

ABC'S OF WINE

Acidity

A naturally occurring component of every wine; the level of perceived sharpness; a key element to a wine's longevity; a leading determinant of balance. Types of acidity in wine include tartaric, malic, and citric.

Aging

(1) The holding of wine in barrels, tanks, and bottles to advance them to a more desirable state. (2) The act of waiting to drink a wine until it is ready.

Ah-So

As in "ah, so easy." A pronged device used to remove old corks (also one-half of the ultra-cork remover, the Durand, which is essentially an Ah-So and a corkscrew hybrid).

Alcohol

The end product of fermentation; technically ethyl alcohol resulting from the interaction of natural grape sugars and yeast; generally above 12.5 percent in dry table wines.

Appellation

A delineated wine producing region (most of the time it is particular to France)

Aroma

A scent that is a component of the bouquet or nose; i.e. cherry is an aromatic component of a fruity bouquet.

Astringent

A tasting term noting the harsh, bitter, and drying sensations in the mouth caused by high levels of acid and tannin.

Balance

The level of harmony between acidity, tannins, fruit, oak, and other elements in a wine; a perceived quality that is more individual than scientific.

Balthazar

A 12L bottle equivalent to 16 standard bottles of wine.

Barrel	A large vessel primarily used for aging wine, but can also be used to ferment, which is typically made of oak.
Barrique	French for 'barrel,' generally a barrel of 225 liters.
Blanc de Blancs	Literally means "white of white", but commonly refers to the name for Champagne made entirely from Chardonnay grapes.
Blend	The process whereby two or more grape varieties are combined after separate fermentation; common blends include Cotes de Rhone and red and white Bordeaux. Can also refer to blending grapes (the same grape or other grapes) from other regions.
Blush	A wine made from red grapes but which appears pink or salmon in color because the grape skins were removed from the fermenting juice before more color could be imparted; more commonly referred to as rosé.
Bodega	Spanish for winery; literally the 'room where barrels are stored.'
Body	The impression of weight on one's palate; light, medium, and full are common body qualifiers. A good way to discern "body" is to compare it to milk - skim being light bodied, all the way to cream being full bodied.
Botrytis	A sometimes beneficial mold that causes grapes to shrivel and sugars to concentrate, resulting in sweet, unctuous wines; common botrytis wines include Sauternes, Tokaji, and German beerenauslese. Also referred to as "Noble Rot".
Bouquet	The sum of a wine's aromas; how a wine smells as a whole; a key determinant of quality.

Breathe	The process of letting a wine open up via the introduction of air.
Bretty (AKA Brettanomyces)	A wine affected by Brettanomyces, a wild yeast that affects some cellars and smells anywhere from Band-Aid and sweaty leather saddle to horse barn.
Brix	Unit of measure for sugar in a wine, tested by specific gravity degrees of Brix.
Bung	Closure for a barrel (see also: "bung hole", a hole in the barrel where wine is pumped in and out of).
Cap	Grape solids like pits, skins, and stems that rise to the top of a tank during fermentation; what gives red wines color, tannins and weight.
Cave	Pronounced with a long "a" sound. A wine fridge.
Chaptalization	The process of adding sugar to fermenting grapes in order to increase alcohol. Invented by Jean-Antoine Chaptal (hence "Chaptalization").
Chateau	French for 'castle;' an estate with its own vineyards. Wineries in Bordeaux are commonly referred to as a "Chateau".
Chewy	A wine that is rich and seems almost thick.
Claret	An English name for red Bordeaux. Literally meaning "clear", because the wines of the time were less dark than wines found in warmer parts of the world.
Clos	Pronounced 'Cloh,' this French word once applied only to vineyards surrounded by walls.

Cold Soak	<p>When grapes are crushed and then allowed to macerate on the skins before fermentation or pressing occurs. Typically the grapes are cooled in some way to prevent early fermentation, but it depends on the case and/or set-up of a winery.</p>
Color	<p>A key determinant of a wine's age and quality; white wines grow darker in color as they age while red wines turn brownish orange.</p>
Cooperative	<p>A winery owned jointly by multiple grape growers.</p>
Cork	<p>An impermeable buoyant material made from bark tissue that is primarily used in wine as a stopper. Over time, tiny bits of air enter the wine through the cork, which help to slowly develop and enhance aromas and flavors in the wine.</p>
Corked	<p>A wine with musty, mushroomy aromas and flavors resulting from a cork tainted by TCA (trichloroanisol).</p>
Crush	<p>The season of picking and juicing grapes for fermentation into wine. Usually, a very busy time in the winemaking calendar when winemakers work a lot of overtime hours. (Also known as "harvest.")</p>
Decant	<p>The process of transferring wine from a bottle to another holding vessel. The purpose is generally to aerate a young wine or to separate an older wine from any sediment.</p>
Demi	<p>A 375 mL bottle, half the size of a standard bottle of wine (not to be confused with demi-sec).</p>
Demi-sec	<p>A French term meaning "half-dry" used to describe a sweet sparkling wine.</p>

Disgorge	The process by which final sediments are removed from traditionally made sparkling wines prior to the adding of the dosage.
Dosage	A sweetened spirit added at the very end to Champagne and other traditionally made sparkling wines. It determines whether a wine is brut, extra dry, dry, or semisweet.
Dry	A wine containing no more than 0.2 percent unfermented sugar.
Earthy	A non-scientific term used to describe aromas and flavors that have a certain soil-like quality.
Élevage	French term for the progression of wine between fermentation and bottling. Comparable to the term "raising" in English; think of élevage as a wine's adolescence or education. The raw fermented juice is shaped during this period into something resembling its final form, through techniques such as barrel aging, filtering and fining. Good winemaking decisions during élevage can help the juice achieve its full potential; bad decisions can leave it flawed.
Enology	The science of wine production; an enologist is a professional winemaker; an enophile is someone who enjoys wine.
Fermentation	The process by which yeast eats the sugar in grapes, which is then transformed into alcohol; how grape juice interacts with yeast to become wine.
Filtration	The process by which wine is clarified before bottling.
Fining	Part of the clarification process whereby elements are added to the wine, i.e. egg whites, in order to capture solids prior to filtration.

Flabby	A wine that has no acidity or structure on the palate.
Fortified wine	A wine in which a grape spirit, typically brandy, is introduced during fermentation; sugars and sweetness are high due to the suspended fermentation.
Fruit Bomb (or Fruit Forward)	A wine with super ripe fruit on the nose and palate. Often times higher in alcohol and higher VA (volatile acidity). Can taste very lush and velvety.
Graft	A vineyard technique in which the bud-producing part of a grapevine is attached to an existing root.
Gran Reserva	A Spanish term used for wines that are aged in wood and bottles for at least five years prior to release.
Grand Cru	French for 'great growth;' the very best vineyards.
Green	A term used to describe underripe, vegetal flavors in a wine.
Grower Champagne	Champagne made produced (pressed, bottled, and sold) by the estate that owns the vineyards where the grapes are grown. Noted by "RM", Récoltant-Manipulant, on the bottle.
Haut	A French word meaning 'high.' It applies to quality as well as altitude.
Hectare	A metric measure equal to 10,000 square meters or 2.47 acres.
Hectoliter	A metric measure equal to 100 liters or 26.4 gallons.

Herbaceous	An aroma or flavor similar to green; often an indication of underripe grapes or fruit grown in a cool climate.
Hollow	A term used to describe a wine that doesn't have depth or body.
Hot	A wine with high alcohol that, in some cases, burns your throat.
Hybrid	The genetic crossing of two or more grape types; common hybrids include Mueller-Thurgau and Bacchus.
Ice Wine	From the German eiswein, this is a wine made from frozen grapes; Germany, Austria and Canada are leading ice wine producers. Grapes are picked in late fall/early winter and pressed when still when frozen, thereby concentrating the sugar.
Jeroboam	An oversized bottle equal to six regular 750 ml bottles.
Kabinett	An official German term for a wine which refers to the time of the harvest. Typically picked in September (main harvest) when grapes are fully ripened, these wines are usually made in a dry or off-dry style.
Kosher	A wine made according to strict Jewish rules under rabbinical supervision.
Labrusca	A grape native to North America, literally meaning "the fox grape", is a species of grapevines belonging to the Vitis genus in the flowering plant family Vitaceae. Concord and Catawba are two primary examples. Not commonly used to make wine, like "Vitus Vinifera".
Late Harvest	As it sounds: a term used to describe dessert wines made from grapes left on the vines well past the original or main harvest, often until botrytis has set in.

Lees	Heavy sediment made from dead yeast cells and grape solids left in the barrel after fermenting the wine.
Legs	A term used to describe how wine sticks to the inside of a wineglass after drinking or swirling. Generally used to tell the alcohol volume (thicker legs = more alcohol).
Maceration	The process of allowing grape juice and skins to ferment together, thereby imparting color, tannins, and aromas.
Maderized	Stemming from the word Madeira, this term means oxidization in a hot environment.
Magnum	A bottle equal to two regular 750 ml bottles.
Malolactic Conversion	The process by which harsh malic acid is converted to softer lactic acid. Typically used with varieties that are highly acidic in order to tame the bite of a younger wine.
Mature	Ready to drink!
Mouthfeel	The various sensations like thick or thin, round or lean, that a wine can create while in the mouth.
Must	Crushed grapes about to go or going through fermentation.
Negociant	A French term for a person or company that buys wines from others and then labels it under his or her own name; stems from the French word for 'shipper.'
New World	Wines produced outside of the traditional wine growing areas of Europe and North Africa.
Nose	Synonymous with bouquet; the sum of a wine's aromas.

NV	Non-Vintage. Typically used in Champagne when they blend multiple years together (called base wine or reserve wine) to achieve a consistent taste profile.
Oak/Oaky	As referred to in "barrel" above, oak is primarily used to make these aging vessels. Oak can soften the harsh grape tannins and impart flavors. "Oaky" is a term used to describe the woody aromas and flavors, like butter, popcorn, and toast, that are found in 'oaky' wines.
Oenology	The science of wine and winemaking.
Open	Allowing flavors and textures to show themselves by exposing the wine to air and time. "The wine finally became open enough to drink after 2 hours in a decanter."
Organic	Grapes grown without the aid of chemical-based fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides.
Oxidation	Wine that has been exposed to air (Oxygen) and has undergone a chemical change. Can be a long process or a short process.
Oxidized	A wine that is no longer fresh because it was exposed to too much air.
pH	An indication of a wine's acidity expressed by how much hydrogen is in it.
Phenolic Compounds	Natural compounds present in grape skins and seeds (Tannins are composed of these compounds).
Phylloxera	A voracious vine louse, or aphid, that over time destroyed vineyards in Europe and California, particularly in the late 1800s.

Plonk	A derogatory name for cheap, poor-tasting wine.
Pomace	The mass of skins, pits, and stems left over after fermentation; used to make grappa in Italy and marc in France.
Port	A sweet, fortified wine made in the Douro Valley of Portugal and aged in the coastal town of Vila Nova de Gaia; variations include Vintage, Tawny, Late Bottled Vintage, Ruby, White, and others.
Premier Cru	French for 'first growth;' a high-quality vineyard but one not as good as grand cru.
Press	The process by which grape juice is extracted prior to fermentation; a machine that extracts juice from grapes.
Primeur (en)	A French term for wine sold while it is still in the barrels; known as 'futures' in English-speaking countries. Also a week-long wine industry celebration of the release of the most recent vintage in Bordeaux.
Pruning	The annual vineyard chore of trimming back plants from the previous harvest.
Quaffable	Something that is easily drinkable but not necessarily complex. Wines you drink without a thought about the wine. They just taste good. You can drink a lot of these wines.
Racking	The process of moving wine from barrel to barrel, while leaving sediment behind.
Reserva	A Spanish term for a red wine that has spent at least three years in barrels and bottles before release.

Reserve	A mostly meaningless and largely American term indicating a wine of higher quality; it has no legal meaning.
Riddling	The process of rotating Champagne bottles in order to shift sediment toward the cork.
Rosé	French for "pink" and used to describe a category of refreshing wines that are pink in color but are made from red grapes.
Sec	Dry (French word for dry).
Silky	A term used to describe a wine with an especially smooth mouthfeel.
Solera	The Spanish system of blending wines of different ages to create a harmonious end product; a stack of barrels holding wines of various ages, the youngest on top and the oldest on the bottom.
Sommelier	Technically a wine steward, but one potentially with a great degree of wine knowledge as well as a diploma of sorts in wine studies.
Spicy	A term used to describe certain aromas and flavors that may be sharp, woody, or sweet.
Split	A quarter-bottle of wine; a single-serving bottle equal to 175 milliliters.
Steely	A term used to describe an extremely crisp, acidic wine that was not aged in barrels.
Stem(s)	(1) Glassware. (2) The main body or stalk of the vine.

Structure	The overall makeup of the wine on your palate ("Does it have structure?"). A more or less ambiguous tasting term that implies harmony of body, fruit, alcohol, acidity, and tannins.
Super Tuscan	A red wine from Tuscany that is not made in accordance with established DOC rules; often a blended wine of superior quality containing Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Merlot.
Supple	A term used to describe smooth, balanced wines.
Table Wine	A term used to describe wines of between 10 and 14 percent alcohol; in Europe, table wines are those that are made outside of regulated regions or by unapproved methods.
Tannins	Phenolic compounds that exist in most plants; in grapes, tannins are found primarily in the skins and pits; tannins are astringent and provide structure to a wine; over time tannins die off, making wines less harsh.
Terroir	A French term for the combination of soil, climate, and all other factors that influence the ultimate character of a wine.
Texture	A tasting term describing how wine feels on the palate (not to be confused with "Structure").
Tight	A wine that is not yet ready to drink.
Trocken	German for "dry" - look for this on Riesling labels if you want a dry Riesling.
Typicity	A tasting term that describes how well a wine expresses the characteristics inherent to the variety of grape.

Ullage	Friend term for the empty space left in bottles and barrels as a wine evaporates.
Varietal	A wine made from just one grape type and named after that grape; the opposite of a blend. Often seen with "single" in front of it.
Variety	Referring to the type of vitus vinifera grape used in the bottle or blend.
Vegetal	A tasting term describing characteristics of fresh or cooked vegetables detected on the nose and in the flavors of the wine. Bell peppers, grass, and asparagus are common "vegetal" descriptors.
Vinfanticide (AKA infanticide)	Drinking a wine too young or before it is ready to be consumed.
Vinification	The process of making wine.
Vintage	A particular year in the wine business; a specific harvest. The year a wine is bottled. Always noted on the label, except in Champagne (See: NV).
Viticulture	The science and business of growing wine grapes.
Vitis Vinifera	The species of grape that comprises over 99% of the world's wine.
Waiter's Friend	A popular and easy to use type of corkscrew.
Yeast	Microorganisms native/endemic to vineyards (or commercially produced) that issue enzymes which trigger the fermentation process by eating the sugar and converting it to alcohol.

Yield

The amount of grapes harvested in a particular year. Usually expressed in tons per hectare.

Young

An immature wine that is usually bottled and sold within a year of its vintage. Wines meant to be drunk “young” are noted for their fresh and crisp flavors.