

Wine Terms

Like any other industry, wine has its own language full of words and expressions that have developed to describe the nuances of the wine world.

By no means comprehensive, but as a starter guide, here are some of the most common terms used, along with a brief explanation.

Wine term	Demystification
ABV	Alcohol by Volume is the level of alcohol in a bottle displayed as a percentage. Table wines in Britain are those between 5 - 15% ABV. Above 15% is a fortified wine and will attract a higher level of excise duty in the UK.
Acidity	Acidity is the refreshing , mouth-watering quality of wines created by the presence of naturally occurring acids. Also gives the wine structure and balance. An acidic wine is not a bad thing! If your mouth waters when you drink a glass this indicates that the wine is more acidic. This acidity gives the wine a fresh zingy flavour and is great when you are pairing many foods with your wines. The refreshing , mouth-watering quality of wines created by the presence of naturally occurring acids. Also gives the wine structure and balance.
Aerate	Allowing a wine to have contact with air to let it fully develop and express itself after the time in the bottle.
AOC	Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée / Protégée. The French certification granted to certain wines (and other drinks and foods) specifying the region and method of production, permitted grape varieties, ageing and labelling requirements. Changed from AOC to AOP to align with other European systems.
Aroma	The smell of a wine, as detected using the nose, usually identified prior to tasting the wine.
Balance	a wine is described as having good balance when all the elements work well together - the tannin and acidity is just right and the flavours all work well together
Barrel Fermented	Wine that has been barrel fermented has been kept (and fermented) in small casks (usually 55-gallon oak barrels) instead of larger stainless steel tanks. It is believed that barrel fermentation increases the body in the wine and adds complexity, texture and flavour to certain wine types. The flavour (from the oak) will depend on the type of oak and the age of the barrel - with younger barrels adding more flavour. The oak imparts flavours such as toast, vanilla and spice as well as giving the wine a rounder mouth feel and structure.
Biodynamic	Wines made using specific methods (defined by Rudolf Steiner) of grape growing and wine making. Biodynamic wines are made using Organic methods plus using soil supplements prepared according to Steiner's formulas, and following a planting calendar that uses astrological configurations, and treating the earth as "a living and receptive organism".
Blanc / Bianco / Blanco	White (wine) in French / Italian / Spanish (respectively)
Blend	Mixture of more than one grape variety

Body	this describes how light a wine is, or how "heavy". A full bodied red is one that is powerful and makes an impact when you first taste it. Whether a wine is medium of full bodied is determined by the growing conditions of the grapes.
Botrytis	Botrytis cinerea is a fungus that affects many plant species, most notably grapes. Known as "botrytis rot"; it causes the grapes to shrivel and go a bit grey, shrivels and decay. Also known as "Noble Rot" it is associated with a process that happens to grapes creating a distinctive, concentrated, exotic, honey flavoured wine with a crisp, acidic finish. Many of Bordeaux's signature sweet white wines, (e.g. Sauternes), Tokaji Aszu from Hungary, and Spätlese level German Riesling all are made from 'Noble Rot' grapes.
Botrytis cinerea	A fungus that shrivels and rots white grapes, driving out water and concentrating sugars and flavours. Ideal for making quality sweet wines. Sometimes referred to as Noble Rot.
Brut / Sec / Demi-Sec etc	There are a number of designations for Champagne and sparkling wine- these are defined by the amount of sugar cane in the wine. Different types of Champagne range between demi-sec and brut, depending on how much sugar cane is in them. Brut is the driest; 'Brut' refers to dry Champagnes, as in those which don't possess high levels of residual sugar and don't taste that sweet. On the other end of the scale, we have 'Sec' Champagnes. Confusingly the word 'Sec' which is French for 'dry,' is used to refer to Champagnes which are noticeably sweet. There are three types of Sec Champagne you need to know about – 'extra Sec,' 'Sec' and 'demi-sec: Sec contains 17-32 g of residual sugar per litre, a demi-sec Champagne will contain between 33 and 50 grams of sugar, extra Sec is the driest of Champagnes in the Sec category.
Cepage	Generally means the variety of grape used to make a wine, but more commonly used to describe the blend of grapes.
Charmat	<p>The Charmat Method is widely associated with Prosecco, but it isn't just Italy that uses this method, it is also used in countries like Germany and America. It is a method used for creating Sparkling Wine, the Charmat Method involves 5 stages.</p> <p>Firstly, the wine undergoes its primary fermentation in stainless steel vats, this creates a fruity still wine with low alcohol. Then it is put into a stainless steel tank to undergo its secondary fermentation. A mixture of yeast and sugar is then added which is called tirage to induce the secondary fermentation, this fermentation process will last between 3 to 12 months, it is also when the bubbles appear and it becomes Sparkling Wine.</p> <p>The Wine is then cooled to stop fermentation and filtered into another tank, this removes the dead yeast cells called lees. This is the time where more sugar can be added, if you choose to add sugar it is called dosage, this will determine how sweet the wine is going to be.</p> <p>To finish off, the wine is then bottled under pressure, ready to be sold off and enjoyed across the world.</p>
Charmat	Method of making sparkling wine where the secondary fermentation takes place in a pressurised tank (as opposed to the bottle in Methode Traditionelle)

Château	Wine producing estate in France, often in Bordeaux. May refer to vineyards, cellars and other buildings, not necessarily a castle.
Chateau	This the French word seen on the label of many Bordeaux wines, and wines from across France, referring to a wine-producing estate, normally a combination of vineyards, cellars and any buildings on the property (occasionally including a castle!)
Claret	Red wine produced in Bordeaux, France
Clos	or enclosed vineyard Clos generally means "enclosure," but it has come to be known as walled or enclosed vineyard. The term, which has is widely used in Burgundy, can only appear on a French wine label if the vineyard by that name produces and bottles its wine.
Corked	this is not about little bits of cork floating in your wine! Cork was affected by a bacteria whilst growing and this can affect the taste of the wine if "tainted" cork is used to stopper the bottle. You will be able to tell when a wine is corked as it will have a strong cabbagey, musty or unpleasant smell when opened. This is why when you are served a glass of wine in a restaurant, the wine waiter will pour you a small sample to taste (or even taste it him or herself) to check if it smells "off". It is not necessary to do this with a wine that comes in a screw cap bottle. If you are not sure about the wine, please tell the waiter and ask him to bring another bottle.
Côte(s)	"cote" means slope (not coast!) Many winemakers grow their vines on the hills / slopes and you may hear them talk about the south facing slope. The way the cote/ slope faces does affect the grapes depending on it they get sun in the morning or evening - affects their ripening process, and protecting them from frost. Means 'bank', 'slope' or 'side', and refers to the area where the grapes are grown to make the wine. Examples include 'Côtes du Rhone' referring to the banks of the Rhône river or the outlying regions of the Rhône.
Crémant	A sparkling wine made using Methode Traditionelle in a region of France other than Champagne (e.g. Crémant de Loire)
Crianza	Crianza literally means (in Spanish) creation / rearing (as in of children!). Sometimes you hear adults refer to children as "crianzas" ! However in the wine world it is the first tier of ageing in Spanish wines indicating that the wine has spent a minimum period of time in oak barrels and in bottles to mature e.g. wine that has spent a minimum of one year in oak cask and then a few months in the bottle. For white wines, the minimum cask aging period is 6 months. The first tier of ageing in Spanish wines,
Cru	Literally meaning "growth" in French, Cru in the context of wine refers to a great or superior growing site or vineyard, a concept linked to the French notion of terroir! So a Premier Cru is a wine that has been made from grapes grown on what the winemaker believes is his best vineyard (field/ slope etc) . There have been official classifications in some regions and they vary from region to region (and country to country), helpfully! See Premier Cru and Grand Cru
Cuvee	A blend or a special selection of grapes.

DO / DOCA	Spanish classification of PDOs similar to DOC in Italy. Denominación de Origen Calificada relates to a wine that has met the conditions of DO plus additional stricter requirements.
DOC/ DOP	Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC): This is one of the terms (In Italian) relating to PDOs (Protected Designation of Origin). Every DOC in Italy is a winemaking region that has its own rules relating to the grape varieties grown and used, production methods, often bottle shape). To be classed as a DOC wine, it has to have been produced within these regulations. Denominazione di Origine Controllata / Denominazione d'Origine Protetta. The Italian wine equivalent to the French AOC certification. Changed from DOC to DOP to align with other European systems.
DOCG	Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita: an Italian wine that has met the conditions of DOC plus additional stricter requirements.
Domaine	the winery and estate on which the wine is made, but not necessarily where the grapes were grown,
Dosage	<p>Dosage is a wine word specific to the production of Champagne and sparkling wine. It refers to the amount of sugar added to the sparkling wine just before corking, or to the sweetness level of the finished wine.</p> <p>The dosage, or liqueur d'expédition (as it is called in French), is typically a mixture of sugar and wine, though it could just be a sweet wine. The tradition of adding dosage comes from Champagne. Champagne has a cool climate, where grapes struggle to ripen and the base wines for making Champagne are noted for their very high acidity. This acidity becomes even more marked after the second fermentation which creates the bubbles. The addition of a 'dosage' mixture was traditionally deemed necessary to balance the acidity in the wines and render them drinkable.</p>
Doux	Sweet (French), used to describe the residual sugar content of a wine.
Estate	see Domaine
Fattoria	This is Italian for "farm" and is often used to refer to the vineyards (fields) where the grapes are grown.
Fermentation	The conversion of grapes to wine, through the process of yeast consuming the natural sugars in the grapes and producing alcohol, carbon dioxide and heat.
Fining	The process used to clear a wine and settle the sediment. Most commonly carried out using Isinglass*, gelatine or albumen from eggs.
Finish	the flavour that lingers in the mouth after you have swallowed your mouthful of wine. If a wine is said to have a long finish, this means you can still taste or sense it in the mouth several seconds after drinking it. Often a long finish is thought to be a sign of good quality. The flavours you taste in the finish can often be different to the initial ones detected.
Flabby	when a wine does not have a good level of acidity or structure it is said to be flabby
Fortified wine	a wine that has had a spirit added during the production process - a spirit such a brandy. Examples of fortified wine are sherry and port. They are usually higher in alcohol as a result

Frizzante	Semi-sparkling (Italian). Indicates the quantity of bubbles in a sparkling wine, being less than the fully sparkling Spumante.
Full bodied	see Body
IGT / IGP etc	Similar to PDO but less restrictive and normally only the region Indicazione Geografica Protetta Tipica / Indicazione Geografica Protetta. Italian certification indicating the geographical origin of a wine. Less strict than DOC / DOP Changed from IGT to IGP to align with other European systems.
Isinglass*	A substance extracted from fish swim-bladders used to settle the sediment in the process known as fining.
Joven	This is the Spanish work for "young" and refers in wine terms to a wine that has (usually) not been in oak at all. It is usually drunk in the year (vintage) of production
Kabinett	This is a German wine term that you will see on labels frequently and refers to a wine which is made from fully ripened grapes picked during the main harvest, usually in September. The wine tends to be light in style.
Late Harvest	When very ripe grapes are picked, they are at maximum concentration and sweetness and are used to make sweet wines. Known as Vendange Tardive (French).
Lees / Sur Lie	The lees in wine are essentially the dead yeast cells, leftover from the fermentation process. There are two kinds of lees; gross lees and fine lees. Gross lees refers to the sediment that forms in the wine, and tend to naturally fall to the bottom of the wine vessel. Lees are the dead yeast cells left after fermentation of the wine. If a wine is described as "Sur Lie" this means that it has been kept in contact with the lees (dead yeast cells) and are not racked or otherwise filtered. This is mainly done for whites, to enrich the flavour.
Legs	"tears" are the tear drops left around the inside of the glass when you swill the wine around. They are an indicator of the level of alcohol in the wine; the more legs or tears left in the glass the higher the alcohol (ABV) in the wine. Also known as 'tears'.
Maceration	Maceration is the winemaking process where the phenolic materials of the grape—tannins, colouring agents (anthocyanins) and flavour compounds—are leached from the grape skins, seeds and stems into the must. To macerate is to soften by soaking, and maceration is the process by which the red wine receives its red colour. In the production of white wines, maceration is either avoided or allowed only in very limited manner in the form of a short amount of skin contact with the juice prior to pressing. This soaking of crushed grapes and skins not only extracts the colour but gives the wine a greater intensity of aromas and flavours.
Malolactic Fermentation	Simply: A fermentation which sometimes takes place after the alcoholic fermentation whereby bacteria convert sharp, harsh malic acids to soft, creamy lactic acids. The result is a wine with a creamy, almost oil-like texture on the middle of your tongue, that adds a marvellous, velvety texture to the wine. It can occur naturally but most winemakers tend to encourage it if they want it. Can be used for both red and some white wines.

Méthode Traditionelle	Process by which many quality sparkling wines (including Champagne and English Sparkling) are made. It involves a secondary fermentation in the bottle to produce the bubbles and correct level of alcohol.
Minerality	A group of flavours in wine (usually white) referring to stony, earthy characteristics and flavours, reflecting the area in which the grapes are grown. You may detect stone, flint, chalk flavours in the wine.
Mousse	The foam or froth that forms when a sparkling wine is poured into a glass.
Mouth feel	this speaks for itself and it really about how thick or thin a wine feels - like any other liquid!
Natural wine	Becoming very popular again, natural wine is simply any wine that has been made only with grapes, and nothing else added and with minimal intervention from machinery, chemicals, preservatives. There are no regulations around production standards when declaring a wine "natural" as there are with "organic" so beware! It is not a legal term.
New World / Old World	New World wines are those wines produced outside the so called "traditional" winegrowing areas (The Old World) of Europe and the Middle East. The New World includes Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States (primarily California), despite the fact that many of these countries have been producing wine for a very long time!
Noble Rot	A fungus that shrivels and rots white grapes, driving out water and concentrating sugars and flavours. Ideal for making quality sweet wines. Sometimes referred to as Botrytis cinerea.
Non Vintage	Wine made from grapes harvested in different years. Also see Vintage
Nose	This just means the smell / aroma of a wine
Oak/ ed	This describes the vanilla flavour that you get with wines that have been matured or kept in oak barrels. During the wine making process the wines is kept in oak barrels and will take on some of the flavour from the barrel. This level of oakiness will vary depending on how long the wine is kept in the barrel, and how new the barrels are; newer barrels will leach out more flavour into the wine than old pre used barrels
Old World	Term used to describe the long established wine growing areas of Europe and the Middle East.
Orange Wine	A style of white wine where instead of removing the grape skins, they are left in contact with the fermenting wine. This process extracts colour and flavours into the wine that would not normally be present in a white wine, making the wine a pale orange colour.
Organic Wine	Organically certified wine is wine that is produced from 100% organically grown grapes and the wine is manufactured without the use of any chemical fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides or any other non-natural substances. The grapes have to be grown in accordance with the rules and principles of organic farming. The rules vary from country to country.

Oxidised	Oxidation, in wine terms, refers to a group of chemical reactions that occur when wine comes into contact with air. It can result in a wine losing its primary fruit characters and developing a brown hue and sherry like flavours. It is considered a wine fault caused by over exposure to oxygen.
Palate	In the context of wine tasting, palate refers to the ability to identify and taste different characteristics of wine. Wine drinkers and wine tasters develop their palate by using visual assessment, smelling the wine and tasting the wine. Developing a wine tasting palate can be done through practice and by tasting different wines
Pétillant	Lightly sparkling (French)
Phylloxera	in the 1860s, a little yellow louse called phylloxera decimated Europe's vineyards. It is believed that the pest was brought to the continent unknowingly by Victorian botanists in some imported American vines. By 1895, French wine production decreased by half due to the havoc created. Once these pests had wreaked their damage was done, vineyards throughout the world were changed for ever.
Phylloxera	An aphid that feeds on the roots and sometimes the leaves of grape vines causing extensive damage to the vine. A global epidemic of Phylloxera occurred in the late 19th century, destroying many of the world's vineyard areas. It was largely eliminated by grafting grape varieties onto American rootstocks which had developed a resistance to the aphid.
Premier Cru / Grand Cru	The top levels of classification of vineyards, with Grand Cru being the highest level. Mainly used to classify vineyards in Europe with Burgundy being the most well known region. Premier Cru is a French language wine term corresponding to "first growth" and which can be used to refer to classified vineyards, wineries and wines, with different meanings in different wine regions. The classification of the vineyards was done way back in the 12th Century! But it varies from region to region.
Reserve / Riserva etc	A definition used to indicate the length of time that a wine has aged in barrel and in bottle. Strictly regulated in many areas such as Italy and Spain but also used throughout the wine world without such regulations. The history of the word come from the fact that many winemakers key back (or "reserved") the best wine from any vintage. The word now tends to relate to the length of time the wine is aged ie kept in oak barrel and bottle before being released. "Reserva" (Spain) means that the wine has been aged for at least three years in the cask and bottle, at least one of which must have been in the cask. "Gran Reservas" are only made during exceptional vintages, but this is up to the producer and these are aged for five years (two in cask, three in bottle).
Residual Sugar (RS)	The level of natural grape sugars leftover in a wine after fermentation that indicates the level of dryness or sweetness.
Rouge / Rosso / Tinto	Red (French / Italian / Spanish)
Sec / Secco / Seco	Dry (French / Italian / Spanish)

Sediment	The solid material comprised of a mixture of dead yeast cells and insoluble parts of grape skins and pulp that settles to the bottom of a tank, barrel or bottle. Usually removed by filtration but does appear in some fine wines that have been aged in the bottle.
Spätlese	Spätlese (literal meaning: "late harvest"; plural form is Spätlesen) is a German wine term for a wine made from fully ripe grapes, the lightest of the late harvest. wines.
Spumante / Frizzante	Spumante is Italian for "fizzy" and this term refers to wines that have are sparkling, fermented to increase the level of carbon monoxide which creates the bubbles. Frizzante is also fizzy wine - but less fizzy! They are usually made in what is known as the Charmat method
Structure	this describes the different flavours you detect in a wine and these can be complex if you detect more that one flavour. However, if a wine has a simple structure, a simple clean flavour, that is not necessarily a bad thing. It can also relate to the level of tannin and acidity in a wine, which all needs to be in good "balance"
Sulphur / Sulphites	Sulphur compounds that occur naturally in wine-making. They help prevent oxidisation and help to maintain the stability of wine in the bottle, preserving the freshness and fruit flavours. Some people have an intolerance to sulphur compounds.
Sur Lie	Literally means "on the lees" (French). Lees (Lie) are the sediment created by dead yeast cells during fermentation and in some wines, it is considered desirable to leave the wine in contact with them to develop yeasty aromas and flavours. The most common examples are Champagne and Muscadet.
Tannin	An enzyme present in grapes that causes a drying effect in the mouth. As a natural preservative. it is an essential component of a wine that is being aged. This enzyme is found in grapes / grape skins, leaves and stalks which produce a slightly earthy lip puckering flavour in the wine called "tannin". Reminiscent of the bitter taste of overly stewed tea! Tannic structure in a red wine in particular is important and gives the wine "structure" and is key in ensuring a wine keeps for a while.
Tenuta	This is the word in Italian which refers to the vineyard or wine estate.
Terroir	A French term used to describe the impact of environment on a wine, including soil type, aspect, climate and even local vegetation. Often describes the character of a wine. This term relates to the ground in which the vines are grown, but has been expanded to mean the characteristics of the environment (climate/ soil / temperature and other growing conditions) that the grapes take on and then reflect in the taste of the wine.
Texture	Used to define the way a wine feels in the mouth, sometimes referred to as mouthfeel. Terms such as smooth, silky and heavy are frequently used to describe texture.
Varietal	Type of grape. Examples include Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Malbec.

Vegan	Wines that are made without the use of any products derived from animals. Most commonly this means that as well as not using Isinglass, other products such as albumen from eggs or gelatine cannot be used to settle the sediment in the process known as fining. Mechanical methods such as filtration are used instead.
Vegetarian	Wines that are made without the use of any products directly obtained from animals. Most commonly this means that Isinglass, a substance extracted from fish bladders cannot be used to settle the sediment in the process known as fining.
Vendage Tardive / Late Harvest	Vendange tardive ("VT") means "late harvest" in French. The grapes are allowed to hang on the vine until they start to dehydrate and are then picked. The juice and sugars concentrate in the grape- this process is called passerillage. The resulting wines are often known as desert wines or pudding wines and are sweeter. In other countries such as Germany or Austria the term Spätlese is used to describe wine using the same making process.
Vielles Vignes / Vinas Viejas	Literally translated to mean "old vines" (French and Spanish), vinhas velhas in Portuguese and alte Reben (German), is a term used to describe wine made from grapes grown on vines of substantial age. Generally they produce fewer grapes but with more complex, intense and concentrated flavours and aromas.
Vineyard	these are the fields in which the grapes are grown, as opposed the domaine or winery where the wine is made
Vinification	The art of winemaking
Vintage	The year in which the grapes were harvested and the wine made using those grapes. A vintage wine will have been made from grapes all harvested in the same year. The flavour of the wine may vary from year to year as the growing conditions vary. A non vintage wine is a blend of wines made from grapes from different years, with the aim of maintaining some consistency on the flavour of the wine. Vintage is not necessarily better than Non Vintage! It depends on the year/ vintage!
Viticulture	The cultivation of grapes.
Wine	an alcoholic beverage made from grape juice which is fermented
Winery	This is effectively the factory where the wine is made: grapes crushed, where fermentation takes place and wine is stored in cask then bottled - differentiated from the vineyard which is the field where the grapes are grown.