
A drinker's decanter

Great aunt Edna wants a decanter as table decoration. Her bridge-playing friends are coming for lunch, and she wants to serve wine from a decanter that makes a statement. Brash! Modern! Striking! And—though the thought is quite horrific—Sexy! Good for great aunt Edna.

Meanwhile, you, the reader, a presumed hedonist, occasionally host a tasting of some variety of fine alcohol. There are several of you around the table, and more decanters on it. Everything is carefully tasted, flavours discussed, notes taken, vintages preferred (1963 for port) or dismissed (the over-rated 1983). Then you set about an evening of drinking. Marvellous—by the finish everybody will be well oiled. But this means that you want a decanter for use by serious drinkers. What is such a decanter?

- Such a decanter is short and squat. Later in the evening, a gentleman is at risk of misplacing a decanter while returning it to the table. It might land slightly askew, supported on one side by a cheese plate. Or, as a gentleman performs a slow-motion glide from his chair to the floor beneath, there is a risk of arms flailing. Neither of these events should cause a decanter to tumble. Hence a decanter needs to be short and squat, hugging the table in an unknockoverable sort of way. Of course, 'short and squat' is not 'striking' nor 'sexy', it is, well, 'short and squat'. It can still be elegant, just as an elderly billionaire can be 'short and squat' but elegant, and even desirable to great aunt Edna (though, again, the thought is quite horrific). But neither he nor a drinker's decanter is 'striking' or 'sexy'. And the modern trend for decanters at jaunty angles is just bad for late-evening digestion: let's not go there.
- A dozen different wines are to be tasted. Table space is at a premium, so the decanter cannot be excessively wide. And as few as a pair of wide decanters can occupy too much of a small home bar: a drinker's decanter, though low and table-hugging, must not be wide. (Also, pouring the bottle into the decanter thoroughly aerates the wine. There is no further advantage in a large surface area, and if a decanter is used to hold the liquor for more than a day, some disadvantage.)
- It must hold a full 750ml. Recent European bottles are only 700ml, but there are older vintages that were bottled at the full three-quarters of a litre, as still are the modern vintages in America.
- In some decanters the last drop is difficult. In those with horizontal shoulders recovering the last drop is like playing a child's puzzle with a steel ball in which the only solution is to cheat by using a magnet. The problem is just as bad the following morning, when, equipped with the mother of all hangovers, it is time to dry the decanter you have just cleaned. A good rule is that a drinker's decanter should have shoulders no nearer to the horizontal than 45°. Indeed, drying is aided by the absence of a punt (an inward-pointing thing centre-bottom): the bottom of the decanter should be concave.
- The neck must not be so long and tall that there is a risk of a hand slipping, but nor may the lip be so close to the shoulders that a fat hand (sorry: a masculine and prosperous hand) cannot reach around.
- In a quality casino, a croupier never takes money hand-to-hand. The customer must place the money on the table, whence the croupier will collect it. Likewise a decanter must never be

passed hand-to-hand, as either of the hands might have an intoxicated owner. Hence a decanter must be held from the side, not from underneath, as holding from underneath requires a hand-to-hand pass (even though both hands belong to the same person). For the same reason there must be a fair amount of symmetry, as a decanter might be picked up at any angle, and repositioning within the hand is a recipe for a spillage.

- When a decanter contains alcohol, the stopper must provide a seal. The seal keeps in the alcoholic fumes, and keeps out the alcohol-free mixture known colloquially as ‘air’.
- But the opposite must be true when a decanter is empty. If there is the tiniest trace of water in a sealed and otherwise empty decanter, then, over time, the inside of the glass will acquire a white mist. This mist is impossible to remove. Go to an antique dealer and examine decanters: many or most will have such a white mist on the inside. So the stopper must be reversible, with the reversed stopper preventing dust from entering but allowing the decanter to breathe.
- The stopper must not roll. A stopper placed on the table must rest where it is placed: it cannot be a ball. (My suspicion is that the fashion for ball stoppers is motivated by cost: so much easier to manufacture a one-size-fits-all ball than to grind a stopper for a particular decanter.)
- Inevitably, over the decades, a decanter will become chipped. Life happens; you pay taxes; you die. If a decanter is starkly plain, every imperfection is prominently and immediately visible. But if the glass is cut with a simple unfussy pattern, the visibility of acquired imperfections is greatly reduced. Also, cut glass has better traction in the hand, perhaps reducing the frequency of such imperfections. Indeed, plain glass flaunts every cheesy fingerprint.
- The glass must be coated in a hydrophobic material, so it does not drip at the end of pouring. Happily, most modern decanters are.
- The only acceptable colour is clear. A drinker should see the colour of the liquid, not of the glass. And the only acceptable material is glass: silver and other metals can impart a slight taste, and are difficult to clean.
- For the last of these points let us return to drying the decanter. The lip must be wide enough that the decanter can stand upside down without risk of toppling, in order to drain thoroughly.

I looked for a drinker’s decanter that does all these things, and could not find one. So a deal was done: <your company name here> received my design and these words, in return making me a set of such decanters. And, out of the goodness of their hearts (alright, probably for commercial reasons), <your company name here> now make available to you The Wiseman Decanter—named after its designer—in return for a paltry amount of hard currency.

Finally, please be merciful. Don’t tell your great aunt: she likes her decanter. It’s brash, modern, striking and even sexy. And her friends never drink much before playing cards.

— *Julian D. A. Wiseman*

PS: I have asked <your company name here> to enclose a copy of this rant inside every decanter box—if it is a gift, the recipient will know your reasoning.

When a decanter contains alcohol, the stopper must provide a tight seal.

The lip must be wide enough that the decanter can stand upside down without risk of toppling, in order to drain thoroughly.

The neck must not be so tall that a hand might slip, but nor may the lip be so close to the shoulders that a hand cannot reach around. To improve grip this decanter has a Georgian-inspired ring neck.

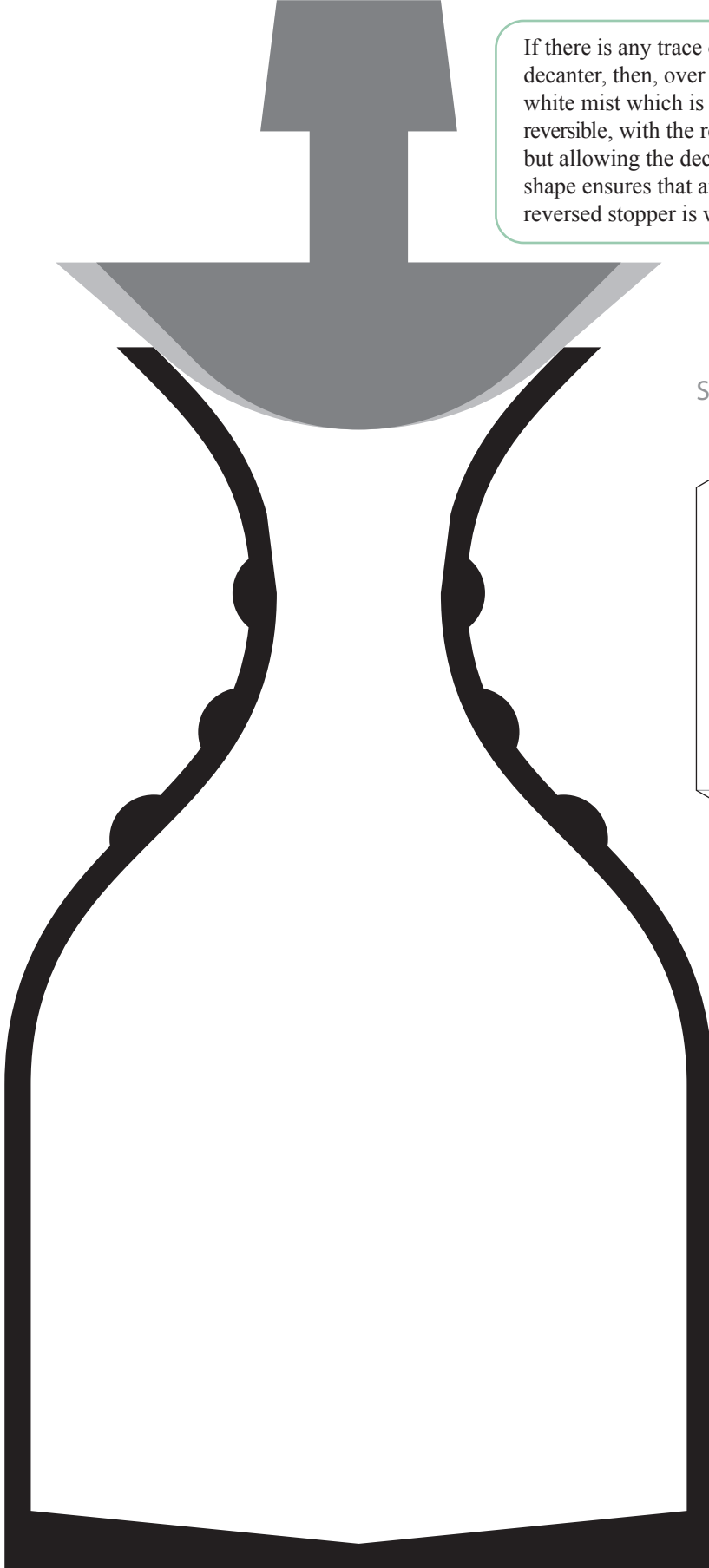
A decanter must not have horizontal or near-horizontal shoulders, as the last drop then becomes difficult to extract, both when drinking and when drying. This decanter has shoulders no nearer to the horizontal than 45°.

A decanter must hold 750ml. Some bottles are 700ml, many are 750ml.

A decanter should be short and squat, hugging the table in an unknockoverable sort of way. Even though tall and lanky looks more elegant, a decanter needs to be drunk-proof.

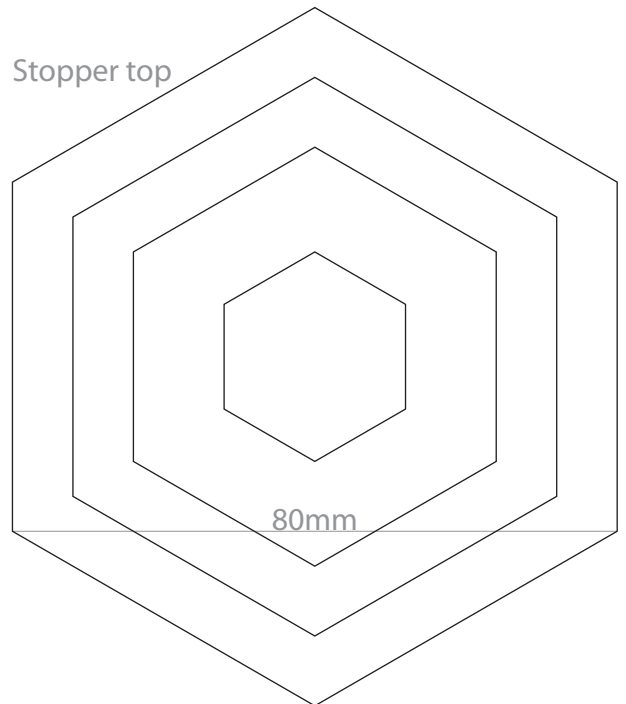
Drying is aided by the absence of a punt (an inward-pointing thing centre-bottom): the bottom of the decanter should be concave.

A decanter should not be excessively wide: table space is at a premium. Even two wide decanters can occupy too much of a small home bar.

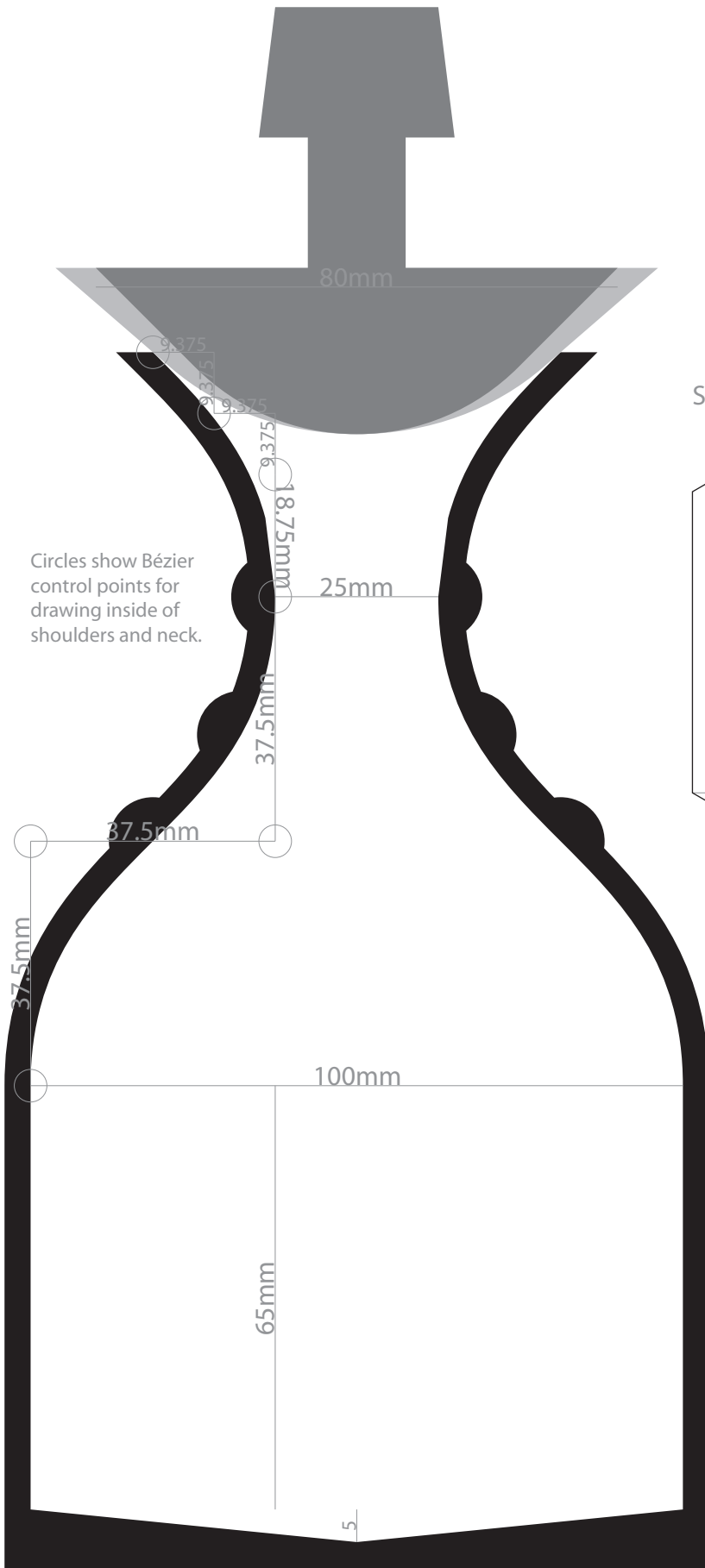


If there is any trace of water in a sealed and otherwise empty decanter, then, over time, the inside of the glass will acquire a white mist which is impossible to remove. So the stopper must be reversible, with the reversed stopper preventing dust from entering but allowing the decanter to 'breathe'. The stopper's hexagonal shape ensures that air can get around the reversed stopper, and the reversed stopper is wide enough to cover the lip completely.

Stopper top



The stopper must not roll. A stopper placed on the table must rest where it is placed: it cannot be a ball. The hexagonal top of the stopper further prevents on-table movement.



Circles show Bézier control points for drawing inside of shoulders and neck.

