

**Introduction to**

# **Wine**

## **TASTING**



# Introduction to Wine Tasting

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# Introduction to Wine Tasting



## INTRODUCTION

Wine tasting can be a fun and exciting hobby, but like any hobby it requires knowledge, skill and experience. Sensory training as well as an introduction to the vocabulary and background knowledge of wines can help you to develop the skill you need to successfully enjoy wine tasting as a serious hobby.

Learning more about wine tasting will not only help you to develop a deeper appreciation for the many different types of wines that are produced around the world, but can also set the stage for incredible social experiences as well. Experienced and novice wine connoisseurs often enjoy traveling to various regions to attend wine tastings, tour vineyards and learn more about wine making. Others choose to host formal and informal wine tastings in their homes to share their love of this hobby with others.

Wine tasting is a centuries old art form that makes it possible for you to develop a deeper appreciation of the color, taste and scent of various types of wines. Considering the varieties of wine that are produced around the world today, this is a hobby that is easy to become passionate about.

While there is always something new to learn about wine tasting, even if you have no previous experience, you can quickly and easily learn to study and appreciate the color, taste and aroma of wine and the art of wine tasting. In this guide you will learn to develop an appreciation for the different attributes of wine, study the vocabulary of wine tasting and look at different ways you can take your appreciation for wine tasting even further, including themed events and wine tasting parties.

Are you ready to learn more about wine and the fabulous art of wine tasting?

If so, grab a bottle of your favorite wine, a corkscrew and a glass and get ready to jump into the exciting world of wine tasting!

Let's get started!

## CHAPTER 1

## **Understanding the Different Types of Wine**

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Before beginning an in-depth look at the art of wine tasting, it can be helpful to develop a basic understanding of the different types of wines. This can be particularly beneficial if you are completely new to the world of wine. There are actually many different varieties and types of wine that are produced around the world. Although many people understand the difference between basic red and white wines, there are still many other styles of wine that can sometimes be confusing.

### **Types of Wines**

#### **Dry Wines**

Dry wines are also often referred to as table wines. These wines are among the most common style of wine that you will find in many of the regions around the world. Common examples include:

- Rose wine
- Dry white wine
- Dry red wine

#### ***Dry White Wines***

Dry white wines are produced from white grapes without any residual sugar. All of the sugar has been completely converted to alcohol, as is the case with all dry wines. The majority of the basic white table wines are either dry or at least close to dry. Examples include Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Viognier and others. There are also some dry white wines that can be somewhat off-dry. This means they do have a small amount of residual sugar remaining but it is not enough for them to be classified as a dessert or sweet wine. Such examples typically come from regions including Alsace, the Loire Valley, Austria and Germany. Muscat, Riesling and Chenin Blanc grape varieties are commonly used for these wines.

Although the fact that there is a little sugar left remaining might imply a sweet taste, most dry white wines can vary quite a bit in terms of flavor and style. This is usually dependent upon the type of grape used, the wine region and the technique involved. Some types of dry white wines might have a slightly sweeter taste due to extremely ripe fruit, a vanilla oak flavor and low acidity. Many people find California Chardonnays to have a slightly sweet taste. Wines with less ripe flavors often have a drier taste, such as with a French Sauvignon Blanc.

As is the case with any type of wine, a white wine can vary from being light bodied to rich and full-bodied. Wines that are light and fruity make excellent aperitifs and go wonderfully with light seafood dishes. Richer, drier white wines can be paired beautifully with cheeses and fish and poultry dishes.

## Rose Wines

Rose wines are often commonly referred to as blush wines. In terms of color they vary somewhat between a red and a white wine. The actual hue can vary from pink to salmon and even to a light red wine. Rose wines are typically fresh and tasty and not too heavy. They can be somewhat dry but they can also have some residual sugar that is used for enhancing the fruitiness of the wine.

Most people think of the White Zinfandel or a White Merlot when they think of rose wines. True wine experts; however, often find these wines to have very little flavor. There are many other classic varieties, including those that are produced in Provence in France and also some from various parts of Spain and Italy.

Rose wines are typically produced using a blend of white and red grapes or sometimes just red grapes. The color of the wine comes from the skin of the grape rather than the juice. The wine is actually only left in contact with the red grapes for the length of time needed to pick up a bit of color.

Blush wines can vary quite a bit in terms of flavor as well as color. The actual flavor can depend on the types of grapes used as well as the region where the wine was produced and the style of the producer. Most such wines are served slightly chilled and feature fruity flavors and aromas that are quite lively. They do well as an aperitif and can be paired very nicely with a variety of foods; especially salty snack foods such as olives, tapenade spreads, certain cheeses and bruschetta.

## Dry Red Wines

Dry red wines are typically produced from red grape varieties that have been fermented to dryness. This means there is very little to no residual sugar left remaining. Red wines are commonly dry with the small exception of some dessert wines such as Madeira or Port. Common examples of red table wines include Zinfandel, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Syrah. They are produced from grapes such as Burgundy and Bordeaux.

## Sparkling Wines

Champagne is, without a doubt, the most famous example of a sparkling wine. There are many regions around the world that produce a variety of different sparkling wines. Most sparkling wines are white, but there are some that pink and even others that are red. Examples of sparkling wines include:

- Champagne
- Prosecco
- Rose champagne
- Sparkling red wine

## Champagne

Champagne is actually a region situated northeast of Paris in France. This is the region where the sparkling wine of the same name hails from. As you learn more about wines you will discover that most wines from France are actually named for the region where they are produced rather than the types of grapes used. Sparkling wines can actually be produced from any region in the world, but only those that come from the specific region in France can be referred to as Champagne.

Sparkling wines date back for centuries. These wines are bubbly due to the carbon dioxide that is dissolved in it, providing the famous fizzy effervescence appearance and texture. Sparkling wines are first produced from a still wine. That wine is then aged and bottled. Sugar and yeast are added to the bottle, providing the secondary fermentation process necessary to produce the carbon dioxide. The yeast sediment is then removed and the bottles are corked and ready for sale.

These types of wines can be produced from practically any variety of grape. In most instances, Champagne is only produced from three types of grapes. Two are dark red grapes; Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir. The other is a white grape, Chardonnay. In fact, many wines are actually blends of different amounts of all three types of grapes.

There are many different styles of sparkling wines that are produced, but generally speaking most are either a vintage or a non-vintage Champagne. A non-vintage or NV is typically a blend of wines from at least two vintages. A vintage wine is one that hails exclusively from one vintage and the year is noted on the label.

All sparkling wines are bubbly, but they can vary quite a bit. They are generally intense, bright and flavorful and feature a lively sparkle and acidity. Some sparkling wines; however, may be crisp and light, while others might be more lush and rounder. There are some sparkling wines that are extremely dry with a small amount of sugar added, such as Extra Brut or Brut Nature. Others are very sweet, such as Demi-Sec.

While sparkling wines are commonly used for celebrations and toasts, there are also some that are used for entertaining. They do well as aperitifs and can also be served with many different foods, including shellfish such as oysters on the half shell, poultry and baked fish.

## *Rose Champagne*

Rose Champagne is a pink champagne that is slightly red in hue. While most typical Champagnes and sparkling wines are white, rose champagnes are made with a slight amount of color from red grapes. The hue can vary from a light blush to a salmon and even a dark red. Rose champagnes can vary significantly based on the types of grapes used as well as the style and production method. They tend to have a red fruity aroma and more flavor than a typical champagne. You might detect such fresh aromas as raspberries and strawberries. Rose champagnes can be served with many different types of foods. Surprisingly, they are excellent with spicy Indian foods.

## **Prosecco**

Prosecco refers to a white grape and sparkling wine from a region in Italy. These wines are usually light and fresh and are frequently served with light foods. They are often lighter in body and have less bubbly than many other sparkling wines, such as Champagne. Instead, they have more of a fizzy nature. Some wine producers prefer to make them at a higher pressure, in which case they are labeled as Spumante.

## **Sweet Wines or Dessert Wines**

Some types of wine are produced with a small amount of sugar left in the finished product. This provides a sweet taste. Such wines can vary from those that are somewhat off-dry to wines that are extremely sweet. The sweetest wines are typically considered to be dessert wines as they are typically served at the conclusion of a meal. Common types of sweet wines include:

- Sweet white wine
- Sweet red wine
- Fortified wines, such as Madeira, sherry or port

There are actually many different types of sweet wines that are produced around the world. The term sweet simply refers to the fact that there is at least some residual sugar left in the wine. This can vary from being somewhat off-dry, which means only slightly sweet, to an extreme, sticky sweetness. Or, it can be anything in between.

Sweet wines can be produced using a variety of different methods. A late harvest wine is made from grapes that are picked late in the season after they have developed more sugar. Once the alcoholic fermentation process has ended, there is some residual sugar left remaining, resulting in a sweet wine.

Fortified wines refer to those in which the fermentation process is stopped through the addition of alcohol. If the fermentation process is stopped early enough, these wines will still have quite a lot of unfermented sugar present. Examples include Port as well as sweet Madeira wines and Sherry.

In some cases a sweet white wine style may be produced by allowing the grapes to freeze. The grapes are pressed and the ice crystals filtered out. The resulting wine is therefore concentrated in sugar and flavor, producing a wine that is intense and vibrant. These wines are known as ice wines.

Perhaps some of the sweetest and most concentrated white wines are produced from grapes that have been affected by a fungus known as botrytis. It is sometimes referred to as 'noble rot'. The fungus dehydrates the grapes while they are growing. The result is a rich and concentrated sweet wine.

## ***Fortified Wines***

## *Port*

Port wines are a type of fortified wines that are produced through the addition of a neutral grape spirit, such as brandy, while the wine is fermenting. That addition stops the fermentation process, resulting in a sweet, rich wine. True Port is produced in Portugal in the Douro Valley, but there are also many other similar styles that are produced throughout the world. Port is commonly served as a dessert wine due to its sweetness. It can also be served late in the evening and is sometimes paired with dried fruits and nuts and cheeses. A common pairing is Port wine and Stilton cheese. Some of the more famous producers of Port wines include:

- Fonseca
- Taylor's
- Dow's
- Graham's
- Quinta de Vesuvio
- Kopke
- Croft
- Warre's
- Quinta do Noval
- Cockburn's
- Offley Forrester
- Sandeman
- Smith Woodhouse
- Delaforce
- Ferreira

## *Types of Port*

There are many different types of port of which you should be aware.

### Vintage Port

Vintage port is considered to be the crème de la crème of all ports. Every Port house has a Vintage Port that is their shining star. That vintage is commonly used for judging the entire producer. Vintage Port is produced from the most exceptional vintages and is then bottled as a single vintage. It is also not aged in wood, but in large vats before bottling. Young Ports often have intense dark flavors. Vintage port is really meant to be aged in the bottle and will improve over a period of decades. The best Vintage Ports are often at least 30 years old before they reach their peak.

### Single Quinta Vintage Port

There are some vintages that are good, but they are not good enough in order to be declared as a Vintage Port. In this case they will be bottled separately. They typically do not need as much time for maturing as a Vintage Port.

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# Introduction to Wine Tasting

## Late Bottled Vintage

Late Bottled Vintage or LBV Ports are a single vintage Port wine that has been left to age in the cask before being bottled. This usually involves several years. Colheita and Tawny Ports must be aged at least 7 years before they are bottled.

## Ruby Port

A Ruby Port is a young Port that is made from young wines that have been blended together with several younger vintages. They are often less dense and intense. As a result, they are also often less expensive.

## Tawny Port

Tawny Ports take their name from their color. They are aged for a long time in oak barrels, lending the lighter, tawny color. These wines are often mellow and provide a flavor that is nuttier and less fruity. Many Tawny Ports are actually a blend of several different vintages. The price for Tawny Ports is typically dependent on the age.

## Colheita

Colheita Port wines are a blend between a Vintage Port and a Tawny. They are produced from a single vintage, but rather than being bottled while young like a true Vintage Port, they are aged in wood for a long period of time; much like a Tawny. They are not produced by all port houses. Some of the best known examples include Calem, Rocha and Quinta de Noval.

## *Madeira*

Madeira wine is a type of fortified wine that is produced on the Madeira Islands, an archipelago of Portugal located in the northern Atlantic Ocean. This is a rich wine that can range from dry to sweet. It is often noted for its somewhat complex and smoky aroma and flavor.

This wine is produced in a similar manner as Port wine and Sherry in that the fermentation process is stopped at some point through the addition of a neutral grape spirit. What is unique about Madeira is the way it is barrel aged before being bottled. While Port wine is either aged in the barrels in a cool cellar for a long time or bottled early, Madeira wine is typically aged in wood for a long period of time in a warm environment. This allows it to oxidize. This enhances the smoky, roasted aroma and flavor.

## *Types of Madeira*

The style of Madeira can depend on how long it is aged as well as whether it comes from a blend of vintages or a single vintage. The grapes that are used can also provide an impact. There are four types of grapes which are used exclusively for the best Madeira wines.

## Sercial

These wines are typically very dry and have very little residual sugar. They are usually fermented dry and have bright, nutty flavors with a crisp acidity.

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# Introduction to Wine Tasting

Verdelho

These wines are somewhat sweeter but are still slightly dry.

Bual

Bual is richer and sweeter and has a darker color.

Malmsey

These are the richest, darkest and sweetest wines. They often feature caramel or roasted coffee aromas.

## *Sherry*

Sherry is a type of fortified wine that is produced in the southern region of Andalusia in Spain. They are made exclusively from a variety of white grapes. Sherry is produced through the addition of a neutral grape spirit, alcohol, during the fermentation process. The alcohol level is raised, stopping the fermentation process. In this way it is similar to Madeira and Port. Most Sherries are somewhat dry. After the fermentation process is stopped, the wine is then aged in oak barrels. What makes Sherry unique is that in some cases the wine may be allowed to slowly evaporate and come into contact with oxygen in the barrels. A specific type of yeast known as flor will then develop on the wine's surface over time. This helps to protect the wine as it ages. The slow and gentle oxidation process results in rather complex flavors and aromas.

Another process known as the solera technique may also be used. In this case, the producer retains older selections in the barrel for many years. Younger wines are then blended in slowly with the older selections.

## *Styles of Sherry*

Fino

This is the lightest and youngest style of Sherry. It has a pale yellow or straw color. These wines are aged under flor for a long period of time. They tend to be fresh and aromatic. Many times they are served chilled and may also be served as an aperitif or with salty snacks such as almonds and olives.

Manzanilla

This style is similar to Finos, but is produced exclusively in a region along the coast. They are often served in a similar manner to Finos, although they have a somewhat lighter body.

Amontillado

This style of Sherry begins much like a Fino but has additional aging to develop a nuttier, more caramelized aroma. They can be served alone but are also paired well with smoky foods, including French onion soup and roast poultry.

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# Introduction to Wine Tasting

## Oloroso

These wines are darker than Amontillado. They have a deep, rich and dark aroma and flavor. As a result, they are often better served after dinner; either alone or with pungent cheeses and nuts.

## Cream

This is an Oloroso that is sweet and is often served as a dessert wine.

## Pedro Ximenez

This style of Sherry is produced exclusively from a grape known as Pedro Ximenez. Traditionally, the grapes are allowed to dry on mats in the sun and ultimately become raisins; making them powerful and concentrated. The final wine is intense, rich and sweet.

## Moscatel

This is another sweet style of Sherry that is made from the Moscatel grape. It often has fruity or floral aromas and flavors. Can be served alone following a meal or with dried fruits and nuts or a salty blue cheese.

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