



Introductory Wine Glossary

Acid (Acidity)

Natural acid is present in all wines. Tartaric and malic acids found in grapes, stems and seeds give the wine, if not properly handled, a mouth puckering "tartness."

Alcohol

Alcohol acts as a preservative. The amount of alcohol can be assessed by a slightly warm sensation at the end of your tongue and the back of your throat.

Aftertaste

Wines in good condition and relatively balanced should leave a pleasant aftertaste lingering in the mouth. (See finish also)

Appellation

The grape's origin in geographic terms. Such appellation depicts officially identified growing areas; e.g. Yakima Valley Cabernet Sauvignon or Columbia Valley Chardonnay.

Aroma

The aroma of a wine is more prevalent when young and is the result of the fresh fruit. The aroma of a wine is said to refer to the smell of the fruit, while the bouquet is the entire experience, including non-fruit entities such as oak.

Astringent

A mouth-puckering effect commonly caused by high contents of acids or tannins; can suggest some predictions about the wine's longevity.

Austere

A straightforward, no frills, uncomplicated wine.

Balance

The relative intensities of acidity, fruit, flavor and character. "Perfectly balanced" means the harmonious marriage of all elements where none dominate or detract. A great wine must be well balanced, yet a well-balanced wine is not necessarily great, just well made.



Barrel Fermented

The fermentation process occurs inside the barrel and gives the wine additional fullness from the activity and the resulting extraction of tannin and wood (typically oak) flavors.

Big

A description for wine with robust character and body. Big is not necessarily great; a big wine can be rather harsh or coarse.

Bitter

Bitterness is most commonly found in the wine's aftertaste; usually from poor harvest timing or improper cellar treatment.

Body

Probably the most difficult to describe element of wine tasting. Often misused, it is indicative of weight and texture in contrast to lightness.

Bottle Age

Many wines, especially Cabernet Sauvignons, Merlots and some Chardonnays benefit from additional bottle aging.

Bouquet

In the broadest sense, the complex smells created by the wine's slow oxidation of fruit acids and alcohol; a developed, mature aroma.

Buttery

A self-descriptive smell and taste found in some wines, especially Chardonnays with oak aging.

Cabernet Sauvignon

The grape which originated from the Medoc area of France, and is so well suited to California and Washington. The grapes are small, dark, late-ripening berries with intense color and high skin tannins. The grape benefits from barrel and bottle aging.

Character

Distinct qualities of a wine due to the grape variety and geographic origin.



Chardonnay

The grape of all the great white Burgundies which is rivaling the White Riesling as the premier white wine grape. Aromatic when young, it matures to a rich and broad, sometimes buttery or smoky smell and flavor. In general, bottle age will improve higher-end, balanced Chardonnays.

Clarity

Your wine should be clear. Cloudiness may indicate either spoilage or secondary fermentation. Minimum filtration can leave light sediment, which is not related to clarity unless the wine is jostled.

Clean

Sound wine, without "off" aromas; highly palatable, refreshing, contrary to a dull wine.

Crisp

A term most often used in connection with a firm, refreshing, sometimes slightly acidic wine.

Depth

A rich, subtle quality meaning different layers of flavors combining to create a "deep" wine.

Dry

The opposite of sweet; no discernable residual sugar relative to the acid.

Earthy

Overtone resulting from specific soil conditions.

Elegant

Well-balanced, refined, pleasant wine of quality.

Estate Bottled

The producer and bottler also controls the vineyard cultivation; usually through ownership but possibly through leasing.

Fermentation

A process during which yeast converts the sugar in the grape juice into half alcohol and half carbon dioxide.

**Finish**

The final impression of the wine; e.g. crisp, flat, lingering, complex, velvet.

Flat

A sparkling wine or Champagne that has lost its spritz. Also, a wine with low acidity and or poor finish, also known as flabby.

Flinty

Quite often an austere, dry, clean white wine. A result of certain soil conditions.

Flowery

With a distinct "bouquet" of fresh flowers. Washington White Rieslings are frequently flowery.

Fragrant

Natural scent, agreeable bouquet or aroma.

Fruit

A quality varietal wine is expected to display discernable smells and flavors relative to its grape.

Fruity

A wine displaying the flavors and aroma of fresh fruit. A characteristic of most well made younger wines.

Great

A very subjective term used to describe a wine. Very often over used, it should describe an excellent growth year, having depth, character, fragrance, style, balance and perfect aftertaste.

Green

An immature product lacking finesse. Sometimes a result of grapes picked prior to reaching desirable ripeness or a young wine requiring bottle age.

Harsh

Overly acidic, excess tannins, astringent. Harshness may disappear with correct cellaring or dissipate when allowed to breath.

**Heavy**

Not really a favorable term. Too much alcohol and extracts. Often used to describe a wine not desirable for an occasion calling for a refreshing, easy drinking wine.

Honeyed

Characteristic fragrance found in sweet white wines, especially late harvested or botrytised wines.

Inspid

Somewhat flat, tasteless, with little character.

Legs

The "tears" falling down the inside of a glass in which the wine has been swirled. Often indicative of a rich, high alcoholic wine.

Light

A wine with little alcohol and lack of body. Often misused consumer term when asking for wine not too demanding to accompany a light meal.

Long

Very desirable; lingering flavor and bouquet.

Malo-lactic Fermentation (ML)

Secondary fermentation converting malic acid to lactic acid. ML converts harsh malic acid to the milder lactic acid producing a softer, sometimes more buttery or creamy wine.

Manor Reserve

A wine benefiting from special conditions and cellar treatment.

Medium dry

Another way of saying "off dry." Contains higher residual sugar making the dry wine semi-sweet.

Merlot

The grape descended from the great French Pomerol area. A deep red grape which matures sooner than Cabernet Sauvignons and shows softness, fruit and charm.

**Must**

Crushed grapes in their juice, prior to being pressed.

Nose

A neutral term used to describe the attributes in a bouquet or aroma.

Pinot Noir

The wine grape of the great French Burgundy region. Fruitier, less tannic and richer textured than Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot, is enjoyable younger but will benefit from bottle age as well.

Oak

The preferred wood in which to ferment or age wines. Very desirable when its flavors are apparent in moderation and balanced with other components of the wine.

Off-taste

Mistreated, sometimes diseased or tainted wine.

Off-dry

Semi-sweet wine. A taster's impression of higher residual sugar.

Oxidized

Unfavorable early spoilage due to exposure to oxygen. Produces "Madeira" wine-like flavors and brownish discoloration.

Poor

No merit, no character, no quality.

Racey

A wine with zest and liveliness.

Ripe

Wine in full bloom.

Robust

Full-bodied, yet rounded, usually a big wine. A term more commonly used with red wines.

**Round**

Well-balanced, mature wine.

Sauvignon Blanc (Fume Blanc)

The white grape of the French Bordeaux region, usually blended with Semillon. It is often described as grassy. The flavor ranges from mild citrus to gooseberries. Goes well with seafood and sheep's milk cheeses!

Spicy

A rich, herb-like aroma and flavor.

Structure

Components of the wine.

Sweet

A wine with either low acid or high residual sugar levels. A natural characteristic of dessert wines.

Tannin

A natural preservative allowing for controlled aging. To detect the tannin levels, refer to the roof of your mouth where tannin induces a drying sensation.

Tart

A wine that is sharp due to high acid levels. Tartness may soften with aging.

Texture

The feeling of the wine in your mouth; encompassing the full range of rough to velvety.

Unbalanced

A wine displaying ill-matching characteristics.

Value

The overall quality and pleasure of a wine relative to its price.

Vanilla

A flavor describing a bouquet of distinct aromas resulting from the wine's exposure to certain oak varieties.



Velvety

Silky, smooth, a word to describe opulence in texture.

Vineyard Designation

When a minimum of 95% of the wine is from the same vineyard, the winery may designate the vineyard on the label.

Watery

Very little fruit, poor presence of alcohol, acidity and other vital parts.

Well-Balanced

A highly desirable compliment; indicating a well-made blend of fruit, tannin, acid and alcohol.

White (Johannisberg) Riesling

The classic group descended from Germany. There are different styles produced worldwide, but it is characteristically crisp, and fruity with clarity of flavor and a refreshing bouquet.

Wood

A quality resulting from the aging and/or fermentation of the wine in oak barrels.

Yeast

The principal component required to ferment sugar into alcohol. Different yeasts will produce different flavors in the finished wine. A combination of yeasts may be used to highlight desirable nuances of character in the wine.