

How to Remove Wine Labels

The following recommendations are based on successfully removing tens of thousands of wine labels over the last 40+ years, with very few failures. While the following descriptions seem very detailed, the process is really very simple and easy to do.

1. Requirements: a straight edge razor blade, containers for soaking, a metal object (such as the metal dinner knife displayed), white paper to put on the removed wine labels, and an IWA "Labeloff", if necessary. Please see below Illustrations #1, #2, and #3.



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2. Recommendation: be patient; do the label removal when rested and not in a hurry. Hot water to start (but not necessary). I do not replace cold water later with hot, though hot water can accelerate the process.

3. What to know about the labels themselves: some labels

- A. Will simply float off (occurring less and less these days).
- B. Are very thin. Once you remove the bottle from your soaking container (illustration #4), test one edge of the label with your razor blade (illustration #5) to see if it is ready to be removed or is so thin any further effort to remove it will cause too much damage. If so, empty the water from the bottle and let it dry. You can then try another approach, as explained later.
- C. Many types of glues are used on the labels. The very sticky ones require careful attention.



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- D. Are of plastic construction. Therefore, use the razor blade to establish enough of the label to acquire a firm hold, and pull slowly the label off (illustration #6).
- E. Don't seem to want to come off. Just keep soaking the label (sometimes for days), periodically changing the cold water for hot water. If still unsuccessful, you can try another approach, explained later.

4. Removing the label after soaking:

- A. With the razor blade, start at one edge, holding the razor blade at an angle so as to not cut the paper. Then start plying back the label with short strokes all along the label, generally keep a straight line (illustration #7), and frequently keep your razor blade moist (illustration #8).
- B. Try to keep the removed portion of the label off the bottle in the process. Keep your hand moist, gently encourage the removed portion of the label forward over the remaining label (illustration #7).
- C. Repeat the process for the back label as well. Most times I start with the back label so as to test if there are going to be any difficulties (illustration #9).



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- D. Keeping your hand moist for the sticky labels. Put the removed label on a clean sheet of paper, carefully positioning the label so as to prevent wrinkles (illustration #10). With the sticky label backs, this process takes practice.



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5. What to do with wine labels that are just too difficult to remove, or which would be damaged if you tried to remove them (occurring at an increasing frequency these days): the answer is a process developed by the Japanese that allows you to remove the print while leaving the paper on the bottle. The local version is call “Labeloff” by IWA, who can be reached @ (800) 527-4072.
- A. Take your “Labeloff” and measure which portion you will use for the length and with (illustration #11). Then cut off the unused portion, to be used later on another wine label (illustration #12).
- B. Peel off the backing (illustration #13), lining up the “Labeloff” over the wine label (illustration #14).



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- C. With a hard and smooth instrument, press the “Labeloff” onto the label, with as many strokes as to ensure that every portion of the label has been treated (illustration #15). Be especially vigorous at the edges and where there is heavy print (illustration #16).



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D. Start removing slowly the “Labeloff” from one edge, testing to see that all of the print is sticking to the plastic (illustration #17 and #18). Once you see any print remaining on the label, stop, go back and cover that part of the print, reapplying the metal instrument to hopefully succeed in reaching a successful liftoff, as shown in illustration #19.



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Enjoy your collection of labels as have I, which by the way has now exceeded 122,000.