

The Newbie's Guide To Wine

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INTRODUCTION

The history of wine making and drinking goes back several thousands of years. Early civilizations discovered the process of fermentation. The exact date remains unknown. It is known, however, that by 7,000 B.C. cultivated vines were growing in the region of Mount Ararat and in Asia Minor. Successive civilizations continued to develop on the process of growing and making and storing wine. Irrigation systems created by the Sumerians around 3500 B.C. helped water the vineyards of Mesopotamia and other arid lands. The Assyrians, The Babylonians and the Egyptians continued the trend.

Although the Egyptians preferred beer, the upper echelons drank wine. The pyramidal tombs in both the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Nobles contain wall hieroglyphics depicting the growing and the harvesting of grapes as well as the making of wine. The Egyptians were also the first to label the wine vats, sealed against the negative effects of air.

The Greeks were the first to begin categorizing the different types of grapes. Authors recorded such things as techniques and tools. In fact, the Greeks invented the pruning knife. They also developed wine containers – amphorae, of clay to act as storage vessels. The Romans took the Greek's inventions and techniques developing them further.

Between 750 and 450 B. C., the Romans refined wine growing techniques and processes. Pruning, fertilization and reduction of acidity owe much to the Romans. Pliny the Elder recorded much of the Roman farmers' practices in this field of agriculture. He classified grapes and recorded the terminology for future generations. The Romans are also responsible for spreading wine culture throughout their empire. Soon, the "provinces" of Hispania (Spain), Gaul (France) and Germania (Germany) – to name a few, were growing grapes for wine making. Even England was learning about wine making. The Roman legions stationed there would trade wine for woolen cloaks and cloth.

Between 500 A.D. and 1400 A.D., the Christian Church began to seriously cultivate land for their own purposes. They needed sacramental wine. Monasteries oversaw large segments of land devoted to growing grapes. Monks made basic vintages, but they also began to experiment, improving upon a basic product. They recorded their work for posterity.

During this period, wine and other spirits were common beverages. Water was not always potable. Wine usually was. Some countries, however, could not grow grapes or produce wine. As a result, trade increased between the haves and the have-nots. The result was a lucrative trade around the European world. Wars arose, some based on cornering and/or controlling the market on the wine-trade.

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The Italian Renaissance (15th century) introduced further developments. Wine was refined. It was becoming a culture unto itself. Vineyards flourished and new techniques continued to grow in proportion to the expansion of area devoted to this crop. The wine trade continued to be lucrative. In Elizabethan times (16th century), the Lord who had the rights to the wine trade was indeed a wealthy man. Dom Perignon, a 17th century Benedictine Monk, refined the art of wine making. He did not discover champagne, but he made it his own.

The colonization of the New World and other countries such as Africa, Australia, spread the concepts of wine making and growing still further. Regions throughout the world began to experiment in growing grapes. Some met with greater success than others did. During the periods following the Industrial Revolution and the First Great War, the New World Wines began to make inroads. The concepts of cheap wine and the need to classify, label and authenticate wine began to evolve.

Today, quality wine growing and cheaper wines both flourish. Each has their own market. Some wines are only for those who truly know their product. The current situation embraces all levels of quality. There are wines for connoisseurs as well as jug wine. You can purchase wine in a bag or in a bottle. The label may bear the name of an ancient and respected vintner. The bottle could also be labeled with a cute little animal. Wine may be fashionable, international and still be unpalatable. It can be local and delectable. Sometimes, this is a matter of taste; sometimes, it is simply a question of education.

This book will act as a guide to help you exchange your Newbie status for that of a more refined one. It will not make you an expert and certainly not an oenophile. That is something that requires years of tasting and practice. Yet, even the experts had to start somewhere on what can be a very pleasurable journey. In this book, we will start with the basics, including the answer to that oh so important questions, "what is wine?"

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1

THE BASICS – WINE 101

Before you can decide what wine to serve with what or attend a tasting, you really need to understand some of the very basics on the subject. You should understand what wine is. You also could do with understanding the basic process of wine making. This includes understanding the major varieties of grapes used in the process.

Wine 101 also includes comprehension of the major types of Wine. This process involves understanding the various approaches to defining or classifying wine. They range from color to taste. This chapter will begin at the beginning with a definition of wine.

WHAT IS WINE?

The simplest way to define wine is this. Wine is the fermented juice of wine grapes. Fermentation is when the sugar present in grape juice becomes, through the actions of yeast alcohol. In this totally natural process, the grape juice becomes wine.

Fermentation can and does occur naturally without human intervention. The weight of grapes in a barrel can crush the fruit into juice, ferment and create wine. Yet, over the 8,000 years or so wine making has been around, humans have become involved in the process. The viticulturists have worked to create the right or ideal type of grapes for producing the best varieties of wine.

In searching to grow the perfect grape, the viticulturist has to remember certain indelible facts. He or she must be extremely aware that grapes require very specific growing conditions to be successful in wine making. The essential factors consist of the following:

- Soil conditions
- Temperature
- The number of days of sunlight
- The angle of the sun
- The variety of grape

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- Vinification – the changing of grape juice into wine

The final factor in making wine that does not taste like rot gut is the skill of the vintner. He or she must utilize his or her skills to produce the best wine possible. In the process, the viticulturist must select plants that work into the schedule. Usually, the only grapes selected for wine come from 3rd year vines.

GRAPES

Essentially, all major grapes come from *Vitis vinifera*. This is the original source of many of the grape varieties. In fact, this species of grape comprises several key wine varieties. Variations of *Vitis* (vine) *vinifera* include the popular American *Vitis labrusa*.

There are more than 8,000 different varieties of grapes from which to choose. All can act as a basis for wine. However, only around 100 grape varieties are the focus of wine lovers. Among the very basic and popular names of wine you should remember are:

- **Cabernet Sauvignon**
(CAB-err-nay So-ve-NYON). A *Vitis vinifera* species, this is probably the most famous red grape around the world. The grape reflects the character of its locale. The best regions are Bordeaux, France; Napa Valley, California and Chile.
- **Chardonnay**
(shar-duh-NAY). *Vitis vinifera*. This adaptable grape is universally known and enjoyed. Lately, it has been considered too popular. Nevertheless, this green-skinned (white) grape is one of the most adaptable. It grows in most climates. With medium to high acidity Chardonnay grapes produce a classically dry to some off-dry white wines. These grapes grow best in Burgundy, France, Champagne, France, California and Austria.
- **Chenin blanc**
(SHEH-nin-BLON). *Vitis vinifera*. This white grape is sometimes called Pineau de la Loire. It has produced white wines in the Loire Valley in France and is the most commonly planted grape in South Africa. High acidity renders the product variable in terms of quality.
- **Merlot**
(merr-LOW). *Vitis vinifera*. Red (black) grapes of this vine produce red wines. It is often a blending grape. Bordeaux reds come from Merlot grapes. Favored regions are Bordeaux, France, Washington State and Napa Valley in California, the Chilean Central Valley and Australia.

- **Muscat**
(MUSS-kat). *Vitis vinifera*. This green (white) grape is often called Muscatel or Muskatel. One of the most ancient of grapes, it has several varieties. These result in a range of products. Muscat grapes can produce frothy, dry, sweet or fortified wines. This depends upon both the variety used and the country of origin. Favorite regions include Alsace and Rhône - France, Piedmont - Italy, Greece, South Africa and Australia.
- **Niagara**
(Nigh-aga-RA). *Vitis labrusca*. This green (white) grape is a north American variety. Wine drinkers describe it as "foxy." It is the leading grape in the United States and is found in Canada as well. The grape does not ship well so it is best used locally. Favored regions is the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario and New York State in the United States.
- **Pinot Blanc**
(PEE-no-Blon). *Vitis vinifera*. This white grape sometimes bears the name of Piano. It is popular in Alsace, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Hungary and British Columbia, Canada.
- **Pinot Gris**
(PEE-no-GREE). *Vitis vinifera*. A white grape variety, this vine produces easy to drink wines. They are light, white or deeper and richer in color. The plants grow best in Italy, Alsace, France, Germany and Australia.
- **Pinot Noir**
(PEE-no-NWAHR). *Vitis vinifera*. A red (black) grape, this produces serious red wines. Difficult to cultivate well, the grapes flourish in Burgundy, France, Sonoma, California, Oregon, Martinborough, New Zealand and Niagara Falls, Ontario.
- **Riesling**
(RISE-ling). *Vitis vinifera*. These white grapes produce some of the world's best white wines. They are varietally pure and can be crisp and dry or lush and sweet. The best regions for growth and production are the Mosel-Saar-Rwer, Nahe, Pfalz and Rheingau in Germany as well as Alsace, France, Niagara Peninsula, Canada and the Claire Valley in Australia.
- **Sangiovese**
(San-gee-oh-VAY-see) Red Italian grapes from this vine produce a range of wines from light to full-bodied. Popular regions include Tuscany, Italy and California, United States.
- **Sauvignon Blanc**
(Soh-vig-non Blanc) *Vitis vinifera*. This green-skinned (white) grape is high in acidity. The product is a white wine with zing. As an aperitif wine, Sauvignon Blanc is considered better than Chardonnay.

- **Sémillon**
(say-mee-Yohn). A golden-skinned or white grape, this is a blender. It usually creates good, dry white wines when combined with Sauvignon. In the 1950s, it was one of the most planted grapes in Chile, South Africa and other places around the globe. Today, it is still popularly grown in California and Washington State.
- **Syrah**
(see-RAH) *Vitis vinifera* L. The ancestral home of this dark-skinned grape is Rhône. It is now popular in Australia. They call it Shiraz (she-RAHZ). Used in varietal and blending, Syrah is high in both tannin and acidity. It is also high in popularity. This grape is among the top 10 grapes grown around the world.
- **Tempranillo**
(tem-pruh-NEE-yo). *Vitis vinifera*. This is Spain's noble grape. A variety of red (black) grape, Tempranillo makes a full bodied red wine. The popular regions are located in Spain, South America, Canada and the United States.
- **Zinfandel**
(zin-fan-DELL). *Vitis vinifera*. Originally. This red grape was believed to be native to California. Tests prove its origins are in Croatia. High in sugar content, Zinfandel is used to create sweet bush wines.

These varieties of grapes are the most common in the world of wine. In the very least, you need to know their names and the type of wine grape. You must be able to distinguish white grapes from black even though the color of the grapes is neither. Moreover, wine, despite its color, is classified as white, red or rosé. Confused? Read on.

COLOR CLASSIFICATIONS

Wine grapes are essentially divided into 2 basic types white and black. This does not indicate either the actual color of the grapes or the wine produced by the grapes. It is simply 1 method of classification of grapes. In turn, the wine is divided into what are termed "styles". These are white red and Rosé.

WHITE WINE

White Wine is not white. If you look closely at the wine, you will see it is yellow, golden or very pale in color. White wine is simply a term used to

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designate wine that is lacking red or pink coloring. In other words, white wine is wine that is not red, pink, rosé or related colors.

White wine can be made from white grapes. White grapes are not white. They are green, greenish-yellow, golden yellow or sometimes a pinkish-yellowish. Like the white wine they produce, a white grape is a grape that is not something else. A white grape is one that is not dark red, bluish or bluish-blackish.

A vintner can also make white wine from the juice of red (black) grapes. This is possible because the juice of the red or black grapes lacks pigmentation. This process, however, is rare. An exception is in the making of Champagne.

White wines are frequently used as aperitifs. They arrive at the table before dinner. They may replace a cocktail. White wine is also common at parties and in bars. Some people enjoy the taste of white wine on a hot day. Serve white wine cool but not cold.

Try: Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Muscadet, Pinot Blanc, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon

RED WINE

Red Wine is red in color. It may also be purplish-red, pale red, ruby red or a variety of red and pink colors. The source is the red or bluish grape. Perversely, the grapes are called "black." All red wines come from black grapes.

Red wines tend to be more complex in taste. They also provide a greater variety in the style they afford. Red wines may be full-bodied. They can also be medium or light-bodied.

Red wines are not usually a self-standing drink. They regularly comprise part of a meal. Do not confuse them with Rosé or "blush" wines.

Try: Beaujolais, Cabernet, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel.

ROSÉ WINE

Rosé or Blush Wines are made with black grapes. They are not, however, Red Wines. Blush wines are actually white wines. They are noted for their sweet and sometime even cloying taste.

Rosés are right for drinking alone, as an aperitif and with meals. In some ways, this type of wine is a general-purpose drink. You need to chill all Rosés before drinking. Do not expect them to last or age.

Try: Pink Merlot, White Zin

DRY, SEMI-SWEET (OFF – DRY) OR SWEET

There are other ways to look at or classify wine. Wine style encompasses the level of sweetness. The acidity level of the grapes results in different textures. Wine is described as dry, semi-sweet or sweet.

DRY WINE

Dry Wines are wines that are not sweet. The sugars in dry wine have been fully fermented. The acidity is more prominent. There are levels of dryness indicated by the Sugar Code. The scale ranges from 0 to 10. The lowest levels represent the driest wines, the highest levels the sweetest.

The pH level of wine is also a major factor in determining how dry a wine may be. A pH level of between 2.8 to 3.3 indicates a dry wine. Over this level, the taste of the wine will reflect a different taste.

There are not wines that are completely dry. Yeast fermentation of grapes does not reduce the sugar content to zero. Yet, some wines are considered 0 on the sugar code. This includes most Chardonnays, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chianti and Soave wines.

Other dry wines include many White German dry wines e.g. Riesling and Pinot Gris. All red wines are considered dry. Among them are Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Zinfandel and Chianti Classico Riserva.

SEMI-SWEET WINE

Semi-Sweet Wines fall between the 2 categories of dry and sweet. They are neither white nor red wine. On the sugar index or code, semi-sweet wines range from 3 to 4. Only white wines fall into sweet and semi-sweet categories. Blush wines are a perfect example of semi-sweet wines. The Late Harvest Riesling and German Spätlese are perfect examples of semi-sweet wine.

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SWEET WINE

Sweet Wines are those with the highest content of sugar. They are unmistakably sweet. The process to create sweet wine or even semi-sweet wine is similar and can follow any of the methods listed below.

- White grapes are allowed to become very ripe.
- Sugar is added.
- Grapes are dried in a specific method using boxes or mats.
- Brandy or other neutral spirits are added to the process.
- The vintner permits the grapes to freeze on the vine.

There are other means to create sweet and semi-sweet wines. The final product includes dessert wines (Sauterne) and the famous Canadian Ice Wines. Port and Cream Sherry are very sweet wines.

Within these types of classifications, there are multiple variations within the wine. Acidity, contributes to the depth of the sweetness. A wine high in sugar content may be saved from being cloying by a higher level of acidity.

TABLE, SPARKLING, FORTIFIED AND DESSERT

There is another way to classify wine. Some individuals divide them into types. Under this system, all wines are categorized as Table Wine, Sparkling Wine, Dessert Wine or Fortified Wine. This basic terminology is a simple way of looking at wine. It is based upon its alcoholic content.

- **Table Wine** is often called Still Wine. It is 8 to 15% alcohol. Table Wine is the kind of wine most people drink on a regular basis. They are usually dry or off-dry in style. Table wines may be Red, White or even Rosé.
- **Sparkling Wine** is 8 to 12% alcohol. It differs from table or still Wine by the addition of CO₂. During fermentation this natural product is retained and not allowed to escape. As a result, the wine is bubbly or sparkling. The most common form of sparkling wine is Champagne.
- **Fortified Wine** contains from 17 to 22% alcohol. As its name indicates, the alcohol content is increased by its addition before or after the fermentation process. Port and Sherry are fortified wines.

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- **Dessert Wines** are super sweet. They also contain around 14% alcohol. Dessert wines are usually the result of the fermentation of light-skinned grapes. Freezing the grape on the vine is one way of creating a dessert wine. Ice Wines are one example of dessert wines.

CONCLUSION

Before becoming an expert on wine and wine making, you really need to start with a very basic comprehension of the subject. You need to know what wine is as well as what the major varieties of grapes are. This chapter - Wine 101, has provided you with a start. The next chapter focuses on terminology.

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2

WINESPEAK – A LOOK AT WINE TERMINOLOGY

Every profession, craft and art has its own language. Wine experts have their own language to discuss the subject of wine and wine making. This glossary of terms will help you make your way through the somewhat confusing world of winespeak.

- **Acidic:** This refers to 1 of the 3 tastes of a wine. It is not complementary. Acidic means the wine tastes sharp, tart or bitter like lemon juice.
- **Aftertaste:** This refers to the residual taste left in your mouth after you swallow the wine. Depending upon the context, the aftertaste may indicate a good or poor wine.
- **Aroma:** This is the recognizable odor, scent or smell of the grapes of the freshly made wine. It is the “perfume” of the specific variety of grape used. Do not confuse aroma with “**Bouquet.**”
- **Aromatic:** This term describes pronounced or very distinctive aromas.
- **Balance:** As the term indicates, balance means all the component of a wine - acid, tannin, alcohol and fruit, are in an equal relationship where none dominates.
- **Bitter:** One of the 3 tastes of wine. Usually stems from under-ripe grapes or tannin.
- **Black Grapes:** The description applied to grapes with a reddish, bluish or purplish tinge or hue. Used to make red wine.
- **Blend:** To mix together 1 or more individual types of wine usually the product of different grape varieties.
- **Bottle Age:** This refers to the time the wine spends aging or maturing in the bottle.
- **Bouquet:** This is a more complex smell or perfume. It is the odor of wine aged in the bottle.

- **Brix:** This is used to measure the level of sugar in the unfermented grape juice.
- **Complex:** This is used when referring to a wine that has many levels of taste and perfumes. This is a compliment reserved for a very good wine.
- **Crisp:** Refers to white wines with perceptible acidity. It feels clean. Crisp is the opposite of "soft."
- **Decanting:** This refers to taking the wine and pouring it into a carafe or other container just before drinking it. This is done with the intent of removing the sediment from and/or airing the wine. Not all wines require decanting.
- **Dry:** Dry wines are the opposite of sweet wines.
- **Dull:** Dull wines are unclear. There is no distinct or distinguishing sense of appearance, aroma or flavor.
- **Estate Bottled:** The term refers to wine that is grown, produced and bottled by the owner of the vineyard it represents.
- **Fermentation:** The natural process through which the sugar in grapes become wine.
- **Finish:** The final taste of the wine.
- **Firm:** A wine that, as a result of its acidity is structured. The opposite of flabby.
- **Flabby:** A wine lacking acidity and, therefore, structure and length of finish.
- **Fortified:** The term applies to wines to which alcohol has been added during fermentation.
- **Full-Bodied:** The opposite of light. Full wines are weighty in both flavor and texture.
- **Jug Wine:** Usually cheap wine sold in jugs.
- **Length:** The actual staying power of a wine's aftertaste.
- **Light-Bodied:** The opposite of full-bodied wine. May lack texture but still retain flavor.
- **Mouthfeel:** This term is a synonym for texture.
- **Must:** This is the juice of white grapes or the skins of black grapes prior too fermentation.
- **Nose:** This refers to the smell, aroma or bouquet of the wine.

- **Oenophile:** A wine lover or connoisseur.
- **Proprietary Wine:** Wine that has been branded for marketing or recognition factor. Comparable to name-brand products.
- **Residual Sugar:** Sugar remaining in a wine that has not been fermented out.
- **Robust** Full bodied wine.
- **Rosé:** A pink wine that may be dry or semi-sweet. It is processed from red grapes.
- **Round** Well-balanced wine.
- **Sommelier:** A wine steward. He or she is responsible for ordering, storing and serving wine.
- **Sparkling Wine:** The name given to any wine that bubbles or is effervescent.
- **Short:** Refers to a wine that's flavor suddenly stops without finishing.
- **Sweet:** A distinguishing feature of wine. It indicates high levels of residual sugar.
- **Tannin:** A naturally occurring bitter tasting substance derived from the skins, stems and pips of grapes. May also be found in oak barrels.
- **Tart:** Refers to wines high in acidity. Often the result of using unripe grapes.
- **Taste:** This is a broad term encompassing all the impressions a wine creates in your mouth. Taste may be sweet, sour or bitter.
- **Terroir:** A French term applied to indicate the entire environmental impact of a specific plot of land or region upon the grapes and wine.
- **Texture:** This refers to how a wine feels in your mouth. Its texture is its consistency.
- **Varietal:** Refers to the specific type (variety) of grape.
- **Varietal Wine:** Wine made from varietal grapes. A single varietal grape comprises the greater part of the wine.
- **Vintage:** This identifies the year the grapes were actually harvested.
- **Vintner:** An individual who makes wine.

- **Viticulture:** The growing or cultivation of grapes.
- **Weighty:** This describes the sensation of how the wine feels in the mouth. The weightier a wine feels on the palate, the higher the content of alcohol.

CONCLUSION

Winespeak can be confusing. It can even be misleading. If, however, you wish to understand what you read and to talk knowledgably about wine, you have to understand the basic terms. Those provided above are basic. They do not go into depth. They are a starting point. Take the list and build upon it. Remember, it is like learning a new language. Everything looks hard and is incomprehensible at the beginning. The more you read, study and speak it, the easier it is to understand. The same applies to winespeak. You have to practice, practice and practice.

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3

NEW WORLD, OLD WORLD, WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

There has always been a disagreement among wine connoisseurs on what country produces the best wine. With the growth of the wine industry in the New World, another argument rages on. Which wine is better – Old World or New World? As anyone with common sense could tell you, it depends.

It depends on a variety of factors. It depends upon whether you like the technological traditional approach to wine making. It relies upon whether you prefer fruity over earthy wines. It is a matter of taste, style and perception. Yet, in the long run, it appears that New and Old Worlds are colliding.

In fact, as the market for wine becomes global and opportunities for the exchange of knowledge advance, the divisions are no longer clear-cut. Technology – whether it be in viticulture, communication or related fields, has also reduced the separation between the Old and New Worlds.

GENERAL DIFFERENCES

OLD WORLD WINE

Old World Wines refer to those produced by the wine making countries of Europe. France, Italy and Spain continue to dominate the top 5 of the wine producing countries in the world. Greece, Germany, Portugal, Hungary and Austria are all part of the Old World cache. In fact, one of the major differences between Old and New World wines is mystique.

It is hard to compete with the Romance of France and Italy. There is the ancient heritage of Greece and the centuries of production in European countries. Vineyards pass down through families. Their methods flow from family member to family member. It is all about tradition.

Tradition is a major component of Old World production methods. The planting, growing and harvesting of the grapes follows established traditions. The making of the wine from grape juice to aging also conforms to certain expectations. Many of the approaches to Old World wine making has remained virtually unchanged over the centuries.

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Established traditions combine with laws governing certain aspects of wine production e.g. combination of grape varieties, to create a consistency. Old World wines are lauded as the result of classic wine making. The regions of Alsace, Burgundy, Piedmont, Mosel-Saar, La Rioja and Duoro are common knowledge. The grapes that create the wine originated in these countries.

Yet, there is variety in the product. The French stress the reliance of Old World wine on "*terroir*." *Terroir* is the environment of the region. It explains the impact of soil, light, slope, altitude, drainage and climate on the grapes. *Terroir* accounts for the subtlety of the wine and its dry nature.

Old World wines have always had a snob appeal. France, for example, has thousands of years of history in making fine wine. The century-old traditions, the reliance on culture, the family names and the renown of such wines as Burgundy, Champagne, Beaujolais, Bordeaux, Zinfandel and Riesling contribute to the appeal. As long as an Old World name is attached to the wine, it must be good.

NEW WORLD WINE

New World Wines are the young challengers. They arrive on the market from anywhere-but-Europe. There are the brash products from the United States and Canada. There are the challengers from South Africa, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia. These are the New World wines and their countries that have a different approach to wine making.

One significant factor has always marked New World wines from their Old World counterpart. This is technology. The New World, overall, has few traditions. They may have a hundred years or so of winemaking, but have yet to establish a long heritage of production. Instead, New World wines have technology and innovation.

Technology, science and innovation are the cornerstones of New World wines. California in the United States is recognized in particular for its freedom of experimentation and use of modern technology. Ontario and British Columbia in Canada are in the forefront of such new products as Ice Wines. In fact, much of New World Wine is based on discovering what works in the New World. This is true for new products as well as technological innovations.

Lacking the same laws, New World wines have experimented with blends of different varietals. In places where sunshine is more prominent than in the Old World, the grapes have produced wines with higher alcohol. Old World grapes produce a new flavor in New World soil under these environmental conditions.

New York vineries are using Native North American varieties such as *Vitis labrusca* because of their hardiness. In Australia, Syrah grapes are now Shiraz grapes. They produce an excellent table wine. In fact, Australia produces the very popular Yellow Tail wine. It is popular worldwide.

While many opt for Old World wines with their more subtle flavor and reserved style, New World wines are being selected for their fruitiness. It is a matter of personal preference. Some choose the old classics of Europe; others find their favorites among the new classics. While critics may argue until Armageddon, it is an undeniable fact – the United States and Argentina are among the top 5 wine producers in the world. Canada is gaining worldwide recognition for its superb ice wines while Marlborough in New Zealand is gaining marks for its Sauvignon Blanc. This is proof positive that a grape – Old World or New World in origin, is not simply a grape.

VIVA LA DIFFERENCE

There are so many different types of wines available for you to taste. It would be a shame to become bogged down in local, regional, national and even continental snobbery. The only way to know what you truly prefer is to try wines from both the New and Old Worlds. Below is a brief compilation of a few countries, wine regions and broad wine divisions.

- **Argentina:** Noted region of production is Mendoza. White and red wines are grown. Red wines derived from Malbec grapes, a French variety from Bordeaux, are becoming increasingly well known internationally.
- **Australia:** There are still more white grapes planted than red. Shiraz/Syrah grapes are popular. Regions for production include Southern Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. Australian wines were once scorned as being plonk. This has changed. Major products include table wines such as Yellow Tail.
- **Austria:** White wines predominate. There are 4 wine regions: Lower Austria, Burgenland, Styria and Vienna.
- **Canada:** Canada is a young producer of wines. Ontario and British Columbia are the major regions for production. Wine production is also taking place in Nova Scotia and Quebec. Canada is best known for its Ice Wines.
- **Chile:** Mainly fine white wines. Regions include Aconcagua, Casablanca, Maipo Rapel and Curicó. Almost all wines produced are dry.

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- **France:** Alsace (mostly dry, white wine), Loire Valley (mostly white), Bordeaux (red and white), Burgundy (red and white), Champagne (sparkling), Provence (red, white, rosé).
- **Germany:** Think only in white. The Riesling grape is the grape in the country. There are 13 regions including Pfalz, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, Rheinhessen, Nahe and Rheingau. The most famous wine from Germany is Liebfraumilch, a medium-dry white wine.
- **Italy:** Native grape varieties predominate. They produce both red and white wines – expensive and inexpensive. There are at least 20 wine producing regions. Major regions are Piedmont (reds), Veneto (whites and reds) and Tuscany (whites and reds). Chianti is probably the best known Italian wine.
- **New Zealand:** Red and white wines. There are 10 wine regions on the north Island and South Island. The best known is Marlborough. Others include Martinborough and Hawke’s Bay.
- **Portugal:** Home to dessert wines such as Port. Medium Rosés are also popular products. Increasingly, the white wine, Vinho Verde, is emerging as one of Portugal’s “new” table wines. Wine producing regions include Minho, Douro and Alentejo.
- **South Africa:** White wines predominate. Regions include Stellenbosch, Paarl, Robertson and Overberg. The grape Chenin Blanc has dominated. At one time, it covered 85% of all plantings.
- **Spain:** This is red wine country. Regions include La Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Navarra, Sherry District and Cataluña. Tempranillo is the principal grape grown in La Rioja and Ribera del Duero. The wine to try is Rioja, preferably ’89, ’90 or ’91.
- **United States:** Wines are both red and white. The States housing the 150 American Viticultural Areas (AVA) are California, Oregon, Washington State and New York. The United States is known for varietal wines. Merlot, ’95 from the Alexander Valley and Cabernet Sauvignon ’94 or ’95 from the Napa Valley are 2 wines worth trying.

CONCLUSION

The great debate of what wines are better continues even as the world is forming its own opinions. The gap between Old and New World wines is no longer a cavern. The change is based on various factors. Technology and increased skill combine with the environment to alter the former imbalance. While the Old World relies on culture and tradition, the New World has called on science, technology and experimentation.

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Nevertheless, the grapes remain as the essence of the production process and the center of the basis for dispute. The nature of the environment and the character and skill of the vintner help define the wine. Yet, the decision in crowning the "Best Wine" remains in the hand of the individual. This, in spite of professional opinion and critical comments, is the final arbitration. In other words, only you can decide which the best wine is. It is your opinion, based on your taste buds and personal preference that will decide whether Old or New World wine is the best – for you.

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4

SELECTING, STORING AND SERVING WINE

You would not think purchasing a bottle of wine would be daunting. It should be simply a matter of entering a store, picking a bottle, paying for it and leaving. Yet, somehow or other, buying a wine does not seem simple. It tends to garner an air of difficulty. You can remove this "fear of wining" if you prepare yourself before you set off to purchase that particular bottle of wine.

SELECTING WINE

Before you go off to buy a bottle of wine, you need to do a few things. You must prepare yourself for the experience. This will make wine shopping not only easier but also pleasant and even enjoyable. Wine shopping should bring as much pleasure to you as opening and drinking the wine.

First, you need to consider the question why. Why am I buying a bottle of wine? Is it for a party? Am I celebrating a special event or occasion? Do I want something to go-with my meal? Is it for a dinner party, a drink's party or an informal gathering? Am I buying wine for a wedding, an anniversary or any other special celebration?

Each event may require a different wine. For a drink's party, you could choose a South African Chenin Blanc or a Spanish White. These are softer, lighter styles of wines. For a dinner party, you might want to buy different wines. You can have a dry, white wine as an aperitif and either a red or white for dinner. You might even want to serve a dessert or fortified wine afterwards. As for a wedding – good choices include champagne or any sparkling wine as well as several table wines.

Once you have decided the purpose for buying wine, you need to look carefully at price. How much can you afford? Wine prices range across the entire spectrum. They can be inexpensive bag or jug wine and medium-priced table wines. Wines can also be extremely expensive. You can pay anywhere from a few to hundreds of dollars for a bottle of wine.

With an idea of what wine you want and how much you can afford to pay, you now can consider the retailer. Where are you going to purchase your wine? There are various options. They include supermarkets, grocery

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stores, wine shops, wineries, auctions and catalogues. There is also the internet. Each of these provides you with the chance to learn how much you do and do not know about wine. Be sure you understand this before you decide where to shop.

As a newbie, you are unlikely to be ready to purchase wines at auction. Wine here is often purchased as an investment. This is for the experts. The internet has its usual precautions. Be wary of small and unknown sites. Wine catalogues involve careful selection. Be wary and check into shipping conditions. Some wines do not travel well. There is also the winery or cellar door. This does provide the benefits of getting the wine from the source. There is also the problem of getting there.

Many of us cannot afford to fly to California, France or South Africa for a bottle of wine or 2, you will probably head off to the nearest retailer. A supermarket may provide you with a wide range of products. The staff is often not wine-savvy. You are probably better off – and it will be better for your ongoing education to visit a well-equipped and stocked liquor store or wine shop.

Before you venture into the store or shop, be sure you have a checklist or wine guide on hand. It also helps if you have boned up on reading wine labels beforehand. It is essential that you know what you are getting. A simple rule of thumb to help you through the process is this: “The more specific in detail the wine label is, the higher the quality of wine.”

Labels contain a wealth of information about the product. With more-and-more countries clearly labeling their wine, it is easier for the consumer to know what he or she is getting. Some mandatory information on wine labels is:

- The name of the wine
- The name of the producer
- The name and location of either/and the person/company legally responsible for the production of the wine
- The volume of the bottle
- The alcohol content
- The name of the shipper and importer
- The country of origin
- The type of wine

The quality and vintage of the wine are optional. Once in the wine shop, be prepared to read the labels. When in doubt, ask the retailer, wine merchant or clerk for further information. Some shops also provide

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pamphlets on the various wines available. Some wineries include basic data to be displayed in front of their products.

The wine shop may simplify the process of selecting wine. These establishments frequently arrange the wine in accordance with the country of origin. Within each country, the wine may also be organized into white and red sections. It is then up to you to consult your list and your budget before you make a decision.

If you want a finer wine, the wine shop may help-out. It may have a special room reserved for the "finer" or more expensive wines. Ask the retailer if the store has such a room. It may also have the opposite – a sales bin. Here you may find wines for a song.

You should also ask about special sales. Some wineries offer promotional sales. There are also anniversary sales and in-store specials. Do not be afraid to check these out.

Do not be fearful about asking the retailer or a clerk about the wines. It is a chance to discuss the topic and to learn more. You may discover something new. You may also learn more in the process of asking a simple question. A good retailer will answer your questions non-judgmentally. He or she will be glad to help you find the right wine.

If you know what you want but cannot find it, ask the retailer. Be specific. Avoid being vague. Try to describe the type of wine, the purpose of the wine, the origin, the producer and any other details you think necessary. At the very least, know whether you want an Old World or New World wine, a red or a white and a table, dessert or fortified wine. Be open to suggestions and let the wine merchant know what you like and think. Be firm about the price.

A good wine merchant will offer a variety of prices. He or she will display a wide selection. They will have some expertise in the subject of wine. Service will be more than perfunctory. There will also be indications of proper wine storage. If the wine shop is a good one, it will satisfy these criteria and more. If you are truly lucky, it will offer in-store tastings or sampling. If it does so, try to attend and enjoy.

One final thought about purchasing wine. Do not stick to the tried-and-true all the time. Venture off the road-most-often-traveled. Be adventurous and open up. Explore the wines of the world. Expand your taste buds. There will be bumps along the way - wines that are disastrous. There will also be some pleasant surprises. When you are at the wine store, whenever you can, opt for a wine you know will satisfy and an unknown quantity. In this way, you can make your event a success and explore something new at the same time.

SERVING

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Ah, the mystique of serving wine. In many ways, serving wine seems to be theater. Indeed, there is a traditional way to serve wine. It is up to you whether you wish to follow the set-pattern. Some guests may expect it. You may enjoy it since it adds to the concept of wine as special. If you wish, you can create the entire set performance piece in the privacy of your home or at a party. All it requires is a bottle of wine and the co-operation of your guests or host or hostess.

The very basics of wine are this: open, pour, serve. The fine points are really window dressing. There are, however, some definite you need to remember when preparing certain types of wine. Generally, you need to chill white wines. This does not mean freeze or make them extremely cold. You simply chill them. Red wines, however, should be served at room temperature. This does not mean they cannot be chilled. In fact you may want to chill them for an hour or 2 in the refrigerator then remove them and let them reach room temperature. This is a general rule. It does not apply in all cases. When in doubt, look it up. Read the advice in a book or go online.

After the wine is ready for serving, you can proceed with the following

- Remove the cork. Use a thick, sturdy wire corkscrew for the job. Avoid the solid bit type as they can break the cork, sending the pieces into the wine. There are also special gadgets for removing the cork. If necessary and you can afford them, purchase it or them.
- After you remove the cork, you have options. You may pour or decant the wine or leave it in the bottle for a moment to “breathe.” The purpose of either procedure is to help remove any of the off-odors of the gases. Breathing also helps to release the aroma of the wine.

Pouring the wine into a carafe, decanter or glass can also help the wine breathe. Decanting also removes some of the sediment. Just be sure to decant or uncork the wine in advance. The time may vary from wine-to-wine. Check to see how long is appropriate for your choice.

- Pour the wine from the bottle or carafe into the glasses of your guests or your own.
- Enjoy.

There are other ways to make serving wine a special event. Pour the wine into appropriate glasses. There is a whole range of glasses intended for the various types of wine. Champagne is suited to tall, slim flutes. Sherry appears in white wine glasses. Wine in general is best served in top glasses with long stems. The prices of glassware can be almost as expensive as wine itself. While the higher-end glasses may make the wine look better, they cannot turn a plonk into a fine wine.

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Purists avoid the highly decorated glasses. They opt for the simple. The best glassware should be clear in color and lightweight. The rim should be thin. Tulip-shaped with a stem is the best form. A longer stem is best. It allows you to hold the glass without touching the bowl and transferring any heat from your fingers. A larger size prevents wine sloshing out of the glass when or if you swirl it to release the aroma. The glass is not frosted. It is not crystal cut with flourishes. The glasses are plain and simple. The purpose, after all, is to show off the wine.

STORING

Storing wine may or may not be necessary. If you buy wine only to serve it the same or next day, there is no need for elaborate wine storage. You place it in a refrigerator or on a shelf and use it. If you are a collector of fine wines or like to have wine around the house, you will require storage. The type of storage facility you choose is based upon the quality of the wine.

Wine – though not all wine – has the capacity to improve with age. To help this process, you need to keep it handy and develop any latent quality. Traditionally, the answer to wine storage is a cellar. This is a problem for several reasons. Not everybody has or has access to a cool, dark wine cellar. Many people do not live in houses with or without basements. They dwell in condominiums or apartments. Some simply cannot afford the proverbial wine cellar. If you do not have a wine cellar handy, there are options.

- A cool, dark closet
- A cool, dark corner beneath steps
- Storage facilities at a wine shop
- Renting or buying a “wine cave.”

The important thing to remember is to keep the environment constant. Temperatures should always be stable. A good temperature for wine storage is between 55°F and 65°F. It must not fluctuate. Extreme temperature changes will alter if not ruin the wine. So, too, will exposure to continuous light. Shield your wine from sunlight.

These are the basics. There are elaborate systems you can purchase or rent. There are also options for the type of wine racks. There are simple wine or wooden constructions. There are also highly elaborate and expensive wooden systems. Some are designed more to look good than to perform better than a less expensive model. The most important thing is to store the bottles on their side. This prevents the cork from drying out.

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CONCLUSION

Buying wine can be baffling if you are a newbie. Always go to the store prepared. Take a list or a wine guide. Be open to talking to the wine shop merchant or retailer about what you want. Be adventurous in your choice when you can.

At home, follow appropriate procedures for both serving and storing wine. You may prepare and serve according to tradition or adopt your own procedures. As long as it meets the demands of the wine, be free to utilize your skills and knowledge. Read up on serving etiquette and storage procedures. You are a newbie. The more you read, the more you will discover about what may become your favorite subject – wine. You may even decide to venture into the next level of this world – wine tasting.

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5

SWISH, SWIRL, DON'T GARGLE – WINE TASTING 101

The motto of any wine lover is simple: "Try as many wines as possible." If you wish to embrace this philosophy, you need to go out into the world and taste whatever wines are available. This may be easy or hard. It depends upon your location, your financial situation and your level of confidence.

You can approach the subject in a number of ways. The first step is to find out where such events may occur. There are several possible options.

- Wine shops. They offer wine tastings on a sporadic or regular basis. Some may even provide courses or workshops on the subject.
- Wine courses. Some universities, colleges and vineries offer the chance to take a course on the subject. These may involve more than wine tasting. In fact, some provide a solid grounding in the science and economics of all aspects of the subject.
- Go to a wine region. Some wineries offer visitors the chance to taste a variety of wines produced from their winery. As part of a tour package, you may get to sample (taste) various wines of a specific region.
- See if a winery is hosting a wine and dine with the wine maker. This is another way to find out about wine making. You can learn what wine matches what food while you taste the product and enjoy the conversation. You may get to ask questions and expand your knowledge.

Before you go to a tasting be aware of the type of tasting. There are, essentially, 2 major kinds: vertical and horizontal. No, this does not refer to the position of your body after the tasting of several potent wines. Vertical refers to a tasting in which all the wines are different vintages of the same wine. Horizontal tastings involve trying a single vintage from several different wineries.

Both types of tastings will help you understand wines. Both may be conducted blind. Tasting blind involves concealment of the labels of the bottles. This prevents conjectures might influence the perception of the wines. Whatever type of wine tasting you decide upon, be sure you understand basic wine tasting etiquette.

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ETIQUETTE

Once you sign up for a tasting, you have to remember there is a certain type of etiquette expected of all participants. This may vary according to the protocol and/or atmosphere of the tasting. In general, however, there are 3 basic rules.

- Do not smoke
- Do not wear any type of scent. This includes perfume, hair gel, body lotion and any other scented products.
- Do not volunteer your opinion immediately after you taste the wine. Wait until everybody has sampled the wine.

As for actual procedure – be sure you are aware of and apply the following.

- Hold the glass up to the light. You are looking to see the hue or color of the wine. Is it clear, dull, hazy or bubbly? Does it appear pale, watery or intense?
- Swirl the wine. This will release the aroma.
- Sniff the wine.
- Slosh the wine around in your mouth. Taste it. How does it feel? Is the texture or “mouthfeel” sweet, bitter or astringent? Does the wine have body? What is the aroma? Is the wine balanced?

Taste the wine with your nose as well as your mouth. Does the aroma remind you of fruits, herbs, earth, flowers, grass, smoke or chocolate?

- Spit or swallow the wine. If you are to taste several different wines, you will spit the wine out. This will ensure your palate is clear and stop you from becoming increasingly unable to distinguish one wine from another as the evening progresses.

CONCLUSION

Wine tasting can be fun. It may be serious, but it is meant to be an enjoyable learning experience. It is one of the best ways to find out how

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much you know. It is an even better way to show you how much there is to learn.

Wine tasting opens up a world of possibilities. It reveals only the tip of the iceberg. It shows you how much more there is to discover and helps you on your way. Wine tasting events direct you by gently shoving you nose and throat first into experiencing wine and more wine.

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6

CHOOSING WINE IN A RESTAURANT

Ordering wine can be a simple matter. You simply choose a house white or a house red wine to go with your meal. You base it on what is available and what you can afford. Choosing wine in a restaurant can also be more complicated. It all depends upon whether the dining facility has a selection of wines and a variety of prices. In the latter instance, you will need to read and understand the Wine List.

WINE LIST

Wine lists come in a variety of sizes and types. You may see the choices scribbled on a chalkboard. The wine list may be a small sampling at the back of the regular menu. The wine list may also come on a separate menu – mixed in or integrated with other beverage offerings.

There are good wine lists and bad wine lists. This does not refer only to the quality of wines. A bad list is one that neglects to include certain information. A bad wine list will leave out such things as price, the name of the wine and the vintage. A good wine list will provide you with all sorts of information upon which to base your decision. It will:

- Group the wines by color and place of origin
- It will clearly provide the name of the wine
- It will show where the wine came from or who made it. This will prevent you from selecting a mediocre or bad example of say a Chardonnay
- It will list the vintage – year
- It will also provide you with the price.
- An above average wine list will also give you a bin number. This allows you to give the server or sommelier a specific number. In this way, you can avoid trying to pronounce the name of an unfamiliar wine.

The intent of this information is to help you select the right wine or a favorite wine. It can be educational. A good wine list will introduce you to comparable but different wines. A bad wine list may turn you off some wines all together. Nevertheless, always ask to see the wine list. If nothing else, it will help you become familiar with what is available and increase your comfort level for the next time you order in this or any other restaurant.

OPTIONS

If you are not sure, always ask someone. If there is a sommelier, put your question to him or her. He or she should be glad to answer your questions. A good sommelier will not make you feel stupid or ignorant. He or she will make you feel comfortable. A good sommelier will guide you in selecting the right wine for the meal and serve it at the right time.

If there is no sommelier, ask your server. He or she may be able to provide some guidance. In any case, always ask to look at the wine menu or list. If the server cannot help you, the wine list will at least provide some form of guidance.

PRESENTATION

There are formal and informal ways of serving wine at a restaurant. In some cases, the server will open the bottle and present you with the cork. Smell it and touch it. Check to see if it crumbles. If it does, there may be problems with the wine. More importantly, read it. This will show you if the brand given agrees with that written on the label. In fact, always read the label of the wine you order. There is a rare possibility that the wine you order from the menu is not the wine that arrives.

Once you have "sniffed" the cork, you nod positively to the server. He or she will then pour the wine into a glass. At this point, you will inspect the wine. You will look at its color. Next, you will swirl the wine to release the aroma before you taste it. Unlike during a wine tasting, you will swallow the wine.

Once you have tasted the fullness of the wine discovering all there is to know, including whether the aftertaste is long or short, you thank the server. If there is a problem, this is the time to inform him or her. You may wish to return the wine if the product is faulty. You can do so if

- The wine is brown in color. This indicates it has been handled or stored improperly.

- The wine has a vinegary or corky smell. This reveals the problem has occurred after the bottling process.

A restaurant has no obligation to replace your wine if you do not like it. If the vintage you have chosen comes from the same grapes but a different producer and you do not like it, you have no right to ask the restaurant to replace it. Consider it as part of the learning curve. If nothing else, it will show you that not all Chardonnays, Rieslings and Champagnes are created equal.

CONCLUSION

Ordering wine in a restaurant can be challenging. You should, however, consider it all part of your education. As in the case of wine tasting and wine shopping, this is all part of learning about wine. You need to do your research and understand the etiquette. You also need to try the various different types of wine lists. It is important to discover and improve your comfort level. In other words, you need to go out and improve your ability to order wine no matter whether the list is good or bad. You must feel comfortable in your ability to go to any restaurant and order wine.

CONCLUSION

The world of wine is a complicated one for a newbie. It speaks its own language. It has its own etiquette. To advance through the process of learning about wine is likened to entering a parallel world. The people look the same. They even dress the same as many others. What is different is the language.

Yet the language should not be a barrier. It is part of the process of becoming more than a newbie. As with any new language, you learn the basics first. You come to accept, if not yet understand, certain terminology. Gradually, you advance to the next stage. The language becomes not mere words but has meaning. The words begin to flow more naturally. Before you know it, green grapes are white and red grapes are black. There is no strangeness. This is just part of the language of wine.

Being comfortable in the world of wine is more than understanding winespeak. It is about more than language. It involves a way of retraining how you think about a certain type of beverage. To the uneducated palate and mind, a wine is a wine is a wine.

In the land of wine, no 2 wines are identical. Even bad wines are different from their equally horrible counterparts. You have to look at wine from a different perspective. You have to involve all the senses. Taste is not enough. You must call upon sight, smell and feel.

Learning about wine is a way to opening your senses. It is a way of increasing your vocabulary. It is about differentiating one wine from others. It is also being able to do so with subtlety.

At the beginning, you may not be able to recognize anything beyond a name. You will rely on the reputation of a certain type of wine. You will name brand. You will know about the obvious. You will also know what to expect from a certain type of wine. You will establish parameters. They will comprise a certain comfort zone. This is natural for a newbie.

As you learn more from reading and experiencing such things as different wine tasting, you can expand your knowledge. In order to become more than a novice, a newbie, you will need to step outside your comfort zone. In doing so, you will begin to grow in your understanding of more wines. This is essential. Be adventurous. Think outside the traditional wine basics. In doing so, you will do yourself a favor. In doing so, you will also open up your taste experience to whatever the world – New or Old, has to offer. Enjoy it all.

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