

# Wine Basics



*What's In Your Glass?*

Wine Basics from John Lynch



# Wine Basics

*Welcome to WineShop At Home.*

Delicious drink. Good food. The clinking of glasses. Laughter. That's the wine lifestyle I want to share. Hey, I truly believe good wine is one of life's greatest pleasures. And I believe its enjoyment should not be reserved just for people with money to burn or "cork dorks" obsessed with critics' ratings. Everyone can fall in love with wine. Everyone can appreciate the flavors, the aromas, the memories of bottles uncorked with good friends. Wine shouldn't be complicated or intimidating. It simply should be enjoyed. That's what WineShop At Home is all about. We're making exclusive, artisan wines accessible. We're bringing people together. We're taking the anxiety out of pouring and tasting. And we're giving you the opportunity to get the party started. Literally. So here's to your success!



# CHAPTER 1: What's in your glass?

## *What is wine?*

Well, it's fermented grape juice that, obviously, can taste really, really good. But wine is more than smashed grapes and yeast. When you drink wine, you taste the unique characteristics of grapes that have been prized for their flavors and aromas for centuries. You taste the influences of the weather and soil where they were grown. That's the concept of "terroir" that connoisseurs love to refer to. Did the grapes come from a vineyard in a hot valley or on a coastal hillside? Was the earth clay? Or limestone? Was the year wetter than expected? How long did the grapes ripen on the vine? And when you open that bottle, you uncork the art and science of winemaking. Techniques can range from "Old World" tradition to "New World" trendsetting, but all have an effect on the drink you're swirling in your glass. Noticing, or trying to notice, all these subtleties is part of the fun of drinking wine. You don't need to be an expert to have an opinion, right?

## *Varietal:*

This term refers to the type of grape a wine is made from. Most wine grapes come from the species *Vitis vinifera*, native to Europe and Asia, and each grape variety has specific qualities. OK, here's where it gets a little confusing. In Europe, varieties are often blended together and named after the area where they were made, i.e. Bordeaux and Burgundy. But off the continent, the preference is to make wine from one variety and name it after that grape, i.e. Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. Although, in California, a rising ultra-premium blend known as "Meritage" is typically a blend of Bordeaux varietals – red or white. Anyway, hundreds of grape varieties are used to make wines around the world, and you'd be here all day if we went into all of them, so we'll just touch on the most popular. (And, no, White Zinfandel is not a grape variety, even though it's one of America's most-quaffed wines.)







# Red Wine Varietals

**CABERNET SAUVIGNON** (Cab-air-nay So-veen-yawn) is the go-to guy of red wine grapes. Tough-skinned “Cab” is cultivated everywhere from British Columbia to the Middle East and yields flavors as varied as berry, spice, tobacco and bell pepper. Cabernet is the main blending grape in Bordeaux wines, but reached prominence in America as a stand-alone varietal. Loaded with tannins, some Cabernets reach their peak after decades of aging. Aroma, taste and color are boldest when the wine is young and they mellow with age.

**MERLOT** (mer-low) grapes make soft, easy-to-enjoy red wines with fruity, floral flavors. It seemed wine-drinkers couldn’t get enough of Merlot in the 1990s, and that mass appeal got slammed in “Sideways.” (Remember the line, “If anyone orders Merlot, I’m leaving!”) Despite the cinematic bad rap, this grape is a winner. Merlot is the other main ingredient in Bordeaux blends. Merlots can also benefit from aging, but less-expensive versions are better enjoyed after just a few years.

**PINOT NOIR** (Pee-noe Nwahr) catapulted to fame, at Merlot’s expense, thanks to “Sideways.” This premium grape is sensitive and expensive to produce. Some experts describe Pinot as a sensitive child or a diva who needs her surroundings just right. But the payoff is worth the TLC. Light- to medium-bodied with fruity flavors, well-made Pinots are sumptuous. This grape grows best in cool climates and is the star of Burgundy wines. It’s also used in Champagne.

**ZINFANDEL** (Zin-fahn-DELL) is thought of as California’s grape, but it actually originated from an obscure Croatian varietal. It can be styled as a sweet rose, which millions of Americans know as White Zin, or as a dark, robust wine with flavors of berry or spice and a lot of alcohol. It’s a hardy grape that thrives in warm weather and easily reflects terroir and winemaking technique.

**SYRAH** (See-rah) makes strong, dark wines that are becoming more and more popular in the United States. Ever wonder about the difference between Syrah and Shiraz? Same grape. Just called Shiraz in Australia and South Africa. Syrah grows practically anywhere, and its wines age well. A young Syrah is spicy, an older Syrah more fruity and smoky.

**SANGIOVESE** (Sahn-joe-VAY-zeh) is the main red grape in Italy’s Chianti district and much of central Italy. Sangiovese grapes can be made into light- to medium-bodied wines or complex reds that age well. Blends of Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon are referred to as “Super Tuscans.” Sangiovese is increasingly popular with California growers and winemakers.

**DOLCETTO** (Dohl-CHET-toe) is a black wine grape from the Piedmont district in northwest Italy and was brought to California by expatriate Italians. Its name means “little sweet one” but this grape actually produces dry wines high in tannins. Dolcetto wines can have flavors of black cherry or licorice and go well with typical Italian fare.



# White Wine Varietals

**CHARDONNAY** (Shar-doe-nay) is the MVP of white wine grapes. It grows in all major wine regions. This versatile grape doesn't have a lot of innate character, so it's greatly influenced by terroir and its winemaker. Chardonnay can be crisp and fruity or oaky and buttery. Chardonnay is the main white Burgundy grape and a Champagne grape.

**SAUVIGNON BLANC** (So-veen-yawn BLAHNK) is big in California and France's Loire Valley. This grape makes wines with grassy, fruity flavors that are meant to be enjoyed young. Some dry Sauvignon Blanc from California is called Fume Blanc. Same grape, different name developed by iconic Napa vintner Robert Mondavi.

**CHENIN BLANC** (shen-in BLAHNK) is another sturdy white grape from the Loire Valley that's popular in California. Chenin Blanc wines range from dry and fruity to sweet and honeyed. It's often used in blended wines in France and as stand-alone varietal in California. Aging can improve some Chenin Blancs by bringing out the fruit flavor.

**PINOT GRIGIO** (Pee-noe Gree-jee-o) goes by this name in Italy and Pinot Gris in France. Wine from this grape varies a lot depending on its region and production. Grapes are often grayish-blue in color but can be white or brownish-pink. Pinot Gris is now Oregon's dominate white grape, but is most commonly associated with France's Alsace region. Pinot Gris can be medium- to full-bodied, crisp, fruity and floral. Pinot Grigio is light in body, color and flavor. Pinot Grigio should be uncorked soon, but some Pinot Gris ages well.

**SEMILLON** (Say-mee-yon) grapes are the foundation of Bordeaux white wines, which can range from very dry to very sweet. Semillon is usually blended with Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc. The blends and dry Semillons should be enjoyed while young, but the sweeter wines can age awhile.

**VIOGNIER** (Vee-ohn-yay) grapes aren't too easy to grow so this varietal was on the endangered list until interest in it picked up in recent decades. It's enjoying special attention by "Rhône Rangers," California winemakers dedicated to grapes from France's Rhône Valley. Viogniers are usually dry wines with intense floral aromas.

**RIESLING** (REESE-ling) originates from Germany's Rhine region and makes wines with fruity, herbaceous flavors. Riesling grapes are especially influenced by terroir and make light-bodied wines ranging from very dry to very sweet.

**GEWURZTRAMINER** (Geh-VERTZ-trah-mee-nur) is from France's Alsace region and makes wines dry to sweet, with strong spicy flavors and floral aromas. People have strong opinions – good and bad - about this varietal. Gewurtztraminer is best enjoyed with spicy foods or no food at all. But watch out, this wine can pack some alcohol.



# Styles of Wine



When people talk about wine styles, they can be referring to a range of qualities. A wine's basic traits are determined by the characteristics of the grapes, the location of the vineyard and the technique of the winemaker. But when it comes to defining broader styles of wine, the elements aren't set in stone.

Style can refer to types of wine, such as sparkling, blush, dessert or fortified. Style can refer to wines from specific regions, such as Burgundies, Chiantis and Champagnes. Or style can refer to wines with certain tastes, colors and textures, such as crisp, acidic whites or bold, tannic reds. And, of course, preference for one style or another is completely up to you.

At WineShop At Home, we've defined five styles for the wines we craft in a very simple way:



- *Coastal Wines* include a range of varietals grown in climates influenced by the ocean. With these wines you experience the effects of the fog, the breeze, the sun, the chill. These wines are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and others and carry distinctive labels inspired by the sea – Avalon Cellars, Albion, Halcyon and Sun Fish.



- *Regional Wines* honor traditional European winemaking techniques, with a touch of modern craftsmanship. These wines are made from Old World varietals such as Merlot, Sangiovese, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Grigio, Syrah and Malbec. And they carry the labels Milano Cellars, Frisch, Tilden Peak Cellars, Villa Encantado and Lumière de Vie.



- *Reds Only Wines* are crafted to suit just about every taste and occasion, from dark Zinfandel to light and fruity Gamay to classic Cabernet and Merlot. These wines are bottled under the brands Fog Vineyards, Nouveau Muse and Pied Violet.



- *Specialty Wines* are just that, wines for life's special occasions. They include dessert wines like Moscato under the Ceres label and sparkling wines like Brut Cava under the Grand Cadeau label.



- *Founders' Circle* wines reflect the sense of family that's so important to me and my wife, Melissa. These high-quality varietals include Cabernet, Chardonnay, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc as well as Meritage wines. And they carry unique labels that honor people and places dear to us. Labels like De Beaumont Cellars, Broadmoore Estates, Mariana Vineyard, McKenna, Somersville Cellars and EVO.



# Where is wine produced?



These days, it seems wine is made just about everywhere but Antarctica. The world's major wine regions traditionally are grouped into two categories: Old World and New World. Old World, obviously, refers to Europe, and New World is the rest of us. Interestingly, there is wine made in every state of the U.S., including Alaska. Since we're in the New World, let's start here:

## California

The Golden State is the center of our domestic wine industry, no doubt about it, thanks to a blessed climate and a history of innovation among winemakers. California produces 95 percent of U.S. wines. Napa Valley is quintessential Wine Country. (And the place we're pretty happy to call home.) The relatively small valley supports several hundred wineries, from the famous to the mom-and-pop, making it an international destination. Cabernet Sauvignon reigns, with some Cabs reaching cult status, but Napa also produces world-class Zinfandel, Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and sparkling wine. Neighboring Sonoma County is the state's other famous wine center. If Napa starts to seem a little hoity-toity, Sonoma County is the perfect antidote. It's laid back, just as beautiful, its wines equally renowned. Sonoma's coastal vineyards produce silky Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays, the warmer valleys are heaven for Cabernets and Zinfandels. Surrounding Sonoma County are Mendocino and Lake counties, both emerging wine destinations. A couple hundred miles to the south, the Central Coast counties of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara turn out remarkable Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays, Zinfandels and Rhone varietals. And we can't overlook the work-horse vineyards of the Central Valley, without which jug-wine production would plummet.

## Pacific Northwest

Winemaking is a relatively young industry in Oregon, thanks to the lingering effects of prohibition, but Pinot Noirs from the verdant Willamette and Umpqua valleys have been judged some of the varietal's most delicious. Now, the state is making a mark with Pinot Gris. Washington's another up-and-comer. Most of its vineyards are on its arid, east side and grow Cabernet, Merlot and Chardonnay. The state also succeeds with cool-weather varietals like Riesling and Gewurztraminer.

## New York

Who knew? West Coasters may not realize that New York is actually our second-largest wine-producing state. It's known for Rieslings from the Finger Lakes, Chardonnays from the Hudson Valley and Merlots and Cabs from Long Island.

## South of the Equator

Chile and Argentina have long been famous for their excellent reds. Way down under, Australia is literally a huge winemaking country. It's got a corner on Shiraz and creates fun blended wines. New Zealand is also a thriving wine region. Its Sauvignon Blanc is considered some of the best in the world.

## OK, now the Old World:

Everyone knows France and Italy are the world's historical wine centers and the influences on other wine regions. No surprise the countries are the world's largest wine producers.

**France's** numerous wine regions have distinct traditions and reputations, and we know the wines by those regional names. Burgundy, Bordeaux, Champagne, etc. (By the way, Bordeaux wineries are "chateaus." Burgundy wineries are "domaines.")

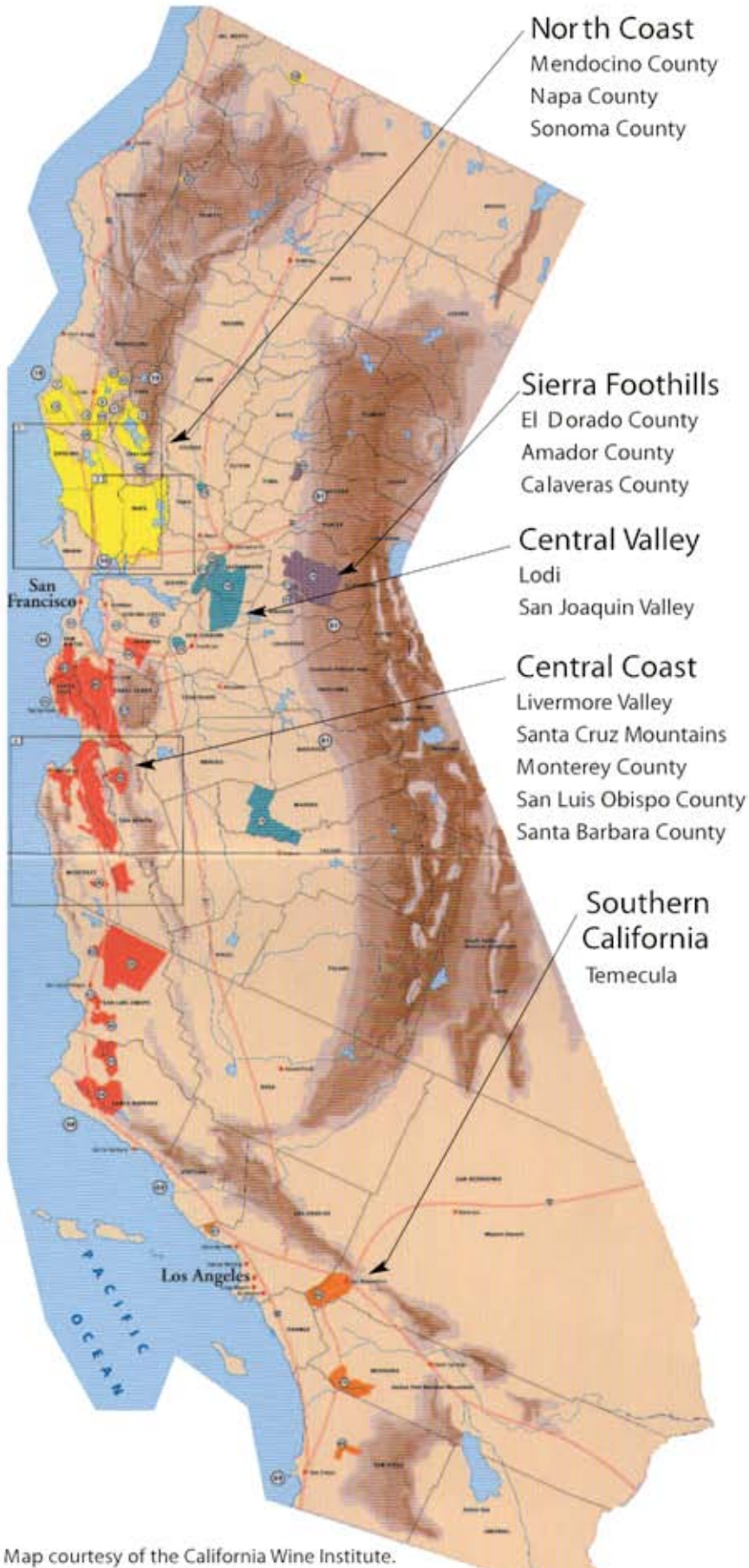
In **Italy**, wine is part of day-to-day life, and the country has as many wine districts as political districts. In fact, they're all the same territories. **Italians** also tend to name their wines after places, like Chianti, instead of the grapes. Sangiovese, Pinot Grigio, Barbera, Dolcetto and Nebbiolo are some of Italy's main varietals.

**Germany** produces mostly white wines, primarily in the southern part of the country. The most well-known regions are along the Rhine and Mosel rivers. You may not know that Germans rate wine quality by the ripeness of the grapes. This system stems from the cold climate's effect on the growing season and the belief riper grapes – with higher sugar content – make better wines.

**Spain** used to have a reputation for producing cheap table wines, but that's all changed, thanks to new techniques and standards adopted by Spanish winemakers. Spanish wines have developed a considerable following. The major wine regions are Rioja; Penedes, where Cava (sparkling wine) is made; and Navarra. Spain now has more acreage planted with grapes than any other country.

**Portugal**, of course, is known for Port, red wine that's fortified with brandy during fermentation.

# What is an appellation?

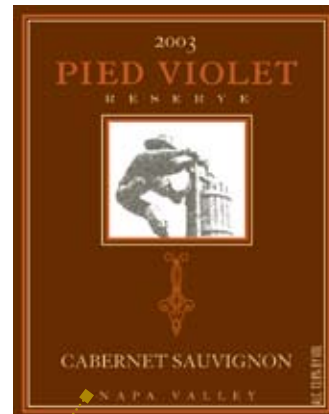


Map courtesy of the California Wine Institute.

The word appellation is now commonly used around the world to refer to the place where grapes are grown. In America, the legal designation is American Viticultural Area (AVA). Appellations have official and legal status, with either a government or trade bureau responsible to strictly regulate usage in order to assure both quality and authenticity.

An appellation may be as large as an entire region, country or state encompassing hundreds of thousands of acres and

many separate vineyards, or as small as a single vineyard. Each region is better known for a particular varietal they may excel in – from the largest appellation to the smallest. If there's an appellation on the label, the law says at least 75-85 percent of the grapes must come from there (depending on designation).



Here's what the appellation on the label tells you:

## Political Appellations

If the appellation is a political border – such as the state of California or Napa County – the grapes may be grown anywhere within those borders.

## Regional Appellations

Regional appellations such as “North Coast” appellations may include several counties or sub-appellations. For instance, the “North Coast” includes Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma and Lake Counties.

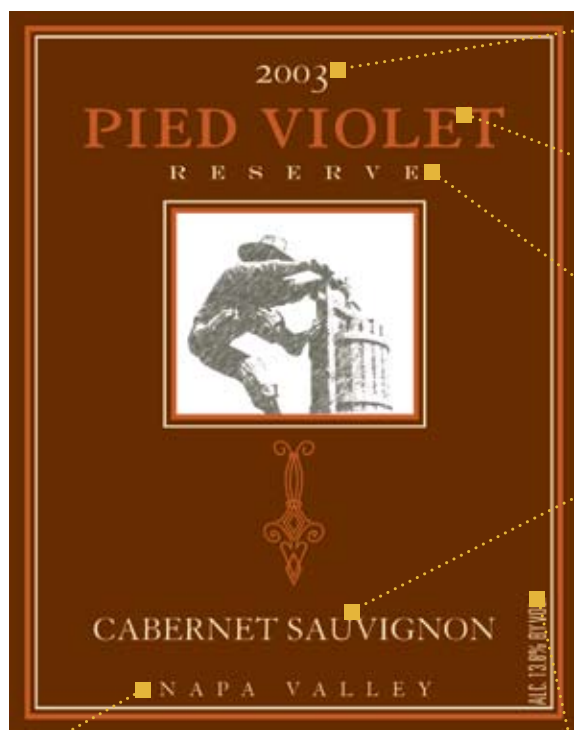
## Sub-Appellations

Sub-appellations often appear within appellations that narrow the style and up the price. The Napa Valley – our home sweet home – and the Sonoma Valley are examples of smaller appellations that carry great weight with wine drinkers throughout the world. These wines must contain 85 percent of their grapes grown in these small appellations. Also, within the Napa Valley you will find the even smaller appellations of Oakville and Stag's Leap. Within the Sonoma Valley you will find sub-appellations such as Chalk Hill and Russian River Valley.



# How to Read a Label

## FRONT LABEL



### THE VINTAGE DATE:

Indicates the year in which the grapes were harvested.

### THE BRAND NAME:

Used to identify and market a wine.

### THE QUALITY DESIGNATION:

For WineShop At Home the word "Reserve" means the best of the best.

### THE VARIETAL OR OTHER DESIGNATION:

Name of the dominant grapes used in the wine (i.e. Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, etc.) where at least 75 percent of the grape was used to make the wine. Other designations may be used to identify the wine, such as Red Table Wine, White Wine or Dessert Wine.

### THE ALCOHOL CONTENT:

Measured in percent by volume.

### THE APPELLATION:

The place in which the dominant grapes used in the wine were grown. This place can be an American Viticultural Area (AVA), a defined grape-growing region, which means 85 percent or more of the wine was produced from grapes grown in the named area.

## BACK LABEL



### THE WINE STORY:

Often contains the particulars of the wine story, the tasting notes of the wine, and/or a pairing suggestion for the wine.

### WHO & WHERE BOTTLED:

If at least 75% of the wine is fermented and clarified at the location, the terms "Produced and Bottled by" may be used. If the named winery introduced the wine to cellar treatment, such as clarification or barrel aging, at another location "Vinted and Bottled by" may be used.

### HEALTH WARNING STATEMENT:

This statement is required by law on all alcohol beverages containing 0.5 percent or more alcohol by volume.

### CONTAINS SULFITES:

Sulfites occur naturally in almost all wines. They are also added to wine as preservatives to prevent spoilage and oxidation.



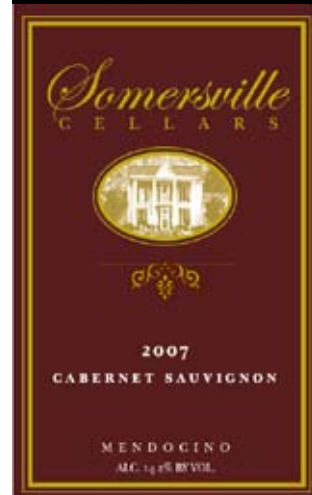
**BROADMOORE**  
ESTABLISHED 1850

**Cabernet Sauvignon**  
San Francisco Bay  
ALC. 13.5% BY VOL.



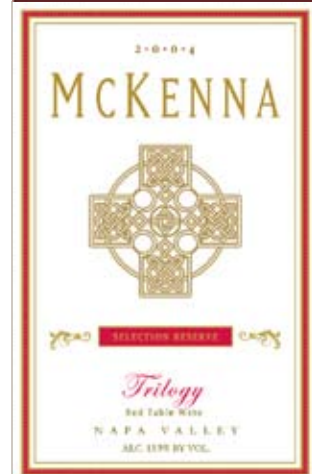
**2007**  
**ZINFANDEL**

NORTH COAST  
alcohol 14.5% by volume



**2007**  
**CABERNET SAUVIGNON**

MENDOCINO  
ALC. 14.5% BY VOL.



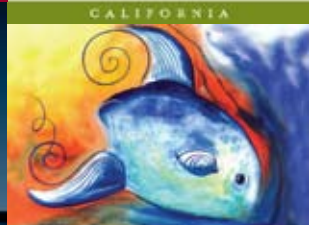
**MCKENNA**

**Triloggy**  
Red Table Wine  
NAPA VALLEY  
ALC. 13.5% BY VOL.



**frisch**

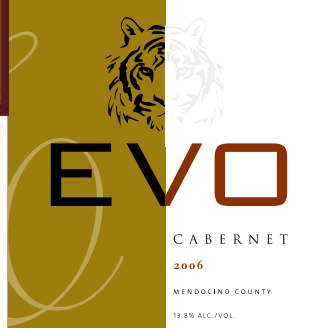
**2008**  
**RIESLING**  
CALIFORNIA  
ALC. 12.5% BY VOL.



**sunfish**  
**2007**  
**CHARDONNAY**  
MONTEREY COUNTY  
ALC. 12.5% BY VOL.



**NOUVEAU MUSE**  
**2008**  
Rosato  
NAPA VALLEY  
ALC. 12.5% BY VOL.



**EVO**

**CABERNET**  
**2006**  
MENDOCINO COUNTY  
13.5% ALC./VOL.



**2007**  
**Lumière de Vie**  
SAUVIGNON BLANC  
North Coast



## CHAPTER 2: From the Vineyard to the Glass

### *How Wine is Made*

Like I've said, enjoying great wine doesn't have to be a complicated thing. Making great wine, on the other hand, kinda is. In fact, some winemakers spend four intense years earning degrees in enology (winemaking) or viticulture (the cultivation of grapes.) But to succeed as a WineShop At Home Independent Consultant, all you really need to grasp is the basic process. Here it is, in a nutshell:

- Grapes are harvested in the fall, a time we in Wine Country call the "crush."
- Ideally, the grapes have reached perfect ripeness so their sugar and acid levels are balanced. They're harvested by hand or machine and taken to a winery. Next they're put into a crusher. The crushing unleashes the sugars, yeast is then added to the juice to start fermentation. The juice then goes into stainless steel tanks or oak barrels for fermentation, which is the yeast devouring the sugars and turning the juice into alcohol. Winemakers can also add cultured yeasts during fermentation.
- A lot of people don't realize that almost all grape juice is clear, even juice from red grapes. So red wines are red because their juice soaks with the dark skins during fermentation. Juice for white wines, on the other hand, is immediately separated from skins.
- You may hear wine geeks refer to "malo-lactic fermentation." That's when winemakers add bacteria that promote the secondary fermentation which converts Malic acid to Lactic acid and help make a wine less acidic. Most dark reds undergo malolactic fermentation.. Most dark reds and Chardonnay undergo malo-lactic fermentation.
- After fermentation, the wines are clarified, and dead yeast and sediment are filtered out.
- And that's usually it for many white and light red wines. They're ready for bottling - and drinking. Dark reds, however, can go on to age for months or years in barrels or bottles.
- An interesting fact about California winemaking is that it's illegal for winemakers to add sugar to wine. Same goes for Italy, but it is allowed in France and other places.
- Now, at WineShop, we are a bonded Napa Valley winery. But unlike many wineries, we don't rely on one or two vineyards for our grapes. Our vineyard is the world. From the renowned appellations of our own valley to the historic wine regions of Europe, we scout the very best grapes. And then we get busy handcrafting limited-edition wines you won't find anywhere else. Classic varietals for your table and cellar, made with an artist's care and creativity.



# CHAPTER 3: What Does Wine Say to You?



## *Assessing Wine*

There is certainly no shortage of “experts” available to tell you what makes a great wine. From schooled sommeliers to your book club friends, it seems any time wine is poured, someone likes to chime in about the quality. And ever try to keep track of the ratings handed down by professional critics, industry magazines and wine competitions? That can get real tedious real quick. Fortunately, no one else’s opinion really matters. Even if you’re new to the world of wine, you are perfectly able to decide what tastes good to you. You are the ultimate judge.



# *The Four S's of Wine Tasting*



**See** – This is about noticing color and clarity. Hold your glass up a bit, preferably toward natural light and against a white background. Now, how would you describe the color? Whites can range from almost clear to light yellow to rich gold. Reds can range from pink to purple to almost black. Color can indicate a few things – the varietal, climate where the grapes grew, flavor and age. For example, richly colored white wines are generally sweeter. Dark reds typically come from grapes grown in warm weather. And young wines are clearer than old wines. Remember, unfiltered or mature wines might have some cloudiness, and that's OK.



**Swirl** – Gently swirl the wine in your glass to let in more oxygen and further release the scents and flavors. This is technically called “volatizing the esters.” Be careful not to fill your glass more than a third or you'll end up sloshing. (And don't swirl sparkling wines because that disturbs the gasses.)



**Smell** – Be bold about your sniffing. Stick your nose right into the glass and take in the scents. What do you notice? Describing aroma and bouquet isn't always easy at first, so an “aroma wheel” can be a fun teaching aid. It's literally a reference sheet in the shape of a wheel that categorizes scents, with generalities like “fruity” and “woody” in the center and specifics like “blackberry” and “burnt toast” at the edge.



**Sip** – Take a good, medium-sized sip. Don't swallow right away. Purse your lips and gently roll the wine around in your mouth. If you want, draw in some air across your tongue to bring out the flavors even more. Now you can swallow – or spit. If you want to sample multiple wines but don't want all that alcohol going to your head, take advantage of the dump bucket.

## **A few tips:**

- Cleanse your palate with water before moving on to the next wine.
- As you taste, take notes about your impressions. Compare with your friends or refer back to your notes next time you enjoy that same wine to see how your impressions hold up.
- Don't wear perfume or cologne.
- Don't take it too seriously. In the end, all it comes down to is if you like a wine or not, regardless of whether you pick up on hints of cherry or traces of bell pepper!





## CHAPTER 4: Simple Pairings

When it comes to picking a wine for dinner, especially a dinner out, a lot of people start to sweat. It's totally gauche to drink white wine with pasta, right? And you'd be a real rube to order a red with your halibut, wouldn't you? Not at all. Sure, there are guidelines for making sure a wine's flavors complement the dish. But our main advice is to enjoy your meals with whatever wine you feel like drinking. That said, it helps to be aware of general pairing rules. The goal is reach a balance so the wine doesn't overpower the food or vice versa.

First, think about the dominant flavors of the food (as opposed to the main ingredients) and go from there. Dishes with bold flavors will go well with bold wines. Heavy foods like beef pair well with full-bodied wines like Cabernet Sauvignon. But also think about contrast. For example, spicy food can go well with sweeter wine like a Gewurztraminer. And an oily food can go well with a crisp, acidic white.

My favorite things about wine are not about the science. Rather, I love the close relationship with wine and food and all the fun you can have finding new traditions in the pairing of your favorite wines with your favorite foods. Someone once told me they thought that wine and food were a better pair than Paris Hilton and a Chihuahua. I'd have to agree. Plus, you don't need a diamond collar for your wine bottle. When sharing wine with friends I love to ask them what foods they think would go well with the wine. This gets them thinking about how they can incorporate wine into a rich and wonderful lifestyle for years to come. It also serves as a great reference point because everyone knows what food they like and what they don't like.

Call it a "guy thing" but I love to pair a big, rich cab with an equally big steak or roast. But my softer side also calls me to pop open a Moscato when enjoying my favorite take-out food such as spicy Chinese and Thai foods. Surprisingly, I love the pairing of Zinfandel with Mexican foods and a silky Pinot Noir with grilled salmon. When drinking one of our White Meritages, I find nothing beats fresh north coast shellfish, such as abalone.

What's my favorite wine? That would be like asking me which of my kids is my favorite. I love 'em all – so I guess I'd have to answer that my favorite bottle of wine is always the one that is open! You could say I like to keep it simple.

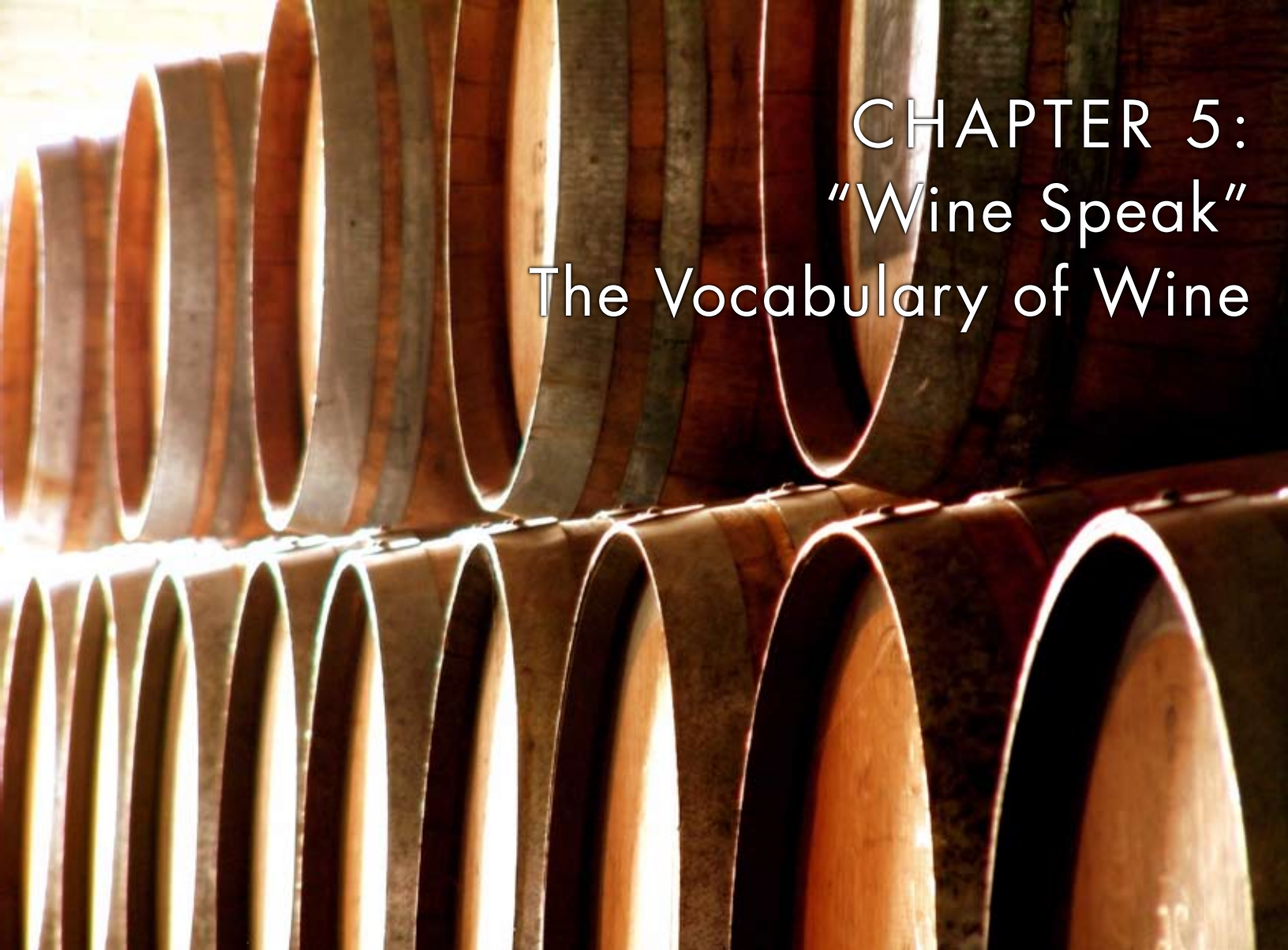
As for pairing WineShop At Home wines with food for Tastings, keep it simple. This is what we suggest:



Three cheeses:

- Blue cheese, Stilton or Gorgonzola
- Gouda, Havarti, Dry cheddar or Parmesan
- Brie, Camembert or Monterey Jack

Round out the offerings with sliced French bread or wafer-style crackers, some strawberries or grapes, milk or dark chocolates and bottled water. See, it doesn't have to be complicated at all.



# CHAPTER 5: “Wine Speak” The Vocabulary of Wine

Wine-talk is often confusing and not a language you need to know to enjoy our wines, which speak for themselves, no translation needed. However, if you enjoy talking the talk, here are some common wine terms to get you started:

**ACIDITY** - A component of wine generally consisting of tartaric acid. Very important in wine, this gives the wine that crisp taste.

**APPELLATION** – This is a name on a label that denotes the origin of the wine grapes. An appellation can be as broad as a country or state or as limited as a county or geographic district. If there’s an appellation on the label, the law says at least 75-85 percent of the grapes must come from there (depending on designation).

**BALANCE** - The relationship linking the four basic components in a wine: sweetness, acidity, tannins and alcohol. Fruit softens a wine’s balance, while acidity, alcohol and tannins firm up the wine.

**BODY** - The impression of the wine’s size and weight. A wine’s body is generally described as light, medium or full.

**BOUQUET** - Bouquet and aroma are often used interchangeably to explain the scent of the wine, but technically, they have different meanings. Aroma refers to scents inherent in the unfermented grape, i.e. fruity scents. Bouquet refers to scents that come from processing the wine, i.e. woody scents.

**CAPSULE** – The foil covering the top of a wine bottle. Bet you never knew that.

**CORKED** – Not a good thing. This is what we call a wine when a defective cork has made it smell like dry rot.

**CRISP** – A taste description for wine with a good balance of acidity and sweetness.

**COMPLEXITY** - These are the different flavors and textures in a wine. In most cases, the more complex, the better.

**DECANTING** – Pouring wine into a decanter to separate sediment in the bottle or to let it “breathe” by exposing it to air before serving. Allowing a wine to breathe frees aromas and mellows tannins.



**DEPTH** – That wine’s deep, man. When people say wine has depth, they mean it’s full-bodied, with layers of taste.

**FINISH** – This is the taste left in your mouth after wine is swallowed. Hopefully it’s a pleasing taste.

**LEGS** – Geez, first body, now legs. Yes, we’re still talking about wine. Legs are what we call the streaks that appear on the side of your wine glass after you give it a swirl. Thin legs mean high alcohol content.

**MAGNUM** – A big bottle of wine, the equivalent of two regular bottles.

**MERITAGE** (MEHR-ih-tihj) – A trademarked name for American wines that blend Bordeaux grapes. Reds are usually blends of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Whites are often Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. Neither varietal can make up more than 90 percent of the wine. The meaning of meritage and pronunciation of this word are found in the two words blended to make up the name, “merit” and “heritage.” This made-up word is often bungled by people who assume it’s French. It’s not, so stress the first syllable, not the last.

**RESERVE** – A description winemakers put on labels to let you know it’s a special bottle. Reserve has no legal definition in the United States, however, so sometimes it’s really slapped on there for marketing purposes.

**SOMMELIER** (So-mel-YAY) – A French word for a wine steward, that person who’s in charge of buying and cellaring wine at fancy restaurants and advising customers on which bottle goes best with that gourmet entrée.

**SPARKLING WINE** – Sparkling wine is a wine with significant levels of carbon dioxide in it making it fizzing. The carbon dioxide may result from natural fermentation, either in a bottle, as with the méthode champenoise, or in a large tank or as a result of carbon dioxide injection. The sweetness of sparkling wine can range from very dry “brut” styles to sweeter “doux” varieties.

**TANNINS** – These are natural substances found in grape skins, seeds and stems. Tannins give red wines their structure, and, in young wines, the astringent taste that can make you pucker up. Tannins mellow with time and are what let red wines age so beautifully.

**TERROIR** (teh-r-WAHR) – This is a huge concept among Old World winemakers and refers to the influences and characteristics imparted by the soil, topography and climate of a vineyard.

**VARIETAL** – This means the type of grape. New World winemakers prefer to make single-varietal wines and name them after the grape. That’s why we ask for glasses of Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon. Wines made in California have to contain at least 75 percent of the varietal grape named on the label. It’s the law.

**VINTAGE** – The year the grapes were harvested and the wine was made. As in, “Ah, yes, that was a very good year.” If a label gives a vintage, then 95 percent of the wine in that bottle comes from grapes picked that year.

## Resource Guide:

[101 Essential Wine Tips](#) by Tom Stevenson

[The Simple & Savvy Wine Guide](#) by Leslie Sbrocco

[The Everything Wine Book](#) by Barbara Nowak and Beverly Wichman

[Wine for Dummies](#) by Ed McCarthy and Mary Ewing-Mulligan

[Wine Spectator](#) magazine and [www.winespectator.com](http://www.winespectator.com)

[Wine Enthusiast](#) magazine and [www.winemag.com](http://www.winemag.com)

[WineShop At Home Brandbook](#)

[WineShop At Home Wine 101 Videos](#) (located in your Business Center)

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