

Vin de Vin Wine Tasting and Collecting Consultants

Grape Vine

A monthly Internet newsletter about wine, wine buying, wine tasting, and wine collecting – V.Pina, Publisher

Grape Vine is a new publication from Vin de Vin Wine Tasting and Collecting Consultants. It is intended to be a free monthly newsletter delivered by Internet only. It will provide interesting, humorous, and helpful information about wine buying, wine tasting, wine collecting, and other useful tidbits about wine.

Grape Vine is an extension of the philosophy of Vin de Vin. That is, wine is and can be fun, simple, and educational. Each issue will be dedicated to making wine more understandable and less mysterious.

From corks to cellaring, from package stores to state stores, from Albariño to Zinfandel, *Grape Vine* covers all bases having to do with wine. If you are curious about wine or simply want to learn more in a fun and interesting manner, *Grape Vine* is where you should hang your grapes (I mean hat!).

Wine 101 – Where grapes are grown and wines are made

Wine can be intimidating, right? Part of that comes from knowing there are lots of different kinds of wines out there but also knowing you have a limited knowledge of wine. One tip that will help you understand wine is knowing a little geography. Most well-known wines come from a handful of countries, namely **New World** countries like the **USA, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, South Africa, and Canada** (eh!) and **Old World** countries like **France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Germany**. Most New World wines say right on the label where the wine is from (**Country and Region**), when it was harvested (**Vintage**), alcohol content, and what grapes were used to make the wine (**Varietal**). Old World wine labels mention the vintage also but they focus more on the country and region more than the varietal (actual grapes used). That is because **many Old World wines have historically been blended** and rarely bottle 100% of the wine from one single grape.

France

France is the best example of this. It is one of the world's biggest wine producers and its labels are among the ones where you need to know some geography.

France's main wine growing regions are:

- √ **Bordeaux** – Most famous for red wines made from **Cabernet Sauvignon** and **Merlot**
- √ **Burgundy** – Most famous for red wines like **Pinot Noir** and white wines like **Chardonnay**
- √ **Rhone Valley** – Most famous for red wines like **Syrah**
- √ **Loire Valley** – Most famous for white wines like **Sauvignon Blanc** and **Chenin Blanc**
- √ **Alsace** – Most famous for white wines like **Riesling** and **Gewurztraminer**
- √ **Champagne** – Most famous for, you guessed it. **Champagne!**

Here are some good wine-related geography tips for France:

- When the label on a bottle of French red wine says **Bordeaux** (as in France) – you should think **Cabernet Sauvignon** or **Merlot**.
- When the label on a French white wine says **Burgundy** – you should know that means **Chardonnay** is the grape from which this wine is made.
- If the label says **Burgundy** and it's a red wine – think **Pinot Noir**
- If the label mentions Rhone (as in Rhone Valley in France) – think **Syrah**
- If the label says Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé – think **Sauvignon Blanc**
- If the label says Vouvray, Anjou, Quarts de Chaume, Saumer, or Montlouis – think **Chenin Blanc**
- Last one. If the label says **Riesling** and it's a French wine – think Riesling! White wines from **Alsace**, France, like **Riesling** and **Gewurztraminer**, are allowed to mention the grape on the label. Hey, that was too simple!

California

California is a lot easier. Nearly all wines made in California list the grape variety on the label. Here are some useful tips regarding where grapes are grown and made in California.

California's main wine growing regions are:

- √ **Napa Valley** – Home to great Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay
- √ **Sonoma Valley** – Red Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc
- √ **Carneros** – Chardonnay and Pinot Noir
- √ **Mendocino/Lake County** – Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon
- √ **Bay Area/Central Coast** – Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Riesling
- √ **South Coast** – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Petit Syrah, and Sauvignon Blanc

In California, technically there are dozens of, brace yourself, “**Approved Viticultural Areas.**” AVAs are fancy words for wine regions. For more a complete list go to <http://www.atf.treas.gov/alcohol/info/vitlist.html>

All you really need to know is that California wines, like most New World wines, generally list the actual grape on the label in addition to the region, vintage, and alcohol content. Why does this matter? Some wine regions are better than others, just like some parts of the U.S. are better to grow oranges than other parts. This conclusion comes from years of planting vines and seeing the quality of grapes and wine they produce. Generally wines taste of the regions they come from. After all that, you should know that if a U.S. wine label lists a region on it, 85% of the grapes used in that wine must come from that region. That means your favorite **Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** *could* have up to 15% of its grapes come from another region. If you are totally confused, drink a glass of wine!

The point is grapes are often blended to make wine so don't be surprised if you find yourself buying and enjoying wines that are a mix of different grape varieties. Wines labeled **Bordeaux** and **Meritage** are examples of blended red wines. The predominate grape in both of these examples is usually Cabernet Sauvignon. Cabernet Sauvignon is normally blended in these examples, with **Merlot** and **Cabernet Franc**. Become a wine label reader (front and back) and you'll learn a lot.

June's Vine of the Month

White Wine

2000 (Vintage) Bonny Doon (Winery)
**Every Heart Has Its Riesling (Wine Name/
Riesling grape)**

This California winery is known for taking chances and for not following current trends. They have crafted an American Riesling in a German style with grapes from Washington State. Talk about diversity! A very nice summer white wine. Low alcohol, lots of fruit to taste, and it goes well with salmon on the grill. Would go even better with scallops on the grill. For \$15, it is well worth it. Ask your local wine shop to order you some.

Red Wine

2000 (Vintage) Viña Alarba (Winery)
**Old Vines Grenache (Wine Name/
Grenache grape)**

A wonderful and interesting wine from Spain. Great, dark color, and what a bouquet! The aroma jumps right out of the glass. Its tastes of a bowl of fruit but has enough weight to match with steak or barbecued meats. Robert Parker (the most famous of American wine critics) says

"this is an unreal value that is priced so low most consumers will never believe it is this good."

It retails for \$6. Enough said!

One final note, the easiest way to learn about different kinds of wines is to taste them. For a change, open two bottles of different red (or white) wines with dinner and compare. Or better yet, hold a **Vin de Vin** wine tasting.

To help you identify different types of red and white wines, I've attached a guide to the most common types of wines. That's all for this month!

Next Month: How to look for and buy wines in your favorite wine store. Cheers!

WINE TYPES

Red wine (grapes) – Most Commonly Known

Cabernet Sauvignon (primary grape in most wines labeled Bordeaux or Meritage)

The King of Red wines. "Cab" is a wine that is dark colored, almost black, and dry. It has more substance and weight than almost all other red wines. Generally it becomes more approachable with age. Grown around the world, it is among the most expensive red wines. Great with steak, lamb, or beef.

Merlot (primary grape in Bordeaux wines that are labeled St.-Emilion or Pomerol [France])

More approachable than a Cab and generally more affordable too. In traditional Bordeaux wines Merlot is used to soften the Cabernet Sauvignon. Still dry, it has more of an upfront fruit flavor than a Cab. Fruit flavors can be of black cherry, strawberries, plums, or figs. Generally not as expensive as Cabs. Grown not only in France but in Chile, Italy, Washington State, Oregon, and California. Goes well with grilled meats, fowl, and pork.

Pinot Noir (primary grape in wines labeled [Red] Burgundy)

Not as weighty or dark colored as a Cab or Merlot, this wine is known for its complexity. It tastes of black cherry, spice, and raspberries. In addition to France, it is grown successfully in California, Oregon, and New Zealand. Because it is difficult to grow it can be comparable in cost to Cabs. Matches well with pork loin, ham, swordfish, veal, roast beef, and beef stew.

Syrah or Shiraz (primary red grape in wines labeled Rhone [Valley in France])

A dark-colored wine, it tastes of pepper, spice, black cherry, earth, tar, leather, and roasted nut flavors, and has a smooth, supple texture and smooth tannins. Australian versions can be 100% Shiraz or blended with Merlot and/or Cabernet Sauvignon. Examples of French blends are Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Languedoc-Roussillon. Generally more affordable, particularly Australian versions. Goes well with grilled chicken, turkey, stews, duck, pork chops, and lamb.

Zinfandel (red, not white zinfandel)

Dry, fruity, and full-bodied with a dash of spice. It is a dark-colored red wine that is among my favorites. Mainly grown in California. Its cousin, Primitivo, is made successfully in Italy. More affordable than many other red wines. Matches well with steak, hamburgers, and beef.

WINE TYPES

White wine (grapes) – Most Commonly Known

Chardonnay (primary grape in wines labeled [White] Burgundy)

The King of White wines. But in my opinion, not necessarily the best white wine in the world. A dry wine, it tastes of butter, butterscotch, and oak. Can age but generally not as long as red wines. Grown around the world, it is among the most expensive white wines. Consider matching it with saltwater fish, shellfish, pork, ham, pasta with butter, fowl, or even duck.

Sauvignon Blanc (primary grape in wines labeled Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre)

A wonderful smelling and tasting wine that can be consumed young, and more affordable than Chardonnay. Not as dry as Chardonnay, this wine has a lower alcohol content and therefore is not as heavy. Among the New World wine producing countries, New Zealand makes the best Sauvignon Blancs hands down. Matches well with poached, grilled, or sautéed freshwater fish, chicken, turkey, or roast pork loin.

Riesling (known as Riesling everywhere)

In my opinion, the best and most versatile white wine grape in the world. It is grown most famously in Germany where it is made from dry to super-sweet. The best part of German Riesling other than its taste, is the fact that it is low in alcohol. Riesling is also grown successfully in California, Washington State, New York State, and Austria. Try German Riesling with your favorite Chinese or Asian food and hold on!

Chenin Blanc (primary grape in wines labeled Vouvray, Anjou, Quarts de Chaume, Saumer, or Montlouis)

In France, this wine can be made into a wide range of styles from medium dry (Vouvray) to downright sweet (Quarts de Chaume). It is also the most widely planted white wine grape in South Africa. South African versions are quite affordable. It tastes of melon, peach, citrus, and spice. It can be a stand-alone wine without food or matched with cold cuts, crab salad, grilled trout, or swordfish. Sweeter styles match well with fresh fruits like strawberries (and cream), fruit flans, cheesecake, and sweet soufflés.

Pinot Grigio (sometimes labeled as Pinot Gris)

One of the great white wines of Italy. It is also grown in France, Oregon, and California. It has a golden yellow color and an herbaceous, vegetative, exotic fruit-type bouquet. Pinot Grigio is a bargain compared to many French and American white wines. Served chilled with seafood pasta, fish, or shellfish.