



Wine for the Rest of Us

I. The Wide World of Wine

Wine is produced from fermented grapes. It's been around since roughly 6000 BC. That's what it is.

Ask a roomful of wine virgins what the main categories of wine are, and they invariably say RED and WHITE. I encourage you to use the categories OLD WORLD and NEW WORLD instead as an entry point into the wide world of wine. Why? It's a way to introduce some key concepts by having something to compare and contrast.

- ✓ Old World is basically Europe: France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Portugal.
- ✓ New World is North America, and also Argentina, Chile, South Africa and Australia ... In other words, "Not Europe."

- ✓ Old World: think *tradition*
- ✓ New World: think *innovation* and *technology*

- ✓ Old World: emphasis is on *terroir*, a French word which not only refers to the soil, but the elevation, the humidity, the grade of the slope, the angle of the sun, as well as the composition of the dirt.
- ✓ New World: the star of the show is the *varietal*, which just means the type of grape.

- ✓ Old World: mostly named after places
- ✓ New World: mostly named after grapes



Ex: Burgundy, Bordeaux, Chianti and Rioja are places

Ex: Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Malbec and Shiraz are grapes

Differences aside, *every* wine has a place, or *region*, associated with it. Your favorite Chardonnay may be made in Napa, or Mendoza, or the Barossa Valley.

By the same token, every wine is made from a certain grape, or blend of grapes; your favorite Burgundy is likely made almost exclusively from Pinot Noir.

However, the *expression* of the Chardonnay or Pinot Noir can vary significantly based upon the *region* in which it was grown, as well as the method of production used.

(Useless info: to be called Chardonnay, a wine must contain 75%-85% Chard, depending on the country, which means it can contain up to 25% of something else. Likewise, for many wines named after regions.)

Every wine also has a producer, whose name appears on the label, which serves to further distinguish and identify the wine.

Also, some wines, only a few, have their own proprietary name associated to them, because they are that special and amazing—often the prestige product at the top of an entire line of products—or a marketing gimmick. “Conundrum,” the popular white blend, would be an example of the latter. Penfold’s “Grange,” an Australian Shiraz-based blend which retails for \$700 or more, is an example of the former.

Now, back to red and white. Red wine is made from red (or *black*) grapes and white wine is made from white (actually yellowy-green) grapes; the color comes from the skins. There is also rose, which has a pinkish or salmon cast, which comes about wine has a little instead



of a lotta contract with skins, or in some cases when a little red base wine is mixed with white.

When you're offered Red or White? the server is typically referring to table wine, which can be drunk with food, as an *aperitif* or by its own damn self. But there is also Sparkling Wine and Dessert Wine.

The most famous member of the Sparkling category is Champagne, which is a *region* in France and is made according to a very specific production method, imaginatively called the Champagne Method. But if you've even heard of Cava, Spumante, Prosecco or plain 'ole Sparkling Wine, well, they matter too. CO₂ and alcohol are both natural byproducts of fermentation, so ideally the bubbles in your sparkler come from this process and aren't forced in artificially.

Dessert wine is usually consumed after dinner (but who says you have to be usual) and encompasses your late harvest, ice wine, port, sherry and madeira. Unless you work in fine dining, you may not have much exposure to guys, but know typically sweeter and higher in alcohol, because the grapes were left to their own devices, even allowed to freeze (thereby concentrating the juice) OR they were fortified with additional booze.

So there you have it. Old and New, grape and place, red, white and rose, sparkling, table, dessert; that's the foundation for everything else that's meaningful about wine. Next, we'll learn how to actually drink the stuff. Cheers.