

Acid – A compound present in all grapes and an essential component of wine that preserves it, enlivens and shapes its flavors and helps prolong its aftertaste. There are four major kinds of acid found in wine: tartaric, malic, lactic and citric. Acid is identifiable by the crisp, sharp character it brings to a wine. Climate plays a major role in acid levels. Hot climates result in lower acidity, while a cooler climate results in higher acidity.

Aeration – The process of introducing oxygen to a wine, whether by simply opening the bottle, pouring the wine into a decanter, or swirling it around in a glass. Aeration can soften tannins in younger wines, but can cause older wines to fade.

Aftertaste – The taste or flavors that linger in the mouth after the wine is tasted, spit or swallowed. The aftertaste, also called the finish, is a very important factor in judging a wine's character and quality. Great wine will have a rich, long and complex aftertaste.

Aggressive – A term used to describe a wine with a harsh taste or texture, usually due to high levels of tannin or acid.

Alcohol by Volume – As required by law, wineries must state the percentage of alcohol in their wines on the label. For table wines, the law allows a 1.5% variation above or below the stated percentage.

Alcohol – Ethyl alcohol, which is a chemical compound formed by the action of natural or added yeast on the sugar content of grapes during fermentation.

Alcoholic – Used to describe a wine that has too much alcohol for its body and weight, making it unbalanced. A wine with too much alcohol will taste uncharacteristically heavy or hot.

Alsace – French wine region located on the German border in northeast France. Unlike most other French winemaking regions, Alsace wines name the varietals on the labels, while others are named for the areas they come from. The style of wines from this region are very similar to German wines because of the similar climates, however there are subtle differences. Alsace wines tend to be drier, riper and have higher levels of alcohol. The main varietals produced there are Gewurztraminer, Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Pinot Blanc. Pinot Noir is the only red varietal allowed, but it is very difficult to achieve proper ripeness, so it most often is made into Rose wines.

Albarino – Spanish white varietal, also called Alvarinho in Portugal. A thick-skinned grape that produces rich, complex wines with flavors of citrus fruit, apricots and peaches. These wines can also be quite dry with mineral notes.

American Oak – Increasingly popular as an alternative to French oak barrels. Marked by a slight sweetness, strong vanilla, dill and cedar notes. Many producers choose American oak over French oak because of the large price difference. French oak barrels usually cost twice as much as American oak barrels.

American Viticultural Area (AVA) – A system implemented in 1978 to identify wines in a similar way to the French AOC system. It is a delimited geographical grape-growing area that has officially been given appellation status by the Tax and Trade Bureau. Two major examples are Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley. The first AVA was the Augusta AVA in Missouri.

Ampelography – The study of grape varieties.

Appellation – Defines the area where a wine's grapes were grown, such as Bordeaux, Dry Creek Valley, Puligny-Montrachet, Russian River Valley, and Napa Valley, to name just a few. Regulations vary widely from country to country. For example, in order to use an appellation on a California wine label, at least 85% of the grapes used to make the wine must come from that named appellation.

Appellation D'Origine Controlle (AOC) – The French system of appellations, begun in 1935 and considered to be the prototype for much of the wine world. To carry an appellation in this system a wine must follow rules describing the area the grapes are grown in, the varieties used, the ripeness, the level of alcohol, the vineyard yields and the methods used in growing the grapes and making the wine.

Aroma – A wine's varietal fragrance plus any changes that develop during fermentation and aging.

Arroyo Grande AVA – Nearly 43,000 acres located in central California, mid-way between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The western part of the region has a long, cool growing season, while the eastern part is warmer. Chardonnay is the most widely planted varietal, followed by Pinot Noir and a few other varietals grown in much smaller quantities.

Asti – An important wine-producing town in Italy's Piedmont region. This area produces Italy's most famous sparkling wine, formerly called Asti Spumante. Moscato d'Asti is a similar wine, but made in a frizzante style (meaning not fully sparkling). These wines are generally quite sweet and so popular that they are second only to Chianti in production amounts. Asti and Moscato d'Asti wines should be drunk young.

Astringent – Describes a rough, harsh, puckery feel in the mouth, usually from excess tannin or high acidity in a wine. Astringent wines may mellow with age.

Austere – Term used to describe wines with high tannin and acid that lack depth and roundness. Usually said of young wines that need time to soften or wines with little richness or body.

Awkward – Term used to describe a wine with poor structure or is out of balance.

Backbone – Term used to describe wines that are full-bodied, well-structured and balanced.

Backward – Term used to describe a wine that is less developed than others of its type and class from the same vintage.

Baden – A large German wine region bordered to the South by Switzerland. The warmest of all German regions, the vast majority of its Pinot Noir (Spatburgunder) is grown there, followed by Pinot Gris. The warmer climate results in wines that are higher in alcohol and lower in acidity to wines from other parts of Germany.

Balance – A wine has balance when its components (fruit, acid, alcohol and tannin) are harmonious and no single element dominates.

Balthazar – An oversized bottle which holds the equivalent of 16 standard bottles (12 liters).

Bandol – A French wine region centered around the resort town of Bandol in Provence. Mourvedre is the main varietal grown there, along with Grenache, Cinsault and Syrah. These blended wines are aged for 18 months in wood and can handle extensive aging.

Banyuls – An appellation in the Languedoc-Rousillon region in southern France known for its unusual fortified wines. These wines are primarily made from Grenache. They can be made in both a sweet and dry style, the sweeter styles being the best.

Barbaresco – One of the few DOCG areas in Italy's Piedmont region. These wines are made from the Nebbiolo grape, must be aged for 2 years (4 for riserva), 1 in wood. These wines are rich, spicy and a bit dry. Often compared to Barolos, though Barolo has more ageability.

Barbera – Most successful in Italy's Piedmont region, where it makes such wines as Barbera d'Asti and Barbera de Alba. These wines are characterized by a high level of acidity, deep ruby color, and full body with low levels of tannin and fresh berry fruit flavors. Plantings in the U.S. have declined, though some wineries still produce it as a varietal wine. Its main attribute as a blending element is its ability to maintain naturally high acidity even in warmer climates.

Barnyard – see *Brettanomyces*.

Barolo – Often called the “king” of Italian wines. One of the DOCG areas in the Piedmont region. Made from the Nebbiolo grape, these wines must age at least 3 years, 2 in wood, while riserva wines must age for 5 years. While young these wines are quite tannic and need 5+ years to soften. Once they have opened up they are very full-bodied and rich with earthy, perfumey, cocoa notes.

Barossa Valley – One of the most important wine regions in Australia. Located in southeastern Australia, this region has been growing grapes since the mid-1800’s. The most popular varietal grown here is Shiraz (Syrah), which the Barossa Valley is world-famous for.

Barrel Fermented – Denotes wine that has been fermented in small casks (usually 55-gallon oak barrels) instead of larger tanks. Advocates believe that barrel fermentation contributes greater harmony between the oak and the wine, increases body and adds complexity, texture and flavor to certain wine types. Its liabilities are that more labor is required and greater risks are involved. It is mainly used for white wines.

Beaujolais – This French region is located in the southern most tip of the Burgundy region. The main focus here is the Gamay grape. These red wines are very light, fruity and low in tannin. They are meant to be consumed early.
Beaune – A very important French town some consider to be the wine capitol of Burgundy. The Beaune produces mainly red wines (Pinot Noir), that are made in a softer, low-tannin style that allows for early consumption, though they will age for 5 to 10 years.

Beerenauslese – German term used to describe specially selected, overripe grapes that are hand-picked and pressed separately from other grapes. These wines are intensely sweet, though not as sweet as Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA). The grapes used for these wines are usually infected with *Botrytis Cinerea* (called *Edelfaule* in German), which shrivels the grapes and concentrates the sugar. These wines are quite expensive and rare and will age for many years.

Bianco – Italian for “white”. Often indicating that a wine is made from any number of different white wine varieties.

Bite – A marked degree of acidity or tannin. An acid grip in the finish should be more like a zestful tang and is tolerable only in a rich, full-bodied wine.

Bitter – Describes one of the four basic tastes (along with sour, salty and sweet). Some grapes (notably Gewurztraminer and Muscat) often have a noticeable bitter edge to their flavors. Another source of bitterness is tannin. If the bitter quality dominates the wine’s flavor or aftertaste, it is considered a fault. In sweet wines a trace of bitterness may complement the flavors. In young red wines it can be a warning signal, as bitterness does not always dissipate with age. Normally, a fine, mature wine should not be bitter on the palate.

Blanc de Blancs – Translates to “white of whites”, meaning a white wine made of white grapes, such as Champagne made of Chardonnay.

Blanc de Noirs – Translates to “white of reds”, meaning white wine made of red grapes, where the juice is squeezed from the grapes and fermented without skin contact. The wines can have a pale pink or copper hue, e.g., Champagne that is made from Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier.

Bodega – A versatile Spanish term meaning “wine cellar”, “winery”, or “wine-producing firm.”

Body – The impression of weight or fullness on the palate. Commonly expressed as full-bodied, medium-bodied or light-bodied.

Bonarda – Grape varietal originally from Italy’s Piedmont region (Bonarda Piemontese), which fell out of favor for many years. Bonarda wines are light, fruity and ready to drink right away. This varietal is now regaining popularity as a blending

grape, especially in Argentina.

Bordeaux – Wine-producing region in southwestern France considered by many to be the world's greatest wine-producing region. This area has about 280,000 acres of vineyard and turns out anywhere from 700-900 million bottles of wine annually. The 5 main red varieties of Bordeaux are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petite Verdot and Malbec. The primary whites are Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Muscadelle. Bordeaux is also home to the famous dessert wines of Sauternes. All of these wines possess superior ageability and are among the most collected wines in the world.

Botrytis Cinerea – Known as the “noble rot”. A beneficial mold or fungus that occurs on grapes under certain climatic conditions and causes them to shrivel, thus deeply concentrating the flavors, sugar and acid. Some of the most famous examples of botrytis-affected wine come from Sauternes (France) and Germany.

Bottle Sickness – A temporary condition characterized by muted or disjointed fruit flavors. It often occurs immediately after bottling or when wines are shaken in travel. Also called bottle shock. A few days of rest is the cure.

Bottled By – Means the wine could have been purchased ready-made and simply bottled by the brand owner, or made under contract by another winery. When the label reads “produced and bottled by” or “made and bottled by” it means the winery produced the wine from start to finish.

Bouquet – The smell that a wine develops after it has been bottled and aged. Most appropriate for mature wines that have developed complex flavors beyond basic young fruit and oak aromas.

Brambly – see Briary.

Brawny – Used to describe wines that are hard, intense, tannic and that have raw, woody flavors. The opposite of elegant.

Brettanomyces (Brett) – a spoiled yeast that grows on grapes and in wineries. It is almost impossible to get rid of it, so most winemakers do whatever they can to avoid it. When it does occur, special filters must be used to reduce continued growth in the bottle. Low levels of this yeast cause distinct barnyard or manure aromas, while higher levels can ruin a wine.

Briary – Describes aggressive wines with high tannin and/or alcohol and with earthy or spicy, black peppery notes.

Bright – Used for fresh, ripe, zesty, lively young wines with vivid, focused flavors.

Brilliant – Describes the appearance of very clear wines with absolutely no visible suspended or particulate matter. Not always a plus, as it can indicate that the wine has been over-filtered.

Brix – A measurement of the sugar content of grapes, must and wine, indicating the degree of the grapes' ripeness at harvest. Most table-wine grapes are harvested at between 21 and 25 Brix. To get an alcohol conversion level, multiply the stated Brix by .55.

Brouilly – The largest and southernmost of the ten crus of the Beaujolais region of France. Made from Gamay grapes, these wines are delicate and quite fruity.

Browning – A descriptor for a wine's color, and is a sign of aging. It is a bad sign in young red wines, but less significant in older ones. Wines 20 to 30 years old may have a brownish edge yet still be quite enjoyable. Wines with considerable browning usually indicates that the wine is fading.

Brunello – A strain of the Sangiovese grape used for Brunello di Montalcino, the sought-after Tuscan red that is big and powerful with firm tannins, allowing for great ageability.

Brut – A general term used to designate the driest Champagnes and Sparkling wines.

Burgundy – One of the world's most famous wine-producing regions, located in eastern France. With about 110,000 acres, Burgundy consists of five basic regions: Chablis, Cote d'Or, Cote Chalonnaise, Maconnais and Beaujolais. All red wines from Burgundy are Pinot Noir, with the exception of reds from Beaujolais, which are Gamay. The whites are Chardonnay, though a few other grapes are grown in minuscule quantities. These wines age very well and are among the most collected wines in the world.

Burnt – Describes wines that have a smoky or singed aroma, usually from overcharred barrels.

Buttery – Indicates the smell or flavor of melted butter in a wine.

Cabernet Franc – A red wine varietal that is not unlike Cabernet Sauvignon, but with less tannin and acidity. In Bordeaux Cabernet Franc is used primarily for blending, but it is becoming increasingly popular as a stand-alone varietal. In France's Loire Valley Cabernet Franc is made into a lighter style wine called Chinon.

Cabernet Sauvignon – The undisputed king of red wines, Cabernet is a remarkably steady and consistent performer. While it grows well in many regions, in some appellations it is capable of producing wines of uncommon depth, richness, concentration and longevity. Bordeaux has used the grape since the 18th century, blending it with Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petite Verdot and Malbec. Elsewhere in the world Cabernet Sauvignon is as likely to be bottled on its own as it is to be found in a blend. It mixes with Sangiovese in Tuscany, Syrah in Australia and Provence, and Merlot and Cabernet Franc in South Africa, but flies solo in many of Italy's sought-after super-Tuscan wines. In the U.S., it is unlikely that any region will surpass Napa Valley's high quality Cabernets and Cabernet blends. Through most of the grape's history in California, which dates to the 1800's, the most legendary Cabs have been 100% Cabernet. Since the late 1970's, many vintners have turned to the Bordeaux model and blended smaller portions of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petite Verdot into their Cabernets. Cabernets are wines of great intensity and depth of flavor. Its classic flavors are current, plum, black cherry and spice, often with notes of tobacco, leather and cocoa. In warmer areas it can be supple and elegant; in cooler areas it can be marked by pronounced vegetal, bell pepper, oregano and tar flavors. It can also be very tannic, though most tannins soften with age. Carbonic Maceration – Primary technique used to make light reds with low tannin (i.e. Beaujolais). Whole, uncrushed grapes are dumped into carbon dioxide filled vats; the weight of the upper layers of grapes in the vat will break the skins of the lower layers and fermentation begins with the oozing juice, thus creating more carbon dioxide. Then there is a traditional crush, followed by standard fermentation.

Carignan (Carignane) – A very high-yielding varietal, grown widely in France (especially Languedoc), Spain and California. Somewhat ordinary on its own, this varietal produces deep purple hued wines with high alcohol and tannin, sometimes fruity and spicy.

Carmenere – Also known as Grande Vidure, this grape was once widely planted in Bordeaux, but is now associated primarily with Chile. These wines are full-bodied and dark in color with intense jammy flavors.

Cellared By – Means that the wine was not produced at the winery where it was bottled. It usually indicates that the wine was purchased from another source.

Chaptalization – The addition of sugar to juice before and/or during fermentation used to boost sugar levels in under ripe grapes and alcohol levels in the subsequent wines. Common in northern European countries (especially Germany and France) where the cold climates may keep grapes from ripening, but illegal in Italy and California. This process is legal in other U.S. states such as New York and Oregon.

Charbono – A grape found mainly in California's Napa valley and Mendocino County. This grape has dwindled in acreage, but is still produced as a stand-alone grape by some well-known wineries and as a blending agent. This grape produces wines that are dark in color, somewhat dull in flavor and high in tannin and alcohol.

Chardonnay – This is an amazingly versatile grape that grows well in a variety locations throughout the world. In Burgundy, it is used for grand wines such as Montrachet, Meursault, Pouilly-Fuisse and Chablis; also widely grown and used in Champagne. Chardonnay was introduced to California in the 1930's, but didn't become popular until the 1970's. Areas such as Anderson Valley, Carneros, Monterey, Russian River Valley, all with cool, maritime influences, are now producing wines far superior to those made a decade ago. When well-made Chardonnay offers bold, ripe, rich and intense fruit flavors of apple, fig, melon, pear, peach and pineapple, along with spice, honey, butter, butterscotch and sometimes nutty flavors. Winemakers build more complexity into this easy-to-manipulate wine using common vinification techniques such as barrel fermentation, sur lie aging (process by which wine is left on its natural sediment), and malolactic fermentation (process which converts tart malic acid to softer lactic acid). No other white table wine benefits as much from oak aging or barrel fermentation as Chardonnay. Because Chardonnay is also a prolific producer that can easily yield 4-5 tons of quality grapes per acre, it is a cash cow for producers in every country where it's grown. Many American and Australian Chardonnays are very showy, well-oaked and appealing on release, but they lack the richness, depth and concentration to age, often losing fruit and structure within a year or two. Thus, many higher-end producers are putting out wines that are unfiltered and unfinned to add longevity and complexity.

Charmat – Mass production method for sparkling wine. Indicates that the wines are fermented in large stainless steel tanks and later drawn off into the bottle under pressure. Also known as the “bulk process.”

Chenin Blanc – This native of France's Loire Valley is the basis of long-lived wines such as Vouvray, Savennieres, and Saumer. It is South Africa's most-planted white grape varietal, though it is called Steen there. In most places where it is produced, Chenin Blanc is used primarily for blending. The great wines of the Loire vary from dry and fresh to sweet and spicy.

Chewy – Describes rich, heavy, tannic wines that are full-bodied.

Cigar Box – Another descriptor for a cedary aroma.

Clean – Fresh on the palate and free of any off-taste. Does not necessarily imply exceptional quality.

Clone – A group of vines originating from a single plant propagated asexually from a single source. Clones are selected for the unique qualities of the grapes and wines they yield, such as flavor, productivity and adaptability to growing conditions.

Closed – Describes wines that are concentrated and have character, but are shy in aroma and flavor.

Cloudiness – Lack of clarity to the eye. Fine for old wines with sediment, but it can be a warning signal of instability, yeast spoilage or refermentation in the bottle in younger wines.

Cloying – Describes ultra-sweet or sugary wines that lack the balance provided by acid, alcohol, bitterness or intense flavor.
Cold Stabilization – A clarification technique in which a wine's temperature is lowered to 32 degrees F, causing the tartrates and other insoluble solids to precipitate.

Complexity – An element in all great wines and many very good ones; a combination of richness, depth, flavor intensity, focus, balance, harmony and finesse.

Corked – Describes a wine having the off-putting, musty, moldy newspaper aroma and dry aftertaste caused by a cork tainted with trichloroanisole (TCA).

Crush – Harvest season when the grapes are picked and crushed.

Cuvee – A blend or special lot of wine.

Decanting – A process for separating the sediment from a wine before drinking. Accomplished by slowly and carefully pouring the wine from its bottled into another container. Also, decanting is used to introduce oxygen into younger wines to speed up the “breathing” process.

Delicate – Used to describe light- to medium-bodied wines with good flavors. A desirable quality in wines such as Pinot Noir or Riesling.

Demi-Sec – In the language of Champagne, a term relating to sweetness. It can be misleading – although demi-sec means half-dry, demi-sec sparkling wines are usually slightly sweet to medium-sweet.

Dense – Describes a wine that has concentrated aromas on the nose and palate. A good sign in young wines.

Depth – Describes the complexity and concentration of flavors in a wine, or the color intensity of a wine.

Disgorgement – A step in the traditional process of sparkling wine and Champagne production wherein frozen sediment is removed from the neck of a the bottle.

Dolcetto – Almost exclusive to northwest Piedmont, this grape produces soft, round, fruity wines fragrant with licorice and almonds that should be drunk young. It is used as a safety net for producers of Nebbiolo and Barbera wines, which take much longer to age.

Dosage – In bottle-fermented sparkling wines, a small amount of wine (usually sweet) that is added back to the bottle once the yeast sediment that collects in the neck of the bottle is removed.

Dry – Having no perceptible taste of sugar.

Drying out – Losing fruit or sweetness to the extent that acid, alcohol or tannin dominate the taste. At this stage, the wine will not improve.

Early Harvest – Denotes a wine made from grapes picked earlier than usual. These wines usually have lower than average alcohol and sugar content.

Earthy – Used to describe both positive and negative attributes in wine. At its best, earthiness is a pleasant, clean quality that adds complexity to aroma and flavors. At its worst, it is a barnyardy character that borders on or crosses into dirtiness or mustiness.

Elegant – Used to describe wines with finesse and grace, with perfect balance and of very high quality.

Empty – Term used to describe a wine with little or no flavor or interesting character.

Enology (Oenology) – The science and study of winemaking.

Estate Bottled – Indicates that the winery either owns the vineyard or has a long-term lease to purchase the grapes.

Ethyl Acetate – A bi-product of fermentation. It is a sweet, vinegary smell that often accompanies acetic acid. It exists to some extent in all wines and in small doses can be a plus, but when it is very strong it is a defect.

Extract – Richness and depth of concentration of fruit in a wine. Usually a positive quality, although high extract wines can also be highly tannic.

Extra-dry – A common Champagne/Sparkling Wine term not to be taken literally. Extra-dry sparklers are somewhat dry, but with some residual sugar.

Fading – Describes a wine that is losing color, fruit or flavor, usually as a result of age.

Fat – Full-bodied, high alcohol wines that are low in acidity give a “fat” impression on the palate. Can be a plus with bold, ripe, rich flavors, but can also suggest that the wine’s structure is suspect.

Fermentation – The process by which yeast converts sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, thus turning grape juice into wine.

Filtering – The process of removing particles from wine after fermentation. Most wines, unless otherwise labeled, are filtered for both clarity and stability.

Fining – A technique for clarifying wine using agents such as bentonite (powdered clay), gelatin or egg whites, which combine with sediment particles and cause them to settle to the bottom, where they can be easily removed.

Finish – The key to truly judging a wine’s quality is the finish. It is a measure of the taste or flavors that linger in the mouth after the wine is tasted. Great wines have rich, long, complex finishes.

Flat – Having low acidity. Can also refer to a sparkling wine that has lost its bubbles.

Fleshy – Soft and smooth in texture, with very little tannin.

Flinty – A descriptor for extremely dry white wines, such as Sauvignon Blanc, whose bouquet is reminiscent of flint struck against steel.

Floral – Having the distinct aromas of flowers; mostly associated with white wines.

Fortified – Denotes a wine whose alcohol content has been increased by the addition of brandy or neutral spirits.

Free-run Juice – The juice that escapes after the grape skins have split and the grapes are crushed or squeezed prior to fermentation.

French Oak – The most widely used wood for wine barrels, which can add vanilla, toast, and butterscotch notes to wine. Used for both red and white wines. French Oak barrels are much more expensive than American Oak, usually twice as much. The cost of using new French Oak in aging a wine is most always reflected in the cost of the wine to the consumer.

Fresh – Having a lively, clean and fruity character. A must for young wines.

Fume Blanc – Term originally coined by Robert Mondavi as another term for Sauvignon Blanc, which resulted in growing popularity of California Sauvignon Blanc. Refers to a drier style of Sauvignon Blanc, similar to French models.

Gamay – Beaujolais makes its famous light, fruity reds from this grape. Gamay makes up 98% of the grapes grown in this region. Low in alcohol and relatively high in acidity, these wines are meant to be drunk young. The almost complete lack of tannins allow for very little ageability. The most famous of these wines is the Beaujolais Nouveau, which is bottled upon production with no barrel aging and released in November of each year. It is, for many, considered to be a “holiday wine”.

Gewurztraminer – This grape can yield magnificent wines, the best of which come from Alsace, where it is made in a variety of styles varying widely from dry to sweet. The flavor profile is not unlike that of Riesling, but Gewurztraminer has very distinct aromas of flowers, spice and litchis. This grape needs a cool climate for optimal ripening, and it can be temperamental to grow and vinify. Gewurztraminer is gaining popularity in other parts of the world as well, such as North America, Germany, Austria and New Zealand.

Grassy – A signature descriptor for Sauvignon Blanc, which can also mean “green”. A balanced amount is good, while too much is overbearing.

Green Harvest – The trimming of unripe grapes to decrease crop yields, thereby improving the concentration of the remaining bunches.

Green – This term has multiple meanings: it can mean that a wine is “grassy”; or it can mean that the fruit is underripe; or it can mean that a wine is very young and not ready to drink. Either way it is used it generally suggests high acidity and low fruit.

Grenache – Drought- and heat-resistant, it yields a fruity, spicy, medium-bodied wine with supple tannins. The second most widely planted grape in the world, Grenache is widespread in the southern Rhone. It is blended to produce Chateauneuf-du-Pape and Cotes-du-Rhone, and used on its own for the Rose wines of Tavel. It is also used in France’s sweet Banyuls dessert wine. Important in Spain where it’s known as Garnacha, it is especially noteworthy in Rioja. Grenache is quite popular in Australia, but is surpassed by Syrah there. A few Barossa Valley producers are making Rhone-inspired blends with Grenache, while some are making stand-out single varietal Grenache, especially from old vines.

Grip – A welcome firmness of texture, usually from tannin, which helps give definition to wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon and port.

Grown, Produced and Bottled – Means that the winery handled each aspect of grape growing, wine production and bottling.

Gruner Veltliner – The most widely planted grape in Austria, it can be found to a much lesser extent in some other parts of Eastern Europe. It achieves its qualitative pinnacle in the Wachau, Kremstal and Kamptal regions along the Danube River west of Vienna. Gruner, as it is called for short, shows distinct white pepper, green and citrus flavors and aromas, along with high acidity, making it an excellent partner for food. These wines are pale in color with light to medium body.

Half-bottle – Holds 375 ml; also called a “split”.

Hard – Firm; a quality that usually results from high acidity or tannins. Often a descriptor for young red wines.

Harmonious – Well-balanced, with no component obtrusive or lacking.

Harsh – Used to describe astringent wines.

Hazy – Used to describe a wine that has small amounts of visible matter. A good quality if a wine is unfiltered and unfiltered.

Heady – Used to describe wines high in alcohol.

Hearty – Used to describe the full, warm, sometimes rustic qualities found in red wines with high alcohol.

Herbal (*Herbaceous*) – Denotes the taste and smell of herbs in a wine. A plus in many wines such as Sauvignon Blanc, and to a lesser extent in Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Hollow – Lacking in flavor. Hollow wines lack depth at mid-palate and have a short finish.

Hot – Used to describe wines with excessive alcohol that, unless balanced with fruit, tend cause a burning, prickly sensation in the mouth and throat. Acceptable in fortified wines.

Imperial – An oversized bottle with holds 4-6 liters; equivalent to eight standard size bottles.

Jeroboam – An oversized bottle with holds the equivalent of 6 wine bottles. In Champagne, a Jeroboam holds 4 bottles.

Late Harvest – On labels this indicates that a wine was made from grapes picked later than usual and at higher sugar (Brix) level than normal. Usually associated with wines affected by Botrytis and dessert-style wines.

Lean – A not necessarily critical term used to describe wines made in an austere, lighter style.

Lees – Sediment consisting of dead yeast cells and grape particles remaining in barrel or tank during and after fermentation. “Sur lie aging” means that the wine is aged on its lees.

Legs – The viscous droplets that form and ease down the sides of the glass when wine is swirled.

Length – The amount of time the sensations of taste and aroma persist after swallowing. The longer the better.

Limousin – A type of oak cask from Limoges, France.

Lingering – Used to describe the flavor and persistence of flavor in a wine after tasting. When the aftertaste remains on the palate for several seconds, it is said to be lingering.

Lively – Describes wines that are fresh and fruity, bright and vivacious.

Lush – Wines that are rich, soft, silky, and very fruity. A lush wine is a very drinkable wine.

Maceration – During fermentation, the steeping of the grape skins and solids in the wine, where alcohol acts as a solvent to extract color, tannin and aroma from the skins.

Made and Bottled by – Indicates only that the winery crushed, fermented and bottled a minimum of 10 percent of the wine in the bottle. Can be very misleading.

Maderized – Describes the brownish color and slightly sweet, somewhat caramelized and often nutty character found in mature dessert-style wines.

Magnum – An oversized bottle that holds 1.5 liters; equivalent to two standard size bottles.

Malbec – One of the five main red grape varieties of Bordeaux. It is used there only as a blending agent, not as a stand-alone varietal. However, Argentina is markedly successful with this grape. In the U.S., Malbec is used only as part of Bordeaux-inspired blends. On its own Malbec is dark in color, somewhat tannic and quite peppery.

Malic – Describes the green apple-like flavors found in young grapes, which diminishes as the grapes ripen and mature.

Malolactic Fermentation – A secondary fermentation process which converts malic acid into softer lactic acid and carbon dioxide, thus reducing the wine’s total acidity. Adds complexity to white wines such as Chardonnay and softens reds. This process can also result in a noted creaminess in the wines.

Marsanne – White varietal popular in the Rhone region of France. Small amounts are also grown in Australia and the U.S., where Rhone-inspired whites are often made. Some California producers are making it as a single-varietal wine. Marsanne can be a full-bodied, moderately intense wine with spice, pear and citrus notes.

Mature – Means that a wine is ready to drink; it is neither too young nor yet past its prime.

Meaty – Describes red wines that show plenty of concentration and a chewy quality. They may even sometimes have an aroma of cooked meat.

Mercaptans – An unpleasant, rubbery smell of old sulfur; encountered mainly in very old wines.

Meritage – An invented term, used by California wineries for Bordeaux-style red and white blended wines. Combines “merit” and “heritage”, as an homage to the great wines of Bordeaux. The term arose out of the need to name wines that didn’t meet minimal labeling requirements for varietals (i.e. 75% of the named grape variety). For reds, the grapes allowed are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petite Verdot and Malbec.; for whites it is Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. Merlot – Merlot is the red wine success story of the 1990’s. Its popularity has soared, along with its acreage. It dominates Bordeaux, except for in Medoc and Graves. Though it is mainly used for the Bordeaux blend, it can stand alone. In St. Emilion and Pomerol, especially, it produces very noteworthy wines, especially Chateau Petrus. It is grown widely in Italy, though most of these wines are very light and unremarkable. In California it is as widely grown as Cabernet and Chardonnay, though it seems to be losing steam there. These wines can range in style from light and fruity with very little tannin, to big and burly with plenty of structure and tannin to age for years. This grape blends well with other grapes and marries well with oak.

Methode Champenoise – The labor-intensive and costly process whereby wine undergoes a secondary fermentation inside the bottle, creating bubbles. All Champagnes and most high-quality sparkling wines undergo this process.

Methuselah – An extra-large bottle holding 6 liters; the equivalent of 8 standard bottles.

Mourvedre – As long as the weather is warm, Mourvedre will thrive in a variety of soils. It is popular across the south of France, especially in Provence and Rhone. In Spain this grape is called Monastrell, and is their most widely grown varietal. In the U.S. it is pursued by winemakers who specialize in Rhone-style wines. (It is also known as Mataro.) These wines are generally medium-bodied, with spicy cherry and berry flavors and moderate tannins.

Muscat – One of the world’s oldest known grape varietals. It is marked by strong spice and floral notes and can be used as a blending agent or on its own. Grown widely in Italy, where it is called Moscato, this grape produces sweet, bubbly low alcohol wines like Moscato d’Asti, while in France it can become a bone-dry wine like Muscat d’Alsace.

Must – The unfermented juice of grapes extracted by crushing or pressing, before the juice is turned into wine. Can also include skins, stems and seeds.

Musty – Having an off-putting moldy or mildewy smell, which can be the result of a wine being made from moldy grapes, stored in improperly cleaned tanks and barrels, or contaminated by a tainted cork.

Nebbiolo – A noble grape of Northern Italy, where it thrives and makes the great, age-worthy wines of Barolo and Barbaresco. Mainly unsuccessful elsewhere, Nebbiolo has a small foothold in California, where the wines are lighter, bearing no resemblance to the Italian types.

Nebuchadnezzar – A very over-sized bottle which holds 15 liters, the equivalent of 20 standard bottles.

Non-vintage (NV) – Blended from more than one vintage. This allows the vintner to keep a house style from year to year. Many Champagnes and Sparkling wines are non-vintage, as are Ruby Ports.

Nose – The character of a wine as determined by the olfactory sense. Also called aroma.

Nutty – Sherries and tawny ports have distinct nutty characteristics. Some full-bodied chardonnays can acquire nutty notes from oak aging. Overt nuttiness in table wine is a flaw.

Oaky – Describes the aroma or taste quality imparted to a wine by the oak barrels or casks in which it was aged. Can be either positive or negative. The terms toasty, vanilla, dill, cedary and smoky indicated the desirable qualities of oak; charred, burnt, green cedar, lumber and plywood describe its unpleasant side.

Off-dry – Indicates a slightly sweet wine in which the residual sugar is barely perceptible.

Oxidized – Describes wine that has been exposed to oxygen for too long, causing the wine to deteriorate. Oxidized wine takes on a dull, stale character, with sherrylike smell and flavor; it also takes on a brownish color.

Peak – The time when a wine tastes its very best; can be very subjective.

Perfumed – Describes the strong, usually sweet and floral aromas of some white wines.

Petite Sirah – Known for its dark hue and firm tannins, Petite Sirah has often been used as a blending agent to provide color and structure. On its own, Petite Sirah can make intense, peppery, ageworthy wines. In California, this varietal is widely grown and made into high-quality single-varietal wines by some very well-known producers such as Biale, Guenoc and Pedroncelli, to name just a few.

Phylloxera – Tiny aphids or root lice that attack *Vitis Vinifera* roots. The disease was widespread in both Europe and California in the late 19th century, and returned to California in the 1980's.

Pinot Blanc – Often compared to Chardonnay because of its similar flavor and texture profile, though Pinot Blanc wines are not nearly as complex and flavorful as Chardonnay. This grape is grown in many parts of the world, but Alsace and California seem to be where it shows at its best. These wines are best drunk young while the fruit is still fresh.

Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio – The Italians use the term Pinot Grigio, where it is grown very widely, especially in the northeast. These wines are bone dry, with steely mineral notes and very little fruit ripeness. Pinot Gris excels in Oregon, California, Alsace and Germany.

Pinot Noir – This grape produces the great red wines of Burgundy, though it is quite finicky. With its thin skins, Pinot Noir reacts strongly to environmental changes such as heat and cold spells. It is hard to work with once picked because of how easily the fruit is bruised and broken. Even after fermentation Pinot Noir can hide its weaknesses and strengths, making it a most difficult wine to evaluate out of barrel, showing poorly one day, then brilliantly the next. Nowadays Pinot Noir is made in a variety of styles: it can be in its classic style (Old World) of delicate fruit, earthy notes and high acidity, or it can be rich, concentrated and loaded with flavor (New World). Pinot Noir can age very well, but each vintage has different aging potential, so it is quite a game of chance when cellaring these wines. Pinot Noir is also widely grown in Champagne, where it is pressed with great care so as not to impart color into the juice (with the exception of Rose Champagnes). This grape also excels in Oregon and California, especially in cooler areas. Classic flavor profiles of Pinot Noir are, when young, red berry and red cherry fruit, and when aged raisiny and pruny with notes of truffles, smoke and cocoa.

Produced and bottled by – Indicates that the winery crushed, fermented and bottled at least 75% of the wine in the bottle.

Pruny – Having the flavor of overripe, dried-out grapes. Can add complexity in the right doses.

Puckery – Describes highly tannic and very dry wines.

Pungent – Having a powerful, assertive smell linked to a high level of volatile acidity.

Racking – The practice of moving wine by hose from one container to another to remove sediment and other visible particles from the wine. This can be done as many times as needed until the juice is clear.

Raisiny – Having the taste of raisins from ultra-ripe or overripe grapes. Can be pleasant in small doses in some wines.

Raw – Term used to describe a wine that is young and undeveloped.

Residual sugar – Unfermented natural grape sugar in a finished wine.

Riesling – One of the world’s greatest white wine grapes because of its resistance to frost and because of its ability to age for years and years, all the while evolving in the bottle. Germany is probably the best-known producer of this varietal, offering wines from bone dry to super sweet, and very inexpensive to over-the-top expensive. Riesling also excels in other parts of the world, particularly Washington State, parts of California, Australia, Alsace and New Zealand. These wines typically have a tropical fruit aroma with hints of petrol, but with varying degrees of sweetness and richness. Some believe that Riesling is the most versatile food wine because of its acidity and layers of flavors.

Robust – Means full-bodied, intense and vigorous.

Round – Describes a texture that is smooth, not coarse or tannic.

Rustic – A term often used to describe wines made in the Old World style; especially with Italian blends or other red table wine blends.

Salmanazar – An oversized bottle holding 9 liters; the equivalent of 12 regular bottles.

Sangiovese – Sangiovese is best known for providing the backbone for many superb Italian red wines from Chianti and Brunello di Montalcino, as well as the super-Tuscans. Sangiovese is distinctive for its supple texture and medium- to full-bodied spice, red fruit and anise flavors. When blended with a grape such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese gives the resulting wine a smoother texture and lightens up the tannins, though it does add acidity. Sangiovese is also widely grown in California, where it is made both into great single varietal wines as well as part of some great blends, sometimes referred to as the “Cal-Ital” style.

Sauvignon Blanc – A great white grape varietal known for its intense aromas and complex flavor profiles. It is grown widely in France; in the Loire Valley it makes up the great wines of Sancerre, and in Bordeaux it is part of the classic blend of white Bordeaux wines. New Zealand is enjoying great success with this grape, with its signature intense grapefruit flavors and perfumed aromas. This style is now emulated all over the world. In the U.S. this varietal was “rescued” by Robert Mondavi in the 1970’s, who began calling it “Fume Blanc” as an homage to its French ancestry. These wines are quite dry, but with crisp, steely acidity, grassy, herbal and citrusy notes. They are made nowadays very often with no oak at all; oak aging seems to soften the wine, and too much oak can make it seem fuller bodied and the classic flavor profile can be masked.

Semillon – One of the classic white grape varietals of Bordeaux, as well as a formidable stand-alone grape, these wines can age quite gracefully. Semillon is the main ingredient in the great dessert wines of Sauternes, and is found in most of the wines of Graves and Pessac-Leognan, where the resulting wines are rich and honeyed. This grape enjoys modest success in Australia and the U.S., mainly used in blending, but sometimes as single-varietal wines, which are dry and mineral with understated fruit.

Shiraz/Syrah – Hermitage and Cote-Rotie in the Rhone region of France, Penfolds Grange in Australia...the epitome of Syrah is a majestic red that can age for half a century. The grape seems to grow well in a number of areas around the world and is capable of rendering rich, complex and distinctive wines, with pronounced pepper, spice, black and blue fruit flavors, along with smoky and gamey notes. In Australia, the Barossa Valley is home to some of the most high-quality Shiraz (as they are called there), while in the U.S. it is gaining popularity because of its early drinkability and has proven to be relatively easy to grow. In France, however, Syrah has widespread plantings and is used in most of the red wines of Rhone, such as Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape, Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage, Gigondas, Cotes-du-Rhone, and Tavel, just to name a few.

Smoky – Usually an oak barrel byproduct; a smoky quality can add flavor and aromatic complexity to a wine.

Soft – Describes wines low in acid or tannin (or both), making for very easy drinking.

Spicy – A descriptor for many wines (both red and white), indicating the presence of spice flavors and aromas such as black or white pepper, anise, cinnamon, clove, and mint (also referred to as eucalypt or menthol).

Stale – Wines that have lost their fresh, youthful qualities are called stale.

Stalky – Term used to describe wines that smell and/or taste of grape stems, or have leaf- or hay-like aromas.

Structure – The interaction of elements such as acid, tannin, glycerin, alcohol and body as it relates to a wine's texture and mouthfeel. Usually preceded by a modifier, as in "firm structure" or "lacking in structure".

Subtle – Describes delicate wines with finesse, or flavors that are understated rather than full-blown and overt. A positive characteristic.

Sulfites – The salts of sulfurous acid have long been used to preserve food and drink and is found in just about everything today. All but a tiny fraction of wines contain sulfites, small amounts of which are a natural byproduct of fermentation. Adding sulfites to wine is a preventive measure against spoilage and oxidation.

Supple – Describes texture, mostly with reds, as it relates to tannin, body and oak. A positive characteristic.

Sur Lie – Wines aged "sur lie" (French for "on the lees") are kept in contact with the dead yeast cells and are not racked or otherwise filtered. This is mainly done in white wines to enrich them. This practice originated in Burgundy, France, with Chardonnay, and is becoming more common in California among some high-end producers.

Tannin – The mouth-puckering substance found mostly in red wines that is derived primarily from grape skins, seeds and stems, but also from oak barrels. Tannin acts a natural preservative that helps wine age and develop.

Tart – Sharp-tasting because of acidity. A synonym for acidic.

Tartaric Acid – The principal acid in wine.

Tartrates – Harmless crystals of potassium bitartrate that may form in cask or bottle (often on the cork) from the tartaric acid naturally present in wine.

Tempranillo – Grape varietal indigenous to Spain, grown very rarely anywhere else. It is dominant in the red wines of Rioja and Ribera del Duero, two of Spain's most important wine regions. In Rioja, Tempranillo is often blended with Grenache (Garnacha) Mazuelo and a few other minor grapes. These wines are generally dark in color, with flavors of ripe red berry fruit, spice and tobacco. The wines of Ribera del Duero tend more toward the so-called New World style, boasting riper, more lively fruit, but similar intensity of flavor. Argentina is enjoying modest success with this grape.

Terroir – French word for "soil", but in the world of wine it carries a larger definition: it refers not only to the content of the soil in which grapes are grown, but also the overall environment within which a given varietal grows. Considered by many to be a defining characteristic of wine.

Thin – Lacking body and depth.

Tight – Describes a wine's structure, concentration and body, as in a "tightly wound" wine. "Closed" is a similar term.

Toasty – Describes a flavor derived from the oak barrels in which wines are aged. Some sparkling wines and Champagnes develop this characteristic.

Trebbiano – This grape is called Trebbiano in Italy and Ugni Blanc in France. It is so widely planted that it is found in nearly every white blended table wine in Italy. These wines are low in alcohol and high in acidity. In France it is used in blending Cognac and Armagnac.

Vegetal – Used to describe wines whose aromas and flavors are reminiscent of green plants and vegetables, often bell pepper and asparagus. In Cabernet Sauvignon, a small amount of vegetal elements are said to be part of the varietal profile, but in large amounts it is considered a flaw.

Velvety – Having rich flavor and a silky, sumptuous texture.

Viognier – Viognier, the great white varietal of France’s Rhone Valley (especially Condrieu), is one of the most difficult wines to grow, thus making these wines sometimes quite expensive. This grape is becoming increasingly popular in the U.S., where it is used both in Rhone-inspired blends and as single-varietal wines. These wines are full-bodied and spicy, with notes of honey, apricot and mineral.

Vintage – Indicates the year that a wine was made. In order to carry a vintage date in the U.S., a wine must come from grapes that are at least 95% from the stated year.

Vintner – Term used for a person who makes and/or sells wine.

Viticultural Area – Defines a legal grape-growing area distinguished by geographical features, climate, soil, elevation, history and other definable boundaries. Rules vary widely from region to region, and can often change. In the U.S., a wine must be made with 85% of the grapes grown within the state viticultural area to carry the appellation name.

Viticulture – The cultivation, science and study of grapes.

Vitis Vinifera – The species of grape vines that make up 99% of the wine in the world. These vines are native to Europe, but have been planted all over the world.

Volatile – Describes an excessive and undesirable amount of acidity, which gives a wine a slightly sour, vinegary edge.

Yeast – Micro-organisms that produce the enzymes which convert sugar to alcohol. Necessary for the fermentation of grape juice into wine.

Zinfandel – The origins of this tremendously versatile and popular grape are not known for certain, although it is thought to have come from Southern Italy as a cousin of Primitivo. A recent DNA fingerprinting has also shown possibilities that it may have come from Croatia. It is the second most widely planted red grape in California after Cabernet Sauvignon, though much is vinified into White Zinfandel, a blush-colored sweet wine. Red Zinfandel is the quintessential California wine. It can be made into a variety of styles: it can be light and fruity, not unlike the “nouveau” style of France; it can be intense, dark and spicy with plenty of tannin for longevity; or it can be a late-harvest style, with port-like qualities.

