
THE CHAMPAGNE DICTIONARY

by Champagne Club

A

acidity the liveliness and crispness in wine that activates our salivary glands.

aeration the deliberate addition of oxygen to round out and soften a wine.

aftertaste the taste that stays after you have swallowed or spat out the wine. A great wine always has a long finish.

aging holding wine in barrels, tanks, and bottles to advance them to a more desirable state.

age The period of time that a wine spends maturing to achieve its best flavor and aroma. Wines are aged in a variety of ways from large casks (such as oak or stainless steel) to bottles.

Complex wines tend to benefit from aging, whereas simple wines should be drunk when they are young.

agrafe metal halter that holds the cap in place.

à la glace mechanical disgorging where you cool the bottle neck.

à la volée disgorging by hand.

alcohol ethanol (ethyl alcohol), the product of fermentation of sugars by yeast.

aldehydes appears in the wine by oxidation of alcohol and have an important effect on the wine's bouquet.

almondy Signifies the almondy taste that appears in young red wines made by carbonic maceration. This taste also reflect certain alterations such as excess oxidation in white wines, or the "taste" of light" in badly-stored sparkling wines.

amber-colored A shade some white wines go after oxidation.

anosmia the loss of smell.

appellation origin labeling. Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC), origin symbol of French-quality wines and some other food items, such as cheese.

aperitif Any alcoholic beverage such as Champagne, Vermouth, or white wine that is taken before a meal as an "appetizer".

aroma the smell of wine, especially young wine (different than "bouquet").

assemblage base wines that are blended to a cuvée.

astringency A lip-puckering sensation caused by excess tannins, which may disappear as the wine ages.

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

attack The first impression a wine makes on the palate.

B

Bacchus Another name for Dionysus, the Greek and Roman god of wine.

balance a term for when the elements of wine - acids, sugars, tannins, and alcohol - come together in a harmonious way.

balthazar the bottle size of twelve liters of wine.

barrel the oak container used for fermenting and aging wine.

barrique a 225-litre oak barrel used originally for storing and aging wines, originating in Bordeaux.

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batonnage a traditional method in which, by stirring the wine during aging, you may create stronger aromas.

belemnite chalk soil best suited for champagne grapes.

big Describes a wine with powerful flavor. (Tasting term)

bitter a taste sensation that is sensed on the back of the tongue and caused by tannins.

blanc de blancs white wine from white wine grapes.

blanc de noirs white wine from black grapes.

blend a wine made from more than one grape varietal.

blind tasting wine tasting where the participants do not know what they have in their glasses.

blocage some wines from large crops that are allocated for future deficits.

BOB see Buyer's own brand.

body a tactile sensation describing the weight and fullness of wine in the mouth. A wine can be light, medium, or full bodied.

body Generally used to describe the "weight" of a wine in the mouth. Wines can be categorized as light-, medium-, and full-bodied. A Cabernet Sauvignon is an example of a full-bodied wine; a Sauvignon Blanc is a light- or medium-bodied wine.

botrytis a beneficial mold that pierces the skin of grapes and causes dehydration, resulting in natural grape juice exceptionally high in sugar. Botrytis is largely responsible for the world's finest dessert wines. (see "noble rot").

bottle Glass bottles are the most common containers for storing wines. Glass is ideal because it does not affect the wine in any way, even during extended periods in the bottle.

bottle aging Process of aging in the bottle by which the wine consumes only the oxygen contained in the bottle, very slowly. This process helps refine the wine.

bottle sickness A condition affecting wines immediately after bottling or shipment. The wine can taste flat or off, or smell of sulfur dioxide. This condition will disappear in about two or three weeks if the wine is stored properly.

bouquet a term that refers to the complex aromas in aged wines.

breathing exposing wine to oxygen to improve its flavors (see 'aeration').

breed Used for wines of high quality, with elegance and finesse.

brettanomyces a wine-spoiling yeast that produces barnyard, mousy, metallic, or bandaid-ish aromas.

brilliant a tasting note for wines that appear sparkling clear.

broad Means a full-bodied, complex wine with plenty of subtleties.

brut french term denoting dry champagnes or sparkling wines.

brut absolut sugar-free champagne.

brut intégral see Brut absolut.

brut non dosé see Brut absolut.

brut zéro see Brut absolut.

bung the plug used to seal a wine barrel.

bung hole the opening in a cask in which wine can be put in or taken out.

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buttery Describes a desirable aroma detectable in quality wines, especially if they have been made using the malolactic fermentation method.

buyer's own brand (BOB) bottles where the buyer can use their own label. Some champagne producers have specialized in this market. Sometimes known as Buyer's own brand, Marque d'acheteur, or Marque auxiliaire.

C

capsule the cap or the metal tray together with the halter that secures the cork. See also Muselet.

carafe A glass container frequently used to serve house wine in restaurants.

caramely Used to describe wines that have been aged for a long time (reserva and gran reserva) and have a rich, burnt sugar flavor.

carbonated maceration Special technique for fermenting red wines in which the whole grape undergoes enzymatic fermentation. It is used to obtain smooth, aromatic young wines.

carbonated wine Sparkling wines of inferior quality that have been industrially injected with carbon dioxide.

cask Wooden cask used to age the wines. The Bordeaux cask (225 litres) is renowned for aging great table wines. It is made of oak staves held together with metal hoops, with two lids

cava Spanish sparkling wine.

cave cellar.

cellar A storage area for wine, not necessarily underground. A cellar is the best area to keep wines for aging. Ideal conditions are darkness, controlled cool temperature, and high humidity. Bottles should be stored on their sides to keep the corks from drying out.

chai A French term for an aboveground structure used for wine storage and aging. Contrast with cellar. Popular in Bordeaux.

champagne (CIVC) the Champagne governing body.

chaptalization adding sugar to wine before or during fermentation to increase alcohol levels. Chaptalization is illegal in some parts of the world, and highly controlled in others.

chaptalisation: The addition of sugar to the must to increase the final alcohol content of the wine.

character The combination of a wine's features that make it distinguishable. A term of praise.

chardonnay This noble grape is grown in many wine regions around the world. It is responsible for the great white wines from the Burgundy region of France. Chardonnay ranges from medium to full-bodied and is frequently aged in oak barrels to enhance its flavor.

charmat process The process of producing sparkling wines in tanks rather than bottles. Often used to mass-produce inexpensive sparkling wines.

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chateau Quality French Bordeaux wines are labeled "Mis en bouteille au chateau" This means that the wines are estate bottled by the proprietor and are considered to be of high quality.

chef de caves winemaker.

citric acid one of the three predominate acids in wine and young wines whose flavors are not exhibiting well.

clarification process where some particles are separated from the wine. This is done by filtration or by addition of substances that pull the particles on their way down to the bottom of the fermenter.

clean A wine with no offensive odors or tastes.

clone plant that by asexual reproduction retains the same genetic characteristics as the original.

clos enclosed vineyard.

cloudy A dull, hazy color in wine.

cloying Overly sweet, and lacking the correct amount of acidity to give the wine balance.

Club Trésor de Champagne an association for those growers who make Spécial Club champagne.

Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagnes (CIVC) organization that governs champagne growers and houses.

complex a wine exhibiting numerous odors, nuances, and flavors.

coopérative-Manipulant cooperative that makes champagne under its own label.

coarse Rough, inelegant texture.

complex A word used to describe the rich variety of bouquet and flavors in a fine wine.

color Color refers to the "look" of wine. That is, the actual color (red, yellow, brown etc.), its opacity (clear, cloudy), and other characteristics. If the color of a wine is wrong for that wine, it may be bad or not yet aged enough.

complexity The various fragrances noted by smell, created by the development of wine from the fermentation and aging process, whether in barrel or bottle.

cork The cork of the bottle.

corkage A fee paid to a restaurant by a customer who brings his own wine.

corked An expression meaning the wine has gone bad. Implies an unpleasant, musty, moldy smell imparted by a flawed cork. Cork can contain bacteria that will cause "off" flavors in the wine. Quality cork manufacturers bleach and process corks to minimize the chance of a bottle being "corked". Unfortunately, almost one out of twelve bottles will have some off, corky flavors. It is for this reason that alternative wine bottle closures have been tested in recent years, but the use of non-cork closures has been resisted by traditionalists. Any closure that seals the bottle airtight is a perfect one for wine. Contrary to popular belief, cork does not - or should not - let air into a wine bottle over time. It is intended to create an airtight seal.

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corkscrew A device used for removing the cork from glass bottles.

corky The odor and taste of cork that indicates deterioration of the wine.

cork taint undesirable aromas and flavors in wine often associated with wet cardboard or moldy basements.

coupage The adding of one wine to another to improve or enhance its qualities. It may be from the same or different years.

crackling Used to indicate a wine that is mildly sparkling.

Crayères Gallo-Roman chalk quarry used as champagne cellars.

crisp A wine with a good acid balance that is fresh and lively.

crown The shape made by the bubbles of a good sparkling wine or cava when they reach the top of the glass.

crush the English term for harvest.

cru habitat.

cryomaceration A winemaking procedure used in making white wines that holds the skins and the crushed grapes at extremely low temperature prior to fermentation, enhancing the fruit and other flavors.

cuvée in Champagne, a blended batch of wine.

D

decant To gently pour a wine from one bottle to another so as not to disturb the sediment remaining in the bottom of the original bottle.

delicate A wine that is light of flavor, fragrance and body.

demi-sec french term meaning "half-dry" used to describe a sweet sparkling wine.

depot see sediment.

deuxième taille the third pressing, now banned for use in the production of champagne.

developed Wine that has undergone modifications over a period of time.

disgorging removal of precipitate or sediment.

dosage sugar addition.

doux sweet champagne.

double magnum see jeroboam.

dry a taste sensation often attributed to tannins and causing puckering sensations in the mouth; the opposite of sweet.

E

earthy an odor or flavor reminiscent of damp soil.

Échelle des crus ranking of a habitat.

elegant A distinguished wine with good lineage, harmonious in color and aroma, balanced on the palate, with a good bouquet and the right period of aging.

enology The study of wine and wine making. Also spelled oenology.

esters sweet fragrant components formed during fermentation and maturation process of the wine.

extracts all remaining ingredients from the evaporation of water and alcohol.

F

fermentation the conversion of grape sugars to alcohol by yeast.

finesse A French term used to refer to the "finesse" of exceptionally elegant wines.

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fining the addition of egg whites or gelatin (among other things) to clear the wine of unwanted particles.

filtration removal of yeast particles and more before bottling.

finish the impression of textures and flavors lingering in the mouth after swallowing wine.

fizzante An Italian word meaning semi-sparkling wines.

flavors odors perceived in the mouth.

floral A term describing the pleasant aroma, reminiscent of the perfume of some flowers, like roses, jasmine, violet, honeysuckle etc., which some wines have.

foxy a term that describes the musty odor and flavor of wines made from *vitis labrusca*, a common North American varietal.

fragrant A fragrant wine is very aromatic and flowery. Common wine fragrances are floral, spice, and fruit aromas such as pineapple, blackberry, peach, apricot, and apple. The variety of the grape is primarily responsible for a wine's fruit fragrances.

fresh A white or ros wine with a good balance between alcohol and acidity. May also be applied to clarete or young red wines.

fruity a tasting term for wines that exhibit strong smells and flavors of fresh fruit.

full-bodied a wine high in alcohol and flavors, often described as "big".

G

grand cru, the seventeen highest-rated villages on the échelle des crus scale of the 324 available in the area.

green Term used to describe a young wine that has not developed enough to balance out its acidity.

H

half bottle, bottle size of 37.5 cl wine.

hard A wine that has not aged enough to achieve a proper balance.

harvest Harvesting of the grapes.

hectare A metric unit of measure equivalent to 2.471 acres. Wineries in Europe use this term to describe the land area of vineyards. Output of wine is measured in hectolitres per acre. A hecoliter is equal to 100 liters or 26.4 US gallons.

herbaceous a tasting term denoting odors and flavors of fresh herbs (e.g., basil, oregano, rosemary, etc.).

hot a description for wine that is high in alcohol.

house A term used for producers of Champagne.

I

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J

jeroboam, bottle size of three liters of wine; also called dual magnum.

K

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L

lees sediment consisting of dead yeast cells, grape pulp, seed, and other grape matter that accumulates during fermentation.

leesy a tasting term for the rich aromas and smells that results from wine resting on its lees.

length the amount of time that flavors persist in the mouth after swallowing wine; a lingering sensation.

light A term used to describe the body or color of a wine. A light wine is usually easy to drink and not high in alcohol.

limousin An old province and a large forest in France near the town of Limoges. The major source of French oak for wine barrels.

liqueur d'expédition sugar addition.

liqueur de tirage the addition of yeast and sugar before the second fermentation inside the bottle.

M

maceration the process during which the grape must release pigments and tannin from the skins.

macroclimate A term of climate scale. Also called Regional Climate, it broadly represent an area or a region on a scale of tens to hundreds of kilometers.

madeirised characteristic of an excessively aged wine. Gives dark color and flavor of sherry, overripe apples, raisins, and plums.

magnum bottle size of 1.5 liters of wine.

malic acid one of the three predominate acids in grapes. Tart-tasting malic acid occurs naturally in a number of fruits, including, apples, cherries, plums, and tomatoes.

malolactic fermentation a secondary fermentation in which the tartness of malic acid in wine is changed into a smooth, lactic sensation. Wines described as "buttery" or "creamy" have gone through "malo".

marc Residue left after the pressing of the grapes. After the wine has been taken from the press, the marc can be used in its distillation or for making the eau-de-vie "Orujo".

Marque auxiliaire (MA) see Buyer's own brand.

Marque d'Acheteur (MA) see Buyer's own brand.

master of wine A title bestowed by the Institute of Masters of Wine. Founded in 1953 in England, it is an exclusive organization requiring one to pass a rigorous three-day exam. A person with this title may put the abbreviation M. W. after his or her name.

mature ready to drink.

maturity The stage in the aging of wines when they have developed all of their characteristic qualities to full perfection.

medium-bodied A wine whose weight and texture on the tongue fall between light and full-bodied.

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mesoclimate A term of climate scale that is intermediate between regional climate (macroclimate) and the very small scale (microclimate).

methuselah bottle size of six liters of wine.

microclimate A term of climate scale. The climate within a small, defined area. Can dramatically affect the character of the wine produced there.

millésime vintage.

mise en bouteille au domaine French term for a wine produced and bottled at the property where the grapes are grown.

monopole A label used on some French wines to indicate sole ownership, or monopoly, of the wine's name. Not an official indicator of quality.

monocru wine from the village.

mousse the bubbles and foam formation of carbonic acid in the wine.

mousseux French for Sparkling.

mouth-feel how a wine feels on the palate; it can be rough, smooth, velvety, or furry.

must unfermented grape juice including seeds, skins, and stems.

muselet the halter, which together with the cap holds the cork. See also Capsule.

must A mixture of grape juice, stem fragments, grape skins, seeds and pulp prior to fermentation.

N

Nebuchadnezzar bottle size of fifteen liters of wine.

Négociant-Manipulant champagne house with the right to buy grapes.

Négociant French word describing a wholesale merchant, blender, or shipper of wine

noble rot the layman's term for botrytis

non-vintage champagne a champagne containing the juice for grapes of different years.

nose a tasting term describing the aromas and bouquets of a wine.

O

oak/oaky tasting term denoting smells and flavors of vanilla, baking spices, coconut, mocha or dill. Oak imparts flavors and tannin to wines during the barrel aging process. Some oak barrels impart a toasty or spicy vanillin odor and taste which is desirable in moderation but undesirable if exaggerated.

oenology (also enology) The science or study of wine.

open tasting term signifying a wine that is ready to drink.

oxidation wine exposed to air that has undergone a chemical change.

overly oaked a wine with excessive character from the oak barrels that it was stored in.

P

pale used to describe wines of low chromatic intensity.

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petillant french term for a very lightly sparkling wine.

pinot meunier red wine grapes grown in the Champagne region of France. Pinot Meunier is used for blending with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to add fruit to champagne.

pinot noir the noble red grape that produces all the great red Burgundies. In champagne it is vinified without skin contact to produce a white wine. A difficult grape to cultivate, it can produce some of the most elegant wines in the world.

phenolic compounds natural compounds present in grape skins and seeds.

phylloxera vastatrix insects that made a devastating attack on European vines in the 1800s.

premier cru wine villages ranked closest below grand cru; 90 to 99 percent on the cru scale. Grapes from these forty-one villages are thus generally seen by the second- highest quality.

pre-phylloxera the period before the phylloxera attack.

proprietaire the owner of an estate, chateau, or winery.

prosecco Italian sparkling wine.

pupitres large wooden stands for remuage.

Q

quarter, bottle size of 18.7 cl wine.

R

racking the process of drawing off the clear wine from the sediment by transferring it from one barrel or vat to another. Better wines are racked two, three, and sometimes more times before bottling.

R.D. (Recently degorged), recently degorged.

Récoltant-Manipulant (RM) grower that makes his own champagne to sell.

rehoboam bottle size of 4.5 liters of wine.

remuage bottles are rotated in different steps to collect the precipitate before it is disgorged.

remueur a person who carries out remuage.

reserve wines old wines used to give a non-vintage champagne more mature taste.

rich a full-bodied wine with good flavor and bouquet.

rosé de noirs rosé wine from black grapes.

rough the tactile "coarse" sensation one experiences with very astringent wines.

round a mature, full-bodied wine that is smooth and graceful.

S

Salamanazar bottle size for nine liters of wine.

sec, French word for "dry".

sediment the fine deposits which may develop in some aged wines. May require that the wine be decanted before drinking.

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sekt German sparkling wine.

semi-blind tasting wine tasting where participants know in advance what to try but not the order in which the wines will be presented.

semi-sweet meaning that the wine has some residual sugar.

simple an uncomplicated, ordinary wine.

skin the grape skin.

smell smell is one of the best indicators of a wine's quality. It is comprised of varying factors: the aroma, the bouquet and the nose of the wine. If off, it could indicate a bad or underage wine.

Experiment to train your nose to appreciate the "smell" of a wine.

smooth describes a wine that is smooth, silky and rich in glycerine.

soft a desirable characteristic in a delicate wine denoting a slight fruitiness. Also refers to a deficiency or lack of balance in more robust wines.

solera the lowest row in the tiers of barrels where wines are aged, used for the oldest wines. Also a system of breeding which consists of improving young wine with the addition of older wine. The aging system used for the generoso wines of Jerez.

sommelier wine waiter.

sparkling wines wines containing bubbles of carbon dioxide gas (a byproduct of fermentation).

Spécial Club growers' counterpart to the big champagne houses' prestige wines. See also Club Trésor de Champagne.

spicy a tasting term used for odors and flavors reminiscent of black pepper, bay leaf, curry powder, baking

spices oregano, rosemary, thyme, saffron or paprika found in certain wines

splits a quarter bottle of champagne, containing six ounces. Used frequently on airplanes and trains.

spumante Italian term for sparkling wine.

stalks woody or green part of the vine that supports the grapes.

stave piece of worked wood that forms the structure of the barrel.

still wine wines without carbon dioxide bubbles.

straw used to describe a clear white wine with a color like straw.

stripping separating the stalks etc. from the must.

structure, an ambiguous tasting term that implies harmony of fruit, alcohol, acidity, and tannins

sulfitation the addition of sulfur to protect against oxidation or to stop fermentation.

sur pointes the stage of the champagne process during which the bottles stand upside down with the precipitate to the cork ready to be disgorged.

sweet wines with perceptible sugar contents on the nose and in the mouth

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T

tannic a word used to describe wine in which tannins overpower the fruit and other elements. A tannic wine is not well balanced.

tannins the phenolic compounds in wines that leave a bitter, dry, and puckery feeling in the mouth.

tart an overly acidic wine.

tartart a harmless substance, tartaric acid, that occasionally precipitates as crystals in some white wines..

tartaric acid the principal acid in grapes, tartaric acid promotes flavor and aging in wine.

taste the taste of a wine is created by the combination of a variety of elements. The acidity of the wine, the alcohol content, the sugar content, tannins and other elements unique to each particular wine. Each combination of these elements yields a taste that is distinct for each wine.

tastevin a small saucer-shaped cup used by wine stewards for tasting wine. Usually made of highly polished silver, the cup has ridges and small crevices that allow the taster to look at the color and clarity of the wine.

tears trace of oiliness left in the glass by a wine rich in alcohol, sugars and glycerine.

terroir French for geographical characteristics unique to a given vineyard

texture a tasting term describing how wine feels on the palate.

thin a wine that is light-bodied, lacks flavor, and is generally light in color.

transversage method that brings the wine from one bottle size to another. Applies mostly to half bottles but may also involve the really large bottles. The process is strictly regulated, and a maximum of 20 percent of the bottles may be from transvasage.

tunnel behavior when a wine ends up in a paused, dumb phase, to then later come out of the tunnel and impress with full force.

typicity a tasting term that describes how well a wine expresses the characteristics inherent to the variety of grape.

U

umami Japanese word for flavorful or delicate, a fifth basic taste.

ullage the empty space left in bottles and barrels as a wine evaporates.

V

vegetal tasting term describing characteristics of fresh or cooked vegetables detected on the nose and in the flavors of the wine. Bell peppers, grass, and asparagus are common "vegetal" descriptors.

vinification the process of making wine

vinology the scientific study of wines and winemaking.

vinothèque old champagne aged in the producer's cellars for later release.

vinifying process in which the winemaker gradually transforms grapes into wine.

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vitis vinifera the species of wine that comprises over 99% of the world's wine
vintage the year a wine is bottled. Also, the yield of wine from a vineyard during a single season.

W

weight similar to "body", the sensation when a wine feels thick or rich on the palate.

wine fermented juice from grapes.

whole bottle bottle size of seventy-five cl wine.

X

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Y

yeast a microorganism endemic to vineyards and produced commercially that converts grape sugars into alcohol.

yield the productivity of a vineyard

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

Z

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