

ROYAL HOBART WINE SHOW

A Quick Guide to Wine
Characteristics



The Royal Agricultural Society of Tasmania

DESCRIBING A WINE

Describing a wine compares to writing a poem; not as easy as it would seem. Every wine tasting experience is unique because every one of us is an inimitable individual, with our own stock of aromas and flavours in memory and senses of taste and smell different to anyone else's.

Those with a privileged nose are able to identify aromas of substances actually present in the wine. Apart from that, tasters have to explain the impressions the wine created in their mind. For all these reasons, no description of a wine tasting is ever wrong.

A suggestion: use words from your hobbies or other areas you know well. I compared describing wine to writing a poem because I am not particularly good at finding rhyming words. You could find wine as exhilarating as hooking the king trout in the river –I can attest this is truly exhilarating - or it could be a flawless performance, a symphony, an ebullient salsa party... I'm sure you have your own bank of experiences.

When it comes to the actual words, wine tasters need to borrow their vocabulary from other areas, including fruits, flowers, spices, nuts, types of wood, or metals. Trying to look for common ground, there are some words expert wine tasters habitually use. These words are not a tight standard, as several terms describe similar concepts and, sometimes, wine tasters give different meaning to the same word.

Words to describe a wine

This is not a wine describing dictionary. I hope the words listed below will help you to write more accurate tasting notes or, at least, to understand better those professional descriptions of wine you though obscure before.

- **Vinegar** is acetic acid.
- **Acetic** is that vinegar-like taste or smell born from exposure to air. Vinegar is acetic acid produced by fermenting wine.
- **Acidic** is a wine with too much acid. Wines contain acids, which vary in concentration.
- **Age worthy** is a term applied to wines which will benefit from further maturation in the bottle. Typical examples are either young reds with powerful tannins or very sweet young whites. Acidity can also be a factor.
- **Aggressive** would be a wine acidic enough to make your gums tingle or with tannins in excess, so much that it would make the back of your throat feel dry.
- **Ample** would describe a wine that feels full and generous in your mouth.
- **Aromatic** will be applied to a wine with plenty more of perfumed, fruity scents -which normally you can appreciate before actually tasting the wine- than average. Grape varieties source of aromatic wines include Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, and the sweet Muscat.

- **Astringent** refers to the rough, rasping feel some wines have, usually caused by tannins, acid or both. The sensation of a dry mouth is strong - tannins produce this, a strong black tea would leave a similar sensation. High tannin content produces dry, puckering effect.
- **Austere** would be a wine without fruity flavours and with bitter tannins, which leave a rough, raspy feeling, high acidity, or both.
- **Acidic** means a wine has too much acidity; this is seen as a fault. All wines need some acidity to keep the balance, but too much and the wine tastes sour.
- **Balanced** - same as rounded - said of a wine it means all its elements are in perfect harmony and none stands out. Which elements? We are talking of the relative degree of acidity, alcohol, fruity quality, tannins, sugar, extract, and other characteristics.
- **Big** is a wine that makes a major impression, probably full-bodied, or a wine with intense aroma or plenty of flavour. To do so, the wine is likely to contain high levels of fruit, tannins, alcohol, or a blend of these. Everything in abundance, tannins, alcohol, acid and fruit flavours, a powerful wine.
- **Bitter** means harsh, unpleasant taste –perceived at the back of the tongue- typically caused by an excess of tannins in the wine. Not a trait to covet, with the exception of some red Italian wines, where some bitterness is a highly sought-after characteristic.
- **Blockbuster** equals to extraordinarily big - in the sense big is applied to wines.
- **Hint**: compare the feel of the wine to that of water.
- **Body** refers, talking about wine, to the feeling in the mouth, this weighty feeling is influenced by the alcohol and extracts contained in the wine. Wines are considered light, medium, or full-bodied.
- **Bold** refers to a wine that almost comes out of the bottle on its own, strong, very distinct aroma and flavour, easy to make out its different components.
- **A wine has bouquet** if it is complex of aromas, usually from aging.
- **Buttery** is a smell and taste that comes often to wines matured in oak barrels.
- **Bright** could be applied to a wine with vivid colour or intense aromas and flavours.
- When a wine is described as **cedary** it has flavours or aromas that remind of the smell of cedar wood.
- **Character** in a wine, as it would be in people, means personality, substance and integrity.
- When a wine has strong flavour and plenty of tannin, but not that much that can be named as aggressive, you can call it **chewy**.
- **Clean** is said of a wine with no faults regarding aroma or flavour.
- **Complex** is a wine with many kinds of aromas and flavours –think of several fruity flavours, and hints of other traits such as vanilla or other spices- and many layers of flavour, as soon as you decipher one flavour, you discover a new sensation. Good wines are usually

complex; great wines even more so. Complexity develops typically through aging, this maturing process lets more flavours to come out.

- **Concentrated** implies an intense taste and powerful feeling. That would be a wine with plenty of tannin, sugar, flavour and colour.
- **Cooked** is a wine with a prunish flavour, usually from excessive heat.
- **Corked** is spoiled wine, smelling of cork, usually from cracked or seeping cork allowing introduction of air or fungi.
- **Crisp**, flinty, a wine with a perceptible acid feeling, but in the good, refreshing sense. Applied to white wines with a clean, fresh flavour -and good acidity, we said.
- **Deep** indicates a serious wine in which flavour seems to develop in many levels - doesn't this remind of complexity? - And where different hints of flavour, or aroma, surface at various stages of the tasting. Deep usually goes hand in hand with complex, subtle and rich.
- **Dry**, definitely not sweet, not at all. The wine does not have sugar or any sweetness that can be appreciated. Some dry wines with very ripe, fruity flavours or new oak flavours occasionally look like sweet. Some red wines that have spent too long in barrel or bottle, therefore losing their fruity flavour, are "dried-out." Driest of Champagnes: brut.
- **Dull**, a wine which appears blurred, or has indistinguishable aromas and flavours, not really defined. Frequently consequence of an excessive contact with oxygen.
- Some red wines have an earthy, dusty taste. This is good if accompanied with good fruit flavour.
- **Easy-drinking**, meaning a more or less simple wine that can be enjoyed as it is, without thinking much about it; probably fruity, low in tannin, if red, and in alcohol content.
- In simple wines, the smell and taste of damp earth can be nice. These are earthy wines.
- The word **elegant** would describe an extremely pleasant to drink wine, with good quality, balance, a delicate expression and not excessively fruity. A wine with finesse.
- **The extract** is what gives body to the wine. It would include all the solid matter, either tannins, sugars, or colouring and flavouring chemicals.
- **Fat or rich** and unctuous, full bodied.
- If a wine has **finesse**, it is elegant; and a wine described as firm, is balanced, well defined. Just the opposite of flabby.
- **Flabby or flaccid** are negative terms usually applied to a wine with low acidity, and for that reason unbalanced. It might mean a syrupy, to the point of sickening sweet, taste; definitely feeble.
- **A fleshy wine** would feel thick, almost solid in texture, when drinking it --due to high concentration of fruit and extract.
- **Focused** in a wine means well defined, flavours and aromas are in place and can be identified.

- A wine labelled **fresh** would leave a crisp, slightly acidic - in a pleasant, refreshing way - impression. Nine out of ten times this term is applied to young white wines with plenty of cheerful fruit flavours and the correct level of acidity.
- **A fruity wine**, with plenty of pleasing fruit flavours, will have certain sweetness and be generally appealing. Particular fruits can be identified: aroma or flavour of apples, berries, citrus, currants, pears, etc.
- **A heavy sensation** in the mouth is one sign of a wine described as full.
- I have seen the term **grassy** often applied to New Zealand wines.
- **Grassy** means taste and aroma of fresh cut grass, some times redefined as capsicum, gooseberry or lime zest.
- **Green** could mean too young and immature -which is not good, or wine made from unripe grapes, producing tart flavour. If green is followed by gooseberry or apple flavours it would refer to the refreshing, zesty flavours found in some white wines -definitely good. Some red wines grown in cool climates also sport a subtle flavour of green leaves -also good.
- **A hard wine** is more than firm and less than aggressive in the tannins-red wine or acidity-white wine scales.
- A wine is labelled **harsh** when it is deficient in the subtlety department; it would feel coarse, rough when you taste it. It might be too acidic or high in tannins.
- **Heavy** means the wine is tough to drink, feeling like a dead weight in your mouth. It is usually applied to full-bodied red wines with plenty of tannins – white wines usually feel light by their own nature- and it may be a sign of a wine that would benefit from more time in the bottle.
- **Herbal** is the wine with aromas suggestive of fresh herbs, dried herbs or specific herbs.
- **Honeyed**, when the wine has a smell or taste reminiscent of honey, characteristic of wines affected by 'noble rot' (*Botrytis cinerea*).
- A red wine presenting the cooked flavour of fruit preserve - or jam - is said to be **jammy**.
- **Lean, stringy or thin**, all these words refer to a wine with high acidity and low flavour.
- **A light wine** has low acidity and little in the matter of body.
- **A long wine** has a lingering aftertaste.
- **Madeirized** refers to oxidized wine, with a brownish colour and stale odor. After the island of Madeira where wine is intentionally produced in open air vats.
- **Mature** usually means a wine is ready to drink after having past the required time in bottle. In the same tune, over-mature would be saying "past its best."
- Unbelievable, but a few wines actually taste of meat. **Meaty wines** are likely reds, with stout and dense flavours.

- **Mineral flavours** are common in German wines and those of the Loire Valley, France. Imagine a taste of rock.
- **Neutral**, neither fish nor meat, little flavour or difficult to make it out.
- **Noble wines** are made from noble grapes, a classification of grapes that produce Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Riesling.
- A wine gets to the nose when it has aroma. **Off-nose** refers to odours indicating defect.
- **Nutty** wines are not mad, they just have a nutlike aroma, such as found in sherry or aged whites.
- **An oaky - or oaky** - wine has characteristics derived from oak, suggesting it has spent time in oak barrels; it feels toasty, smoky, buttery, smells charred, has vanilla flavours, or has a higher tannin content it would have otherwise. It could be used as a negative term when oak flavours rule over other flavours in a wine, as oak flavours are only desirable if they are balanced by fruit. In this case, and if we are talking about a young, good quality wine, it might lose some oakiness spending some years in bottle.
- **Oxidized** is a wine spoiled from over-exposure to air.
- **Petrol flavours** are similar to mineral but in this case is associated to mature wines from Riesling and it is considered positive.
- **Piercing** if having lively fruit flavours - positive - or high acidity - not so.
- **A powerful wine** would possess an abundance of everything: high levels of extract, alcohol, or both. It feels big, even larger than life. Powerful can be an unwanted characteristic in some wines.
- **Racy wine** is lively, spirited, crisp and fresh; as such it is noticeably acid but it is stimulating and refreshing. Racy is often associated with German wines.
- **Rich wine** feels intense, concentrated, deep... full flavour vibrating in your mouth. Rich may be used to define a slightly sweet wine. A wine can have too much of a good thing and become too rich, too sweet.
- **Ripe** is a wine made from well ripened grapes, with good fruit flavours; it might even have hints of fruits from warm climates - taste more of pineapple than apple. It might feel sweet even if does not have sugar.
- **Rounded**, almost equivalent to balanced, is a wine with all elements in place, complete. Satisfying flavours, no surprises or sudden sharpness.
- **Simple** is the wine lacking in complexity, no layers, plain aroma and unidimensional flavour. This is expected of everyday wine - table wine - but it is a terrible fault in an expensive wine.
- **Smooth or soft**, a qualifier applied to red wines with mild tannins or low acidity whites, easy to drink wines both of them.
- **Sparkling wines** contain carbonation, such as does champagne.

- **Spicy** is applied to Australian wines sporting a taste of cinnamon, cloves or pepper, and also to Gewürztraminer wines usually full of exotic aromas and flavours.
- **Steel flavour** is found in a wine firm and lean with a good acidity.
- **Stony flavours** are similar to the mineral ones, minus the thrill.
- **Structured** is a red wine with fruit flavours well supported by the tannins or a white where fruit flavours stand up to the acidity.
- **Subtle** is usually associated to finesse or an elegant wine, the fragrances or flavours are hinted, with plenty of notes in them -positive. It has been applied to wines lacking fruit flavours - negative.
- **Sulphurised** is when there is a noticeable sulphur flavour. Sulphur is an anti-oxidant introduced in some wines in small amounts. Fermentation creates minute amounts naturally.
- **A supple wine**, like a supple body, is both vigorous and smooth. This refers to texture rather than taste.
- **Sweet** is either a wine with plenty of sugar, or plenty of rich and ripe fruit flavours. There might be residual sugar from fermentation, from grape sugar incompletely converted to alcohol.
- **Tannic** is a wine with an abundance of tannins - the chemicals colouring skins and stems in the grapes. This is not bad if balanced by fruit. Sometimes the wine is simply calling for extra maturation.
- **Tart apples** have a sharp, unripe, acid taste, so does tart wine.
- **Toasty** is one of the flavours resulting of oak ageing, like the flavour of a buttered toast.
- An **upfront wine** is uncomplicated, easy to drink; probably full of simple fruity flavours.
- Wines with excess of alcohol can certainly make you feel warm, but the term is also applied to some red wines with a full-body, tangy flavour and deep, velvety colour.
- **Woody** is having the aroma or taste of aging barrels.
- **Yeasty** means smelling similar to bread. Yeasts are introduced to carry out fermentation and can be incompletely removed.

Words for the perplexed

- **Appellation** is the French system regulating authenticity; applies to region where the grapes were grown.
- **Balance** is the relative degree of fruity quality, acidity, tannins, alcohol and other characteristics.
- **Cooper** is a maker of casks or barrels.
- **Nose** means aroma in wine speaking. 'Off-nose' refers to odours indicating defect.

- **Sommelier** is a specialist in selecting and serving wine.
- **Sulphur** is an anti-oxidant introduced in some wines in small amounts. Fermentation creates minute amounts naturally. See sulphites.
- **Vintner** refers to a winemaker.
- **Viticulture** is the art and science of growing wine grapes.
- **Vitis Vinifera** is a plant species encompassing most traditional European wine grapes.

Ten major grape varieties

1. Cabernet Sauvignon: grows in a variety of climates, but most closely associated with Bordeaux, France. Produces wines usually high in tannin.
2. Chardonnay: from Burgundy, France. Classic and popular.
3. Chenin Blanc: from France's Loire valley. A white grape, grow in climates too warm for many vinifera types.
4. Grenache: Spanish grape with raspberry-like flavour and fruity aroma.
5. Merlot: produces deep coloured, high alcohol wines with low tannin. Sometimes chocolaty.
6. Nebbiolo: from Piedmont, Italy in the northwest, produces Barbaresco and Barolo. High in acidity and tannins.
7. Pinot Noir: difficult to grow, low in tannin, prone to rot.
8. Riesling: a traditional German grape from the Mosel region.
9. Sangiovese: produces herby, spicy Italian wine from Tuscany, Italy.
10. Syrah/Shiraz: from France's Rhone valley, but more recently Australia and New Zealand. Spicy, sometimes reminiscent of black pepper. Not to be confused with Petit Sirah, a California grape

5 BASIC WINE CHARACTERISTICS

Sweetness: aka "Level of Dryness

Our human perception of sweet starts at the tip of our tongue. Often, the very first impression of a wine is its level of sweetness. To taste sweet, focus your attention on the taste buds on the tip of your tongue. Are your taste buds tingling?—*an indicator of sweetness*. Believe it or not, many dry wines can have a hint of sweetness to carry a larger impression of **Body**. If you find a wine you like has residual sugar, you may enjoy a hint (or a lot!) of sweetness in your wine. Hello moscato!

How to Taste it in Wine

- Tingling sensation on the tip of your tongue.
- Slight *oily* sensation in the middle of your tongue that lingers.
- Wine has a higher viscosity; wine tears on side of glass slowly. (*also an indicator of high ABV*)
- Dry red wines such as cabernet sauvignon often have up to 0.9 g/L of residual sugar (*common with cheap wines*).
- A bone-dry wine can often be confused with a wine with high **Tannin**

Acidity: Wrapping Your Head Around It

Acidity in food and drink is tart and zesty. Tasting acidity is often confused with the taste of higher **Alcohol**. It is common for wines grown in cooler vintages to have higher acidity. Wines with higher acidity feel lighter weight because they come across as 'spritzy.' If you prefer a wine that is more rich and round, you enjoy slightly *less* acidity.

Acidity Characteristics

- Tingling sensation that focuses on the front and sides of your tongue. Feels like pop rocks.
- If you rub your tongue to the roof of your mouth it feels gravelly.
- Your mouth feels wet, like you bit into an apple.

Tannin: The Misunderstood Wine Characteristic

Tannin is often confused with **Level of Dryness** because tannin *dries* your mouth. What are wine tannins? Tannin in wine is the presence of phenolic compounds that add bitterness to a wine. Phenolics are found in the skins and seeds of wine grapes and can also be added to a wine with the use of aging in wood (oak).

So how does tannin taste? Imagine putting a used black tea bag on your tongue. A wet tea bag is practically pure tannin that is bitter and has a drying sensation. Tannin tastes herbaceous and is often described as astringent. While all of these descriptors sound very negative, tannin adds balance, complexity, structure and makes a wine last longer.

How Does a High Tannin Wine Taste?

- Tastes bitter on the front inside of your mouth and along the side of your tongue.
- Tannin makes your tongue dry out.
- After you swallow you feel a lingering bitter/dry feeling in your mouth.
- Tannin can often be confused with the term "dry" because it dries your mouth out.

Fruit: Identifying Different Flavors

Wines are often characterized by their main fruit flavors. Tasting for fruit flavors in a wine can help you better define your preferences. For instance, wines that have strawberry notes lead into a very different set of varietal wines than enjoying wines that taste like blackberries. Additionally, the *level* of fruitiness that you taste in a wine leads to very different growing regions.

Tasting for fruitiness in a wine

- **Red Wine:** red fruits such as raspberry or dark fruits like blackberry and blueberry?
- **White Wine:** Lemon and Lime or Peach and Yellow Apple?
- Can you name 3 different fruits easily?
- Do you find it difficult to pick out a single fruit flavor?
- Does a wine give you stronger impressions of other flavors such as grass, bell pepper, black pepper, olive or meat?

CHAMPAGNE & SPARKLING WINE CHARACTERISTICS

Sparkling wine and champagne characteristics, when tasting, include appearance, aroma/bouquet, and palate. First, it is considered appropriate to hold the glass by the stem as you taste. Holding the glass by the bowl may change the temperature. What are some of the common descriptions? What should one expect when tasting and drinking? How does one describe the characteristics?

Here are some general guidelines along with common characteristics and a general range of features you may observe. Appearance, Aroma/Bouquet, Palate

Appearance

Take a look at the bubbles. The best sparkling wines will have the finest bubbles. They will also form intricate uniform paths from the bottom up through the opening. Lesser quality sparkling wines will have bubbles that vary in size or are larger and take on more random paths to the top. The type of champagne glass will also have an impact on the appearance of bubbles. You can further evaluate the bubbles when you taste the champagne. Next, tilt the glass at about a 45 degree angle. Hold it next to a white background. Sparkling wine (unless there is a definite fault) will have a clarity described as clear or brilliant. Look at the wine. If you were to hold a flashlight below the glass at an angle, would it shine through unobstructed and translucent (clear)? Will the light actually seem more intense and effervescent (brilliant) as it passes through? Next, look at the colour. The core or thickest part will appear in a range from very pale straw to moderate gold. Blanc de noirs will typically lean more toward the darker end and Blanc de Blancs will be on the paler end. For rosé, the colour will range from very light pink to a smoked salmon colour. As you look outward from the core, the rim, (or colour at the perimeter) will be lighter, from watery clear to a slightly paler colour than the core. The colour will give an indication of the age of the sparkling wine. Older vintages will take on a darker hue. Very young sparkling wine will be lighter.

Aroma/Bouquet

This part is often referred to as "nose". When you nose a wine, you sniff it. You do not swirl a sparkling wine like you would a still wine. Swirling will cause the CO₂ to dissipate too quickly. The bubbles will help release the aroma (primary scents) and bouquet (underlying smells that develop as wine ages) and carry the scents to your nose. The type of champagne glass will often have an impact on the intensity of the aroma and bouquet. Tilt the glass and put your nose in it. Sniff, inhale and smell. The sparkling wine should smell clean. You can inhale a couple of times, or just take a few short whiffs, whatever feels best to you. Opening your mouth while you sniff may also enhance the experience.

You may want to try sniffing at different points in the glass. Associate the aroma/bouquet with scents that are familiar to you. Laboratory testing through gas chromatography has actually proven that wine contains molecules matching those in certain fruits, flowers and other substances. Some common descriptors used for scents found in sparkling wine include apple, pear, fresh baked bread, brioche, citrus, mushrooms, bread dough, a hint of honey, subtle strawberry, some straw or hay, herbal notes, almond... to name some.

You may be able to further define the aroma/bouquet. Is the apple smell reminiscent of baked apples or green apples? Is the citrus lemon or lime? The yeasty, bread like scents are the result of autolysis (the consequence of aging on dead yeast cells after the secondary fermentation has taken place in the bottle). An unpleasant off odor may indicate the sparkling wine has a fault.

Palate

The palate is what characterizes sensations in the mouth. It is more than just taste; it also includes feel. Take a small amount of wine into your mouth. One of the first things you notice as you taste it are the bubbles. Observe the sensation as they flow over your tongue and gums. Are they soft and velvety or aggressive and tart? As the bubbles begin to dissolve, what do you notice? Sweetness is detected toward the front of the tongue, acidity is along the sides and bitterness is near the back. Are the elements balanced? Fine champagne may have different attributes. It can be dry, crisp, creamy, delicate, elegant, fruity, display minerality, be full or medium bodied and have differing degrees of autolysis. What you smell may or may not be similar to what you taste, but the descriptors are fairly similar (ripe pear, apple, biscuit, brioche, citrus, mushrooms, strawberry, straw, herbs, almonds, etc.) The finest champagne will become smoother and develop the greatest amount of autolysis as it ages, displaying more fresh bread, brioche, or nutty characteristics. If the wine is out of

balance because there is too much alcohol, it can feel heavy or invoke a slight burning sensation. When you swallow or spit (perfectly acceptable, especially if you will taste several wines), a fine champagne should have an enjoyable, lingering finish.

The best has wonderful complexity and depth that has been stored and aged appropriately and will lure you back for more. You will likely notice something different every time you smell or taste, like a mystery slowly unfolding before you.

CHARDONNAY

Chardonnay is the most common and well known variety of white grape in wine production today. The most prominent flavour in Chardonnay wine comes from oak used in the wine production process. Other flavours and aromas include fruit, lemon, melon, grass, and vanilla. Some other characteristics of Chardonnay wines are high acidity, golden colours, and a velvety feel in the mouth. One reason why Chardonnay wine is so popular is because Chardonnay grapes are grown nearly everywhere that wine is produced. Chardonnay grapes are relatively hardy and are able to survive in a variety of environments. Chardonnays have also become very popular, probably the most popular of all white wines today. It thus for good reasons that Chardonnay is regarded as the "king" of white grape varieties.

Chardonnay is used in so many different places to produce so many different wines because the Chardonnay grapes themselves are relatively neutral in flavour. Most of their flavour is derived first from the conditions in which the grapes are grown and second from the conditions of the wine production. This makes it easier for different wineries to produce markedly different Chardonnay wines.

Another reason why Chardonnay does so well is that it is an aggressive plant, quickly growing very large leaves to take in the sun's energy. The production of large leaves, though, takes energy away from the production of grapes, so vintners have to be aggressive themselves in trimming back the leaves and stressing the vines so that they produce more and better grapes.

Chardonnay Wine & Oak

Chardonnay wines may be best known for being "oaked," which means being treated with oak flavouring. People who like Chardonnay are often focusing on the oak flavours and some confuse the flavour of oak for that of Chardonnay itself. There are several different ways wine producers can treat Chardonnay grapes with oak:

- Aging in expensive French oak casks
- Aging in cheap oak casks
- Soaking oak chips in the wine
- Pouring liquid "essence of oak" in the wine

The first options produce better, more expensive Chardonnay wines while the latter options allow for the creation of cheap, mass-produced Chardonnay wines. Not every Chardonnay is treated with oak. If the bottle of Chardonnay wine doesn't say anything you can assume that it has been oaked in some fashion, but you can find "naked" or unoaked Chardonnays. These are common in a few regions, like north-eastern Italy, but they are produced elsewhere. Unoaked or less heavily oaked Chardonnays tend to have lighter, delicate flavours which can be matched with a fairly wide variety of dishes. If you find an unoaked or lightly oaked Chardonnay that you already enjoy, you should try experimenting with different dishes.

Wines Produced with Chardonnay Grapes

It's common for wines produced with Chardonnay grapes to simply be called Chardonnay wines, there are several important wines which have names that don't reveal this origin. These wines may be produced entirely with Chardonnay grapes or they may be blended wines in which Chardonnay is the primary component. Chablis, White Burgundy, Champagne

Chardonnay Aromas

Fruit, citrus, lemon, apple, pineapple, melon, herbal, grass, oak, smoke, cinnamon, vanilla, toast, butter, creamy.

Chardonnay Flavours

Fruit, citrus, lemon, apple, tropical fruit, pineapple, melon, herbal, grass, cinnamon, wood, oak, vanilla, toast, butter, smoke, marshmallow, earthy, mushroom.

Chardonnay Character Profile

Dry full body crisp acidity velvety.

Food Pairing with Chardonnay

Smoked salmon, roast turkey, pork, poultry, and mushrooms.

Cuisines to Eat with Chardonnay

Chinese Food, Japanese Food, Spicy Food.

Pairing Chardonnay with Cheese

Aged cheeses, brie, gruyere, jarlsberg, provolone.

PINOT NOIR WINE

Grapes Flavour, Character, History, Wine Food Pairings

It is thought that the birth of Pinot noir sprang from a seldom seen grape that is grown in only a few select areas of France, Gouais Blanc. Pinot noir as a plant is quite complicated and seems to have spread itself to numerous off springs. There are 16 known, unique different types of Pinot noir grapes grown today. Pinot Noir is a popular grape that has become even more popular over the past 40 years. In fact, recent studies show that Pinot Noir is the 10th most widely planted grape in the world! Today there are a total of 117,358 hectares under vine of Pinot Noir planted all over the world.

Pinot noir, the red wine grape of Burgundy, takes its name from a combination of the French word for pine, (Pinot), is due to its tight, pine cone shaped, fruit clusters. The word Noir comes from the the grapes natural dark colour. While Pinot grows in countless other countries, it reaches its highest peaks of expression in the cool climates of Burgundy. Pinot noir is also an important grape in Champagne, where it is either used on its own, or as a blending grape. Like all the noble grape varieties, Pinot Noir also has its own holiday, International Pinot Noir Day is celebrated ever August 18.

Pinot noir has a long history dating back to the first century when the ancient Romans began enjoying it, due to its popularity in the recently conquered Gaul regions in what later became France. In part, much of the early popularity of Pinot Noir is thanks to its continuing use by the Church and Catholic Monks. It was the wine of choice for sacraments. If it was good enough for the Church, of course the public came to love

it as well. Pinot noir is a finicky, less hardy grape than Cabernet Sauvignon. It requires low yields and is subject to numerous illness that can be brought on by wind, cold or hot weather, fungus or rot, due to its thin skin and susceptible to disease. The grape does best in cool, dry climates with well drained, stony, or chalk infested soils.

Pinot noir, due to its more delicate nature and red berry profile is perfect for many wine and food pairings. Pinot noir matches well with duck, pork, veal, chicken, squab, tuna, salmon and other meaty fishes. Depending on the dish, and its seasoning or dipping sauces, Pinot noir works well with many sushi or sashimi dishes. Due to its high level of acidity, Pinot noir stands up to foods and sauces that are higher in acidity.

Pinot noir produces a heavily perfumed wine with scents of earth, spice, cherries, strawberries and raspberries when ripe. It is a light to medium bodied wine, with high acidity that can age well. Burgundy is an expensive wine region. While great wines are produced in Burgundy, many wine collectors state, finding a good Burgundy is a bit of minefield. While the great wines are amazing, as often as not, the bottles they buy and open do not deliver their desired levels of pleasure. They also add, the hunt and failure is part of the fun.

The most famous and expensive of producer of Burgundy is Domaine Romanee Conti, which makes numerous wines including, Romanee Conti and La Tache. Domaine Romanee Conti takes credit for producing the world's most expensive wine. A case of the 1978 Romanee Conti sold in 2013 for almost \$500,000!

While France is the perfect terroir for Pinot Noir, which is where the grape provides its finest expression, Pinot Noir is planted all over the world. Aside from offering the best expression of Pinot Noir, France has the most planted hectares of the grape with 30,351 hectares planted to vine. The United States has the second largest area 29,542 hectares under vine. This is followed by Germany, New Zealand, Italy, Australia, Chile, Argentina, South Africa.

The finest producers of Pinot Noir in California are located in Sonoma, especially in the Russian River appellation, the Central Coast regions and Santa Barbara. Some of the better producers of Pinot noir from Northern California are; Marcassin, Aubert, Peter Michael, Rochioli, Patz and Hall and Kistler. There are now numerous producers of Pinot noir in the central coast of California that are making very good wines including Brewer Clifton and Ojai. In California, the degree of ripeness and alcohol has become an issue of contention between some growers, producers and wine lovers. Proponents of the riper style of Pinot noir in California are headed by Loring and Siduri. The success of Pinot noir in America is not limited to California. The grape has had great success in Oregon and Washington State. Robert Parker, the famous wine critic owns a vineyard, Beaux Freres in the Willamette Valley of Oregon that produces Pinot Noir. Pinot noir is successfully grown in several other countries including Australia, Italy, New Zealand, Spain and Switzerland.

AUSTRALIAN SHIRAZ

Maturation and Differences in Regionality

Do Australian wines show regional differences? Very much so, and this was confirmed at a recent Shiraz tasting by the Institute of Masters of Wine. The best wines from various regions of Australia, and also had the chance to taste mature vintages alongside current releases. This gave a unique opportunity to assess the maturation times of the top-flight wines, whilst seeing if cool- or warm-climate wines are better suited to laying down. As a broad guide, Shiraz from different regions displays the following characteristics:

Margaret River - Warm Maritime Climate.

With a climate akin to Pomerol, the Margaret River region is best known for its Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux blends. Although it can be hard to identify an MR Shiraz blind, they do display great elegance and structure. Not as full or rich as the Barossa, but with intense spice, black cherry, cinnamon and raspberry flavours. The tannins are ripe and the wines usually have good length.

Hunter Valley - Hot Climate

Although hot, the Hunter can be prone to rain, which can occasionally cause problems. The Shiraz can be complex and opulent, with plummy, earthy and leathery aromatics. On the palate the wines display concentrated earthy flavours, fruit sweetness, ripe tannins and good length. The Hunter has an ability to produce wines that can age remarkably well, especially Shiraz and Semillon. Tyrells still harvests grapes from vines planted in 1879.

Clare Valley - Warm to Hot Climate

The home of Wendouree - one of Australia's most sought after wines which does not open up to its full glory for at least a decade. Clare Valley Shiraz is concentrated, but has more spice, cracked-pepper and anise aromas than the Barossa. They display ripe prune-like fruit with great structure and sometimes angular tannins.

Barossa Valley - Warm Climate

Thank goodness for Peter Lehmann! At a time when the big companies in the Barossa were abandoning Shiraz, scrubbing up their own vines and cancelling long term contracts with growers, Lehmann stepped in using borrowed money to buy grapes from the growers and make Shiraz. What foresight he showed: the Barossa is now arguably the most important region in Australia for Shiraz. The area is littered with fine producers such as Henschke, Rockford, Charles Melton, Greenock Creek, Torbreck and Three Rivers. It is also loved by Robert Parker. Is this due to the amounts of American Oak used in the wines or their stunning complexity with aromas of plums, liquorice, chocolate and of course vanilla? On the palate the wines are fruit-driven, with massive concentration, ripe tannins and almost infinite length. Some people find these "one glass wines" because of their power.

McLaren Vale - Warm Climate

Situated to the South of the Barossa, the wines are similar in texture but produce different flavours. McLaren Vale Shiraz produces wine with intense blackberry and liquorice aromas with vanilla overtones. The tannins are ripe and give good longevity to the wines.

Heathcote - Warm Climate

There are not really any singular flavours to identify Shiraz from Heathcote as the area has a number of smaller wineries, who make highly individualistic wines - Wild Duck Creek's "Duck Muck" is made from grapes that are picked at 17+ Baume (a potential Alc level of 18%!). If you were to identify flavour compounds, then plummy and meaty come to mind with abundant fruit flavours and concentration.

Grampians - Warm Climate

Shiraz from the Grampians typically shows pepper and spice aromas with massive fruit concentration and finely structured tannins. With age they develop meaty, gamey bouquets and a silk-like palate. Some of the finer estates wines are often compared to the Rhône Valley in France.

BOTRYTIS

Botrytis Cinerea is a fungal disease that can blight many species of plants, including flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Depending upon weather conditions, Botrytis can take one of two forms in grapes, one as destroyer, the other as enhancer. As "grey rot" it appears and grows during lengthy periods of humidity early in the season. Settling in on immature grapes, it multiplies rapidly, first appearing as tiny brown speckles which gradually grow and spread until the berries turn brownish-purple, begin to shrivel, and seem covered with a grey powder. Eventually the berries will become very dark, desiccate, and drop from their stems. Yields are greatly reduced and wine made from severely-infected fruit will taste mouldy and oxidize easily. In some climates, grey rot is a severe problem with most all grape varieties.

In certain white grape varieties, such as Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, and Furmint, an infection of Botrytis can be so beneficial, even critical, to the production of dessert wines like Sauternes in France, Tröckenbeerenauslese in Germany, or Tokaj in Hungary, that the mold is called "Noble Rot" in these locales (*La Pourriture Noble* in french, *Edelfaule* in German).

Dessert wines made with botrytised grapes are prized and somewhat rare, because weather conditions must be just right for "Noble Rot" to occur. Ideally, a short period of humidity or rain in mid to late season, when the grapes are more ripe than green, will be followed by a sustained period of cool, dry weather, where daytime temperature hovers near 60° F.

Under these somewhat rare conditions, the Botrytis fungi penetrate the grape skins with mycelia to feed and take water from the grapes, which shrivel. Overall acidity decreases. Gums form, along with glutinic and citric acids, and the grape sugars become very concentrated.

Detailed and labour-intensive vineyard management is required to manage a Botrytis-infected crop. Harvesting is difficult and requires much care in handling the extremely tender and sticky berries and many passes to select them at their optimum.

This intense sweetness partially inhibits yeast and fermentation can be very slow, lasting for months. High concentrations of glycerol develop during these extended fermentations and the resulting wines can be fragrantly enticing, exceptionally smooth, and extremely long-lived, cellaring well for decades.

Information sourced from:

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Wine Tasting Reviews

Champagne 411

Wine Pages