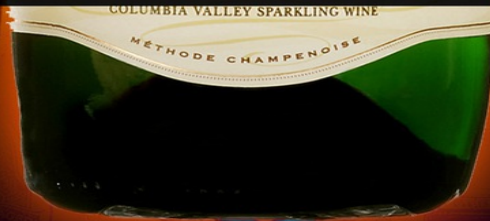


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FRENCH WINE



RED, WHITE, ROSE AND CHAMPAGNE.

FRENCH WINE

Red, White, Rose, and Champagne

Table of contents

PRESENTATION AND ORIGINS

France, the country of wine

Oak me

WINE LIST, PLEASE

50 shades of red

White...but not really

The champagne from Champagne

Red + White = Rosé?

LET US TASTE...SIMPLY

Smell the taste

What a nice robe!

The wine's tears.

THE WINE TRAVELS

Cap sur le Cap

The Haute Cabriere

PRESENTATION AND ORIGINS

I love French wine. I love its smell. I love its texture. Even more, I love what it represents. Wine is an alcoholic beverage, resulting from the fermentation of raisins. This is what you will find in any good dictionary. But let us not limit wine with this simplistic definition. This book's goal is not to list everything that is linked to wine. No, I want to share with my reader here some of the basis and testimonials, so as to give you the urge to know more and jump (with moderation) in this world.

The history of vinery is so rich and ancient that we cannot retrace its genesis with precision. We do however place its first apparition some 8000 years back in Caucasia and Mesopotamia and the debut of the culture some 4500 years back.

Millennia of practice, of refinement, of trading between people until its first appearance in France “only” 3000 years back, only to clench itself quite strongly on the Bordeaux coast, in Languedoc-Roussillon, in Provence, in Champagne, in Bourgogne, etc.



France, landscape, vineyards

France, the country of wine

Even though it is consumed in many countries, wine has a special value in France. It is not only consumed, but it possesses a reserved place on the table and in the French people's hearts.

For more than 85% of French people, wine and art cannot be told apart from life. For more than 90% of French people, wine contributes to the beauty of the landscape. This means that wine's aura goes beyond the taste buds.

Even better?

If we were to believe the annual competitions, the prizes, and the wine tasters, yes! French wine is really the world's best wine. The infamous wine taster Robert Parker gave the maxim grade to 300 wines around the world, and more than 200 of these wines are French.

The *terroir*

Wine making can be summed up as follows: pick the grapes, press them and let them ferment. Easy, right? Obviously, in thousands of years of practice, every country has developed techniques and secrets to make their own wines.

To the know-how and the experience, natural factors are added. It is time for me to pull the magic word out of my hat, the word that you often hear from wine connoisseurs: the *terroir*. The *terroir* is the totality of soils of a region from an agricultural possibility's point of view. If the ground, the wind, the sun rays, the rain, etc. are the natural factors of a zone, it is good for the man to know how to analyze them, recognize them and exploit them.

This mix of natural and human factors is called the territory. You need to understand that with thousands of years of practice and wine research, wine-growers, and other vinery people have reached a high level of expertise. They know very well which type of wine to plant in what type of soil. We will never find two territories that have perfectly identical natural features. The wine and its taste will thus be different from one region to the next. The quality of the French *terroir* is at a very rare level and contributes a lot to the richness of grapes that grow here.

Oak me

Before being put in bottles, some vintages will be first stored in oak barrels.

It is what we call maturation on oak.



French Oak Barrels

This expensive procedure becomes even more expensive if the barrels are changed after every vintage is used for many reasons.

In red wine's case, they allow to soften the tannins and thus spread the bitter taste created by the latter. You can read more about tannins in the Wine tasting chapter. Generally, the barrels bring more richness to the wine's aromas and a stabilization of their color. Better put, the oak wood gives a woody shade and new aromas.

Apart from being expensive, this procedure is very demanding in terms of time and precision. Oak maturation is thus used exclusively for wines with a certain value

WINE LIST, PLEASE

French map and a pen in hand, you are waiting for the location of wines and the regions in which they are found to prepare better for your next visit to the hexagon. Here we are!

50 shades of red

The *Merlot*

With its dark red and strong aroma, the *merlot* is waiting for you in the Bordeaux region. You will find it, amongst others, in the vineyards of *Pomerol*. Meaty and fruity, imposing a strawberry and raspberry aromas, the *merlot* will be a perfect companion to grilled or roasted beef, chicken, or blue cheese, etc.

The *Cabernet Sauvignon*

Often associated to the *merlot* in the Bordeaux region, the *cabernet sauvignon* is one of the most well-known vintages in the world. Its grape variety is defined by the very vegetal aroma of green pepper, but also by some subtle cherry, cider, and spices. It is an ideal wine for a meal with veal, beef or even pork.

The *Côtes du Rhône*

No, your quest for red wine will not stop in Gironde! Let us take East in the Rhone region to embark in the discovery of a pretty strong red wine: The *Côtes du Rhône*. This wine's name comes from the Rhone, the shores of which the grape variety touches. You will need a bit of time to go through the 10 hectares, and this only if you will still be able to walk straight after the tasting.

Do not hesitate to fill your journey with stops in order to test the different dishes that you can find in this region. Stuffed geese, pheasant, grilled beef and meats will be even more delicious with this wine accompanying wonderful.

The *Beaujolais*

A little further up north the *Beaujolais* will be waiting for us. This name

surpasses the borders of France; each year, the entire world impatiently awaits the *Beaujolais Nouveau*. This red wine, which comes mainly from the grape variety of Gamay, is sold every third Thursday of November. Its fruity aromas – combining bananas, berries, cherry – make an ideal beverage to go along with a dish with grilled veal.

Be careful, the *Beaujolais Nouveau* is not a container wine and cannot be preserved for more than six months.



The Rhône Valley

White...but not really

The Chardonnay

With a name as sexy as it is famous, the grape varieties that give us the *Chardonnay* are found in the valley of Loire, in Champagne but more often in Bourgogne. Cultivated on more than 30 000 hectares in France, it has conquered the wine growing countries over the entire world. Its pale yellow type, with shades of silver and its freshness, have made it an ideal side for the langoustine, cod or even dorado.

The Sauvignon Blanc

If it is a little less famous, the *Sauvignon Blanc* does not want anything from the *Chardonnay*. You can find it in *Bordelais* but also in the very beautiful valley of Loire. Old villages, the gothic cathedral, and the palace are there to

be visited...if you do not pass directly to the tasting. In any case, the lychee notes and the pale yellow tone with green reflections offered by this grape variety will give you bliss.

Alsace is our next destination. Does the cold in the north frighten you? Do not worry; the *pinot-gris* will warm you up. Originally coming from Bourgogne, it has been cultivated for many decades in Alsace. This grape variety has had many names over the years: “*tokay-d’Alsace*” or “*tokai-pinot-gris*”. After a few glasses, we will contain ourselves from trying to remember them all.

The champagne from Champagne

In order to present the *Champagne*, we will quite evidently evoke the vineyards of Champagne, which situated itself in the Champagne region. As you already understand, the name of this fizzy wine is inseparable from the vineyards name.

Developed from pinot noir grape varieties, *meunier* and *chardonnay*, *Champagne* is always served when celebrating a birthday, a graduation, a marriage, etc.

However, do not wait for your best friend’s third marriage – even though “this time it will work out” – to pop open a bottle. Many duplicates exist all over the world. The label of a real *Champagne* wine will have information such as the batch identification, a registration number, the words *Produit de France*, etc. on it.

Red + White = Rosé?

A funny tale tells us that a rosé wine is a mix between red wine and white wine. Even though the color could make us believe it, it is not the case. The rosé wine is made from black raisins with white pulp. The grape variety often used is *syrah*. To have the same quality of the rosé vintage from one bottle to another, and to preserve the taste and flavor is a difficult task to accomplish.

Furthermore, this wine is not perceived as being a high-class wine, and actually, it does not receive the same attention as other wines. The tendency has started to change in the past few years, especially in the south of France, where the quality of the rosés knew how to seduce the locals as well as the tourists. Languedoc-Roussillon overflows with quality rosé wines, very

pleasant to taste.

Fresh in the mouth and fruity, the rose wine makes an amazing union with seasoned dishes, meridional flavors, and with homemade pizzas.



Le Champagne and its bubbles

LET US TASTE...SIMPLY

The wine bottles have important information such as the brand, the name of the domain, the type and name of the wine and even the level of alcohol. When tasting, it is not necessary to be pompous, to close your eyes, or to feel in an exaggerated way, to search and find aromas that you do not taste.

You are only beginning, so do not hesitate to ask for help around you. Apart from tasting a *piquette* (a very bad quality wine), you should know that there really isn't any bad wine.

Uncork in advance

Waiting, always waiting! Yes, but it is for a good cause, dear reader. Opening the bottle in advance allows oxygen flow to the wine, and thus aids in the spreading of the aromas but also in the creation of new ones. The served wine will see its taste changed in only a couple of minutes. The speed of evolution is different from one type of wine to another. Rather slow for a strong red wine, but very fast for a very clear dry white wine. Basically, do not leave your Chardonnay bottle open the entire week.

Smell the taste

Smell the taste? Are you having doubts and questioning yourself if I'm not already tasting? No. What we call the *taste of the cork* is an odor. Once you have poured the wine, put your nose above the glass. A musty, dusty, wet cardboard, corky odor is a sign of a *corked* wine. You will thus not have to drink the entire bottle in one sip while holding your nose, but keep it for a dish you might want to prepare...and open another bottle.

What a nice robe!

No, the following stage does not consist in giving compliments to the girl next door. I am talking about the robe of the wine, and its aspect.

Let us start with the color. Cherry red or pure red, purple or orangey, violet and purple are the quality and maturation indicators for a wine. A ruby red or a more purple red are generally the colors of a rather young wine, while a brick red, ochre or with orange highlights means that the wine is older, a long-keeping wine. The same general rule applies to white wines. The very

young wines will show a pale yellow robe and a well-matured wine will let you admire a yolk yellow or even golden yellow color.

Further, slightly turn the glass (not your head) and, if you can see a white background, serve only the hollow in your hands and then slowly turn to the wine. The whole idea here is not to concentrate for five minutes, with your eyes at 10 centimeters away from the glass, only to triumphantly announce: “It’s a red wine!”. No. You will observe and appreciate the depth of the robe, its highlights, its shininess or even its tears.

The wine’s tears.

The tears? Yes. We will be talking about its fat and its legs. I have always had a thing for the word “tears”, it’s much more poetic than “fat”. We are talking about drops on the side of your glass from when you were turning the wine, drops that drip along the glass.

This step is absolutely not to be neglected because, from these tears, we can understand a few things. A rich number of tears defines a wine that is rich in alcohol, and hence, a wine coming from sweet grape. Seeing how the sun prefers the sweet grapes, if we were to try and locate where the wine came from, we could risk and say the south.

A more fluid wine, with less fat, will more likely have its roots in a region characterized by freshness.§



The robe of the wine

Smell freely

Your nose in the glass, you smell the wine with exaggerated slowness, while waiting for those around you to risk giving the first impression. I am going to take this person from your shoulders: the wine contains hundreds of odorous molecules! No one can find all of the wine's tones, and above all, it's not because you are the only one to smell a certain note that makes you right. Give it a first smell, then wait for a couple of minutes and make the wine spin a bit in your glass before smelling it again. This "second smell" is a good way to confirm the notes you smelled the first time, but also to discover new ones. Why not make this experience playful, interesting, and without anyone taking notes of your first impressions before comparing your list to that of your friends?

Cherry, strawberry, iris, raspberry, banana, plum, black olive, hummus, pepper, caramel, resin, rose, orange, cinnamon, vanilla, mushroom, flint, etc. are just a couple of odors that can come up when you have your nose in the wine. I can only invite you to discover the long, varied and amazing list!

Taste the wine

You have been waiting for this moment from the first sentence. Stop shaking with impatience, the moment of tasting has arrived! If you have thoroughly followed every advice from this book, the bottle has been open for a while; the aromas are at their peak, and the glass is only waiting for you. Again, do not try to follow a trend or copy your feelings from your friends.

The tannins

If you are tasting a red wine, focus on the tannins. In a few words, and without bothering you with a biology course, the tannins are the vegetal molecules that react in contact with saliva. They were created by the maceration of the juice and the skin of the black grape. The tannins are only present in the red wine. You could thus notice them quite easily by rinsing the wine in your mouth until you get this rasp taste on your tongue and your gums. This rasp taste is called astringency. The level of astringency depends on the amount of tannins in the wine. To describe its strength, we refer to smooth tannins and tough tannins, and as fat tannins if the taste persists in the mouth, or fine tannins if it does not.



Wine tasting

THE WINE TRAVELS

To emphasize the French wine's importance by giving numbers and statistics would be an easy exercise. But why would I bother you with billions, percentages, and ratios? I prefer presenting you a region that, in my opinion, honors the French wines.

Cap sur le Cap

Direction south for an unforgettable trip to Cap. Not *Le Cap d'Agde*, no. I'm talking about a different Cap. This coastal city in South Africa. Armed with a guidebook, the fearless will try to conquer the Table Mountain, the less frightened will say hi to the sharks, the more adventurous ones will launch themselves from the top of Signal Hill in a paraglider, the more curious will stride in the Malay neighborhood. We will choose the gourmand version of Cap, with its *Route des Vins*.

Leaving from Cap, a small half hour is necessary to reach a cute village that, by its name, shows the importance of the historical French influence in South Africa: *Franschhoek*. In Afrikaans, this name is translated by "the French corner". It's not just because, in this village, they taste wine, cheese, bread and celebrate 14th of July.

Franschhoek had been renamed this way so the French can feel at home and develop their vinery culture here. They really did do that. Rest assured; you will not always need a translator to pinpoint the vineyards on the map because they often sound French. Here, you could visit the *Grande Provence*, *Dieu Donne*, *Petite Ferme*, the *Burguny Bourgogne*, *Chamonix* and many more. More than 30 domains can be visited in "the French corner".

The Haute Cabriere

Our choice will lead us into a magnificent little corner, the *Haute Cabriere* domain.

Once passed the entrance of the domain, a pathway will lead you towards the restaurants and the cellars. This little road gives you a taste of what is waiting for you. The speed is limited, but you wouldn't need it to stop your car to appreciate the vines that surround you. The times are soft on both sides of the road, and the grape variety opens their big green colored leaves and their

compact grapes.

At the reception, you can start the tasting or opt for a visit of the storage tanks. Do not miss the guided tour, free and pleasurable that will offer you a true olfactory experience in the middle of the French oak barrels.

If I were to describe the experience in one word, it would be « conviviality ». This feeling is even more real in comparison with the wine tasting in France. The ambience here is as solemn as in a church. The pressure before this wine steward that awaits your connoisseur's impression is just as big as meeting your in-laws for the first time.

None of this is at *Haute Cabriere*, not even in *Franschhoek* in general. The frame is very warming, the wine stewards smiling, the visitors all have the same state of mind and willingness to have a pleasuring time.

Seated outside, in the middle of the vineyards and mountains, do not rack your brains to pick a wine. The wine tasting proposes 5 to 6 wines and, if you hesitate, the stewards will guide you for the taste of the wines and also for the order in which it is preferable that you taste them, so as to appreciate them better.

Your wine steward will present the bottle, the origin of the wine and its main notes. You will often hear the words "French oak" repeated during the presentation. Actually, the proposed wine of the Cap domains usually passes through the oak maturation process and has that woody, delicate and pleasing taste.

South Africa, Le Cap

Some tastings are to be made with aromatic chocolate (rose, orange, etc.) and for every wine, a corresponding chocolate. While pleasing, I advise you despite everything, to keep this mix for your next tasting.

Where will the next tasting take place? You have a ton of options in this magnificent region. Your only problem might be not having enough time to see everything during your stay. I will save you the hassle by giving you the places that wine lovers should not miss.

In the Constantia Valley, the *Groot Constatia* domain awaits you. Founded in



1986, the *Groot* wines have gleaned many rewards over the years. Give your mouth pleasure by letting it savor the freshness of their *sauvignon blanc* and its notes of melon and peach.

South Africa, vineyards and mountains



Another award winning domain will have to appear in your route plan: *De Grendel*. Famous for its luxury, this vineyard, however, is laid-back. A shuttle will lead you from your car to the installations. This magnificent scene and the high-quality wines will surely give you a magical moment.

Finally, I can only advise you to finish this unique visit in the *Stellenbosch* region that has no less than 15% of South Africa's wine production. I have

mentioned, rather, the importance of the openness and sharing of wine. Let us let a South African win the honor of ending this tour: the *pinotage*. A mix of the pinot noir and the *cinsault*, and it remains quite scarcely known outside its border, despite its unique and interesting taste. Strong in taste, it has many fruity notes as well as caramel aromas, jam, banana and a lot of other that I will leave the pleasure of discovering to you.

The valley of *Durbanville*, *Fairview*, *Helderberg*, etc. are other places where you will have to stride. But after all, the *Route des Vins* is only starting.

Bon voyage!