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HOW IT FEELS . . .

to have a trained palate

Sandi M. Marques, 34, accredited sommelier, Stratford, Ont. Here, Marques describes an oenophile's ritual when she tastes a glass of wine.

I draw a small amount of wine into my mouth and swirl it around, making sure it comes in contact with all areas of my tongue. Then I take in a little bit of air, which helps oxygenate the wine inside the mouth and intensify it. I stick my lips out a little, suck in a little air, and ever so slightly, I gurgle. Finally, I swallow, and I pause, and I wait to see if what I smelled in the glass is what I taste in my mouth. If it is, then I have a balanced wine, a good quality wine.

I always knew I had a very sensitive sense of smell and taste: I can pick up on the faintest spice in a dish, or I can walk into someone's house and pinpoint what type of Glade PlugIn is being used.

There's a misconception that we taste with our tongue, but we really taste through our nose. A keen sense of smell will give you a keener palate. In so much of food and wine, it's about layers and about deciphering the layers. I can break apart the bouquet of a wine, and I can break apart mashed potatoes, tasting first the starchy potatoes, then the cream, the butter, the salt and pepper.

But I can turn that off, too. In juggling two kids, a career, a husband and a house, every single meal I have, and every single glass of wine I drink, is not an experience. Sometimes I just want Kraft Dinner.

HOW IT FEELS . . .

to become a carnivore

Liz Allemang, 22, journalist, Toronto. She was a lifelong vegetarian until . . .

I had been thinking about meat for awhile. I was cooking more, reading more recipes, and I knew I was limiting myself. There are certain flavours that duck fat can produce that you're just not going to get from a roasted red pepper.

But the real catalyst came in my second year of university. I was watching a Food Network show where the chef really sold his potato gratin to me, and he did it by emphasizing the need for bacon, which adds a smoky flavour. I could not get that gratin out of my head – it dogged me for a month. So I figured, I'll make it.

Cutting up the bacon was weird; you know it's flesh. But the smell when it first hit the pan was pretty exciting, because I was finally going to eat the cause of that smell. And to hear the sizzle, to see it caramelize – I don't know that I thought: This is my life changing. But it was exciting.

With the first bites, all I could taste was the bacon, because that's all I was thinking about. But then I really got into it, and I could see how the smokiness played off the nutty crisped-up cabbage, and how the richness of the fat paired with the cheese and cream. I thought: This is what I've been missing? I wanted to kick myself. >



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