

Wine in South Africa

Introduction

As one of the leaders in the wine-making industries of the world, South Africa is known for its diverse, high quality wines. SA is ranked 8th in the world as one of the biggest producers of wine in the world, as of 2022.

History

Dutch settlers and French Huguenots established vineyards with wines brought from their home countries to take advantage of the fertile soil found in the cape. With the grapes they harvested, they would produce wine which they would then sell to the ships of the Dutch East India Company. This is recognised as the beginning of South Africa's history with the modern day wine industry. The first vineyard planted was recorded in 1655, making South Africa one of the oldest "wine countries" to exist.

From there, expansion began into what is now known as the Cape Winelands - one of South Africa's most famous attractions. Our country is now one of the leading producers of wine in the world.

Wine Categories, Properties & Prices

There are many different types of wines in the world, the most popular being red wine, white wine, rose wine, orange wine, sparkling wine and dessert wine. Each wine has a distinct flavour that comes from its unique production process.

The type of grape used, inclusion of grape skins and time taken for fermentation all affect the taste and quality of wine. Red wine and white wines are most common and gain their name from the coloured flesh of the grapes used to make them.

The main property that casual wine drinkers pick their drink of choice is sweetness. Sweetness ranges from "bone dry" to "sweet". The length of fermentation and sugar content affects the sweetness of the wine. Sweet wines have added sugar and have a shorter fermentation time in comparison to dry wines, which are stripped of their natural sugars.

Other flavours can be imbued into the wines. One such technique includes the usage of oak barrels. Old barrels transfer very little flavour to the wine. However, newer oak barrels soak the wine with their flavours, creating complex notes in the wine itself. Notes of berries, vanilla and mocha can also be added to wine.

Many factors affect a wine's value and hence, its price. The land on which the grapes were grown, different wine making techniques, the length of fermentation, packaging and distribution all affect the price. Most high quality wines come from prestigious vineyards and are made by skilled winemakers.

Red Wine

The grapes used to make red wine are fermented with the skins on. This is where they get their colour from. The flesh is what makes the juice. Yeast is used to turn the juice into alcohol.

Types:

- *Cabernet Sauvignon*
 - A full-bodied acidic red wine with strong tannins that mellow with age. This means that it feels thick and viscous in the mouth and its taste is bitter but mellows out over time.
 - Pairs well with meat, especially fatty meat.
- *Merlot*
 - Softer tannins, meaning mellower flavour and an easy drink. Often has berry undertones (i.e. that of raspberry, strawberry and black cherry)
 - Pairs well with chicken, light meats
- *Shiraz*
 - Also known as Syrah
 - Usually made in dry styles, this wine is full-bodied with brisk acidity and firm tannins.
 - Pairs well with gamey meat and mushrooms
- *Pinot Noir*
 - Light to medium bodied wine with bright acidity and silky tannins. Although it has many fruity undertones, this wine is almost exclusively made in a dry style.
 - Pairs well with light meats, full-flavoured fish and earthy vegetables

White Wine

The grape skins are removed before the fermentation process in order to prevent imparting tannins and colour into the wine.

Types:

- *Chardonnay*
 - A medium to full bodied dry wine. It ranges in fruity flavours from apple to lemon to papaya.
 - Pairs well with meaty fish and shellfish
- *Sauvignon Blanc*
 - A dry, acidic and tart wine with hints of citrus
 - Pairs well with seafood, poultry and salads
- *Moscato*
 - Sweet, fruity and often used as a dessert wine. An easy drink.
 - Pairs well with crisp salad and desserts
- *Pinot Grigio*
 - Light to medium bodied, crisp dry wine with strong fruit notes. Often has citrus undertones.
 - Very versatile and can pair well with most foods.

- *Riesling*
 - Can be dry or sweet - most popular as a dessert wine as sweet varieties are favoured by the public. Has a firm balance between sweetness and acidity.
 - Pairs well with spicy, Asian dishes

Sparkling Wine

These wines are made with additional sugar to provoke a secondary fermentation process which creates carbon dioxide. Trapped in the wine bottle, the carbon dioxide settles into the wine, creating a delectable carbonated drink.

Types:

- *Champagne*
 - The most prestigious kind of sparkling wine
 - Made most commonly with Chardonnay, sometimes a blend of Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier
 - Often has tart notes of apple, citrus and bright acidity
- *Cava*
 - Dry Spanish sparkling wine
 - You can usually find a Cava Brut (dry) which has a bitter aftertaste
- *Prosecco*
 - A slightly sweet “flat” Italian sparkling wine - has larger “lazier” bubbles that can make it seem flatter than most sparkling varieties
- *Crémant*
 - An affordable French sparkling wine with a similar production process to that of champagne
 - The properties of this wine vary based on the region it was made in - can be sweet or round.

USEFUL INFO: Wineries in SA

Almost 2960 wineries can be found in South Africa. Our country is known for its large wine estates. The Cape Winelands are considered the star collection of all our wine estates. Only the best known of our wine estates make up the Cape Winelands. These include Stellenbosch, Paarl, Franschhoek, Wellington, Constantia, Robertson and Durbanville.

These estates are popular among tourists and wine connoisseurs. Accommodation can easily be found in the Cape Winelands, along with many other activities for adventure-lovers. These activities include Franschhoek walking tours, Stellenbosch ScooTours (tour the area on a giant scooter), cycle tours, e-biking and more.

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