



Basic Wine Terminology

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

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

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

anosmia — the loss of smell

appellation — a delineated wine producing region particular to France

aroma — the smell of wine, especially young wine (different than “bouquet”)

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

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

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

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

blend — a wine made from more than one grape varietal

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

Bordeaux — the area in Southwest France considered one of the greatest wine-producing regions in the world

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”)

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

breathing — exposing wine to oxygen to improve its flavors (see “aeration”)

brettanomyce — a wine-spoiling yeast that produces barnyard, mousy, metallic, or bandaid-ish aromas

brilliant — a tasting note for wines that appear sparkling clear

brut — french term denoting dry champagnes or sparkling wines

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

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.

citric acid — one of the three predominate acids in wine

claret — the name the English use when referring to the red wines of Bordeaux

class growth — see *cru classe*

closed — term describing underdeveloped and young wines whose flavors are not exhibiting well

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

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

corked — a term that denotes a wine that has suffered cork taint (not wine with cork particles floating about)

cru classé — a top-ranking vineyard designated in the Bordeaux Classification of 1855

crush — the English term for harvest

cuvée — in Champagne, a blended batch of wine

demi-sec — french term meaning “half-dry” used to describe a sweet sparkling wine

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

earthy — an odor or flavor reminiscent of damp soil

enology — the science of wine and winemaking (see “oenology”)

fermentation — the conversion of grape sugars to alcohol by yeast

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

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

flavors — odors perceived in the mouth

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

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”

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

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

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”.

mature — ready to drink

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

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

noble rot — the layman’s term for botrytis

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

oak/oaky — tasting term denoting smells and flavors of vanilla, baking spices, coconut, mocha or dill caused by barrel-aging

oenology — the science of wine and winemaking (see “enology”)

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

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

phenolic compounds — natural compounds present in grape skins and seeds

phylloxera — a microscopic insect that kills grape vines by attacking their roots

plonk — British slang for inexpensive wine; also used to describe very low-quality wines

rough — the tactile “coarse” sensation one experiences with very astringent wines

sec — French word for “dry”

Sommelier — A wine butler; also used to denote a certified wine professional. For a full overview go here: [sommelier courses](#).

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

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

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

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

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

terroir — French for geographical characteristics unique to a given vineyard

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

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

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

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. Also, the website for the Wine School of Philadelphia.

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.

weight — similar to “body”, the sensation when a wine feels thick or rich on the palate

wine — fermented juice from grapes

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.