconception that a general 'taste map' of the human tongue exists is still quite prevalent. Sweet on the tip, sour and salt on the sides and bitter at the back has been the accepted convention. We now know that the four tastes are sensed all over the tongue and are unique to each person. Still, it should be recognized that some very general commonalities do exist.

Each guest was invited to use the standard salt, sugar, citric acid and caffeine solutions and a brush to dab our tongues in different places. Where we sensed sweet we would use a red crayon to colour the corresponding portion of the tongue outline. Where we sensed sour we coloured in yellow and so on. Besides looking very silly (thank goodness everyone was doing it) we were all amazed at the results. After some time and concentrated effort a rainbow emerged that represent our own unique tasting pattern. The most surprising result for the group was that our tongues are not symmetrical. Some people are 'left-tongued', 'right-tongue' and even 'center-tongued'.

Should you wish to try this it can be easily done at home and with friends. Shari's book can be a great aid and it also offers so much more in terms of food and wine pairing. By the way, there was also a test that involved your tongue, blue dye and a self adhesive reinforcement ring, but we won't get into that. Enjoy!

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