

What are 'wine legs'?

When you swirl a glass of wine and look at how it runs down the glass, you're looking at the legs. Look at the ring of wine near the top of the glass and how the droplets form and run back down into the wine. These are the legs. The French call them tears of wine, some people call them fingers, curtains and even church windows. But we know them as legs.

They usually occur in high alcohol wines and you'll see the link between alcohol and wine legs shortly. Some people say you can pick wine quality by the legs. This is just not true.

The legs occur due to the Marangoni effect. It comes from the fact that alcohol has a lower surface tension than water. Wine is mostly a mix of water and alcohol plus a few other parts such as sugars, tannins etc. As you swirl your wine around the glass and leave some on the side it starts to evaporate. Alcohol evaporates faster than water due to its lower boiling point and higher vapor pressure. The changed alcohol to water mix now has different surface tension areas. The wine forms droplets in the areas of least / most resistance which fall back down the glass under their own weight.

