

Terminology of the Oenophile

Term	Definition
Acescence	Wine with a sharp, sweet-and-sour tang with a characteristic vinegary smell.
Acidity	The sharp or crisp quality in a wine.
Aeration	The process of circulating air through wine by swirling or other means.
Aggressive	A term usually applied to wines that are high in acidity, have high tannins or both.
Angular	A term describing wines that lack roundness, generosity, and depth. Wines from poor vintages or that are too acidic are often described as being angular.
Aperitif	A wine that is either drunk on its own (without food) or before a meal to stimulate the appetite.
Appellation	A geographically delineated wine region
Aroma	The scent of the wine.
Astringent	A term used to describe harsh, bitter, drying sensations in the mouth caused by high levels of tannins.
Attack	The initial impression of a wine as it enters the mouth.
Auslese	German for “select harvest” (also Prädikat in Germany and Austria)
Austere	Austere wines are generally unpleasant wines to drink because they are too hard, dry, and lack richness or generosity.
Backward	An adjective used to describe a wine that is (1) rather young, unevolved, closed, and undrinkable; (2) a wine that is not ready to drink; or (3) a wine that simply refuses to release its charms and personality.
Balance	A term used to describe the harmonious blending of acids, sugars, tannins, and alcohol.
Beerenauslese	German for “harvest of selected berries”
Big	A big wine is a large-framed, full-bodied wine with an intense and concentrated feel on the palate.
Bitter	A taste sensation caused primarily by tannins as they bathe the back of the tongue.
Blend	A wine made with more than one variety.
Blush	A wine made from red grapes that appear pink or salmon colored because the grape skins were removed from the fermenting juice before more color could be imparted into the wine. Also referred to as a “rosé.”
Body	The weightiness, fullness, or solidity of the wine in the mouth.
Bouquet	The aromas present in the wine.
Brawny	A taste descriptor for hefty, Herculean red wines usually young and full-bodied. (Does not equate to eloquence)
Breathe	The process of letting a wine open up via the introduction of air.
Brilliant	A tasting note used to describe wines that appear sparkling clear.
Brix	A scale used to measure the level of sugar in unfermented grapes. Multiplying brix by 0.55 will yield a wine’s future alcohol level.
Browning	As red wines age, their color changes from ruby/purple to dark ruby, to medium ruby, to ruby with an amber edge, to ruby with a brown edge. When a wine is browning, it is usually fully mature and not likely to get better with additional aging.
Brut	A French term used to describe the driest Champagnes.
Cap	Grape solids such as pits, skins, and stems that rise to the top of a tank during fermentation; what gives red wines color, tannins, and weight.
Capsule	The plastic or foil that covers the cork and part of the neck of a wine bottle.
Carbonic Maceration	Whole, uncrushed grapes are fermented in a sealed vat containing a layer of carbon dioxide. Results in fruity, soft, and distinct red wines with little tannin and are

Terminology of the Oenophile

Term	Definition
	immediately drinkable. (Used throughout France's Beaujolais region.)
Cépage	A French term for grape variety. When used on a wine label, it will usually refer to the varietals used to make the wine.
Chaptalization	The practice of adding sugar to the grape must prior to fermenting to compensate for low sugar content in the grapes.
Chewy	A wine is described as chewy if it has a dense, viscous texture from high glycerin content. High-extract wines from great vintages can often be chewy, largely because of a higher alcohol content which produces a fleshy mouth feel.
Clairet	A French term for wine ranging in color from a light red wine to a dark rosé.
Claret	British name for Bordeaux wine. It is also a semi-generic term for a red wine similar in style to Bordeaux.
Closed	Underdeveloped and young wines whose flavors are not exhibiting well are called, "closed."
Corked	A corked wine has taken on the smell of cork as the result of an unclean or faulty cork.
Coates Law of Maturity	A principle relating to the aging ability of wine that states that a wine will remain at its peak (optimal) drinking quality for as long as it took to reach the point of maturity. For example, if a year-old wine is drinking at its peak, it will continue drinking at its peak for another year.
Color	A key determinant of a wine's age and quality; white wines grow darker in color as they age while red wines turn brownish orange.
Complexity	Refers to the different aromas, flavors, and sensations present in a wine.
Cru	A French term for ranking a wine's inherent quality, i.e. cru bourgeois, cru classe, premier cure, and grand cru.
Cuvée	French term meaning vat or tank. On wine labels it refers to wine of a specific blend or batch.
Debourage	Refers to a process in which the must of a white wine is allowed to settle before racking off the wine. This process reduces the need for filtration or fining.
Decant	The process of transferring wine from another holding vessel. Decanting is used to aerate a young wine or separate sediments from an older wine.
Dessert Wine	In the UK, a very sweet, low alcohol wine. In the US, by law, any wine containing over 15% alcohol.
Diffuse	Wines that smell and taste unstructured and unfocused are described as diffuse. Red wines that are served at too warm of a temperature often become diffuse.
Disgorge	The process by which final sediments are removed from traditionally made sparkling wines prior to adding the dosage.
Dosage	A sweetened spirit added at the very end to Champagne and other traditionally made sparkling wines. It determines whether a wine is brut, extra dry, dry, or semisweet.
Drip Dickey	Trademarked name for a cover that slips over the neck of a wine bottle and absorbs drips that may run down the bottle after pouring. (Generic term is "drip cloth")
Earthy	A term used to describe aromas and flavors that have a certain soil-like quality.
Eau-de-Vie	French term for grape-derived spirit such as brandy. Its literal translation is "water of life."
Egrappage	French for de-stemming. De-stemming is removing stems prior to pressing and fermenting the grapes and their juice. Stems have a significant amount of course and green tannin that is undesirable in the finished wine.
Eiswein	German for ice wine, a dessert wine made from frozen grapes.
Elegant	A term used to describe lighter-styled, graceful wines. Typically used to describe white wines.
Élevé En Fûts De	French phrase that may appear on wine labels to denote that the wine has been aged in

Terminology of the Oenophile

Term	Definition
Chêne	oak barrels.
Enology	The scientific study of wines and wine making.
Estate Winery	A US winery license allowing farms to produce and sell wine on-site, sometimes known as a farm winery.
Extract	A term used to describe everything in the wine besides water, sugar, alcohol, and acidity.
Exuberant	A term used to describe wines that are gushing with fruit and seem nervous and intensely vigorous.
Fat	A term used to describe wines that attain a super sort of maturity that become quite rich and concentrated with low to average levels of acidity. A “fat” wine is a prized commodity, but if a wine becomes too fat, it is seen as flawed and described as “flabby.”
Fine Wine	The highest category of wine quality, representing only a very small percentage of worldwide wine production.
Finish	The sensations or flavors left in the mouth by a wine after it has been swallowed.
Fining	Part of the clarification process where elements are added to the wine, i.e. egg whites, in order to capture solids prior to filtration.
Flagon	A glass bottle that holds 2 liters of (usually inexpensive) table wine.
Fleshy	Synonymous with chewy, meaty, or beefy. A fleshy wine has a lot of body, alcohol, and extract, and usually a high glycerin content.
Floral	Wines made from Muscat or Viognier grapes have a flowery component, as well as occasional red wines.
Fortified Wine	A wine to which alcohol has been added, generally to increase the concentration to a high enough level to prevent fermentation.
Forward	An adjective used to describe wines that are (1) delicious, evolved, and close to maturity; (2) wines that border on being flamboyant or ostentatious; or,)3) unusually evolved and/or quickly maturing wine.
Fresh	A wine is described as “fresh” when it is lively and cleanly made.
Fruity	A very good wine should have enough concentration of fruit so that it can be said to be fruity. The best wines will have more than a fruity personality.
Frizzante	Italian term for semi-sparkling wine.
Frizzantino	Italian term for a wine that is slightly effervescent, more than a still wine but less than a semi-sparkling wine.
Fruit Wine	A fermented alcoholic beverage made from non-grape fruit juices which may or may not include the addition of sugar or honey.
Fruity	A term used to describe the strong smells and flavors of fresh and cooked fruit. Synonymous with “jammy.”
Green	Green wines are made from under ripe grapes and lack richness and generosity as well as having vegetal character.
Hard	Wines that have abrasive, astringent tannins or high acidity characteristics are described as “hard.” Young vintages can be hard, but should not be harsh.
Harsh	A wine that is too hard is said to be harsh. Harshness in a wine, young or old, is a flaw.
Hedonistic	A hedonistic wine has earned its label when the wine provides sheer delight, joy, and euphoria.
Herbaceous	Many wines may have distinctly herbal smells such as lavender, thyme, sage, rosemary, oregano, fennel, or basil.
Hollow	A term used to describe a wine that lacks depth or body.
Horizontal Wine Tasting	A tasting of a group of wines from the same vintage or representing the same style of wine (such as all pinot noirs from different wineries in a region), as opposed to a vertical tasting which involves the same wines from different vintages. In a horizontal tasting, keeping the wine variety or type and wine region the same helps emphasize the

Terminology of the Oenophile

Term	Definition
	differences in winery styles.
Hot	A term used to describe the “hot” burning sensation produced by wine that is high in alcohol content.
Ice Wine	Wine made from frozen grapes. In Canada it is trademarked as a single word, “Icewine”. In Germany, it is Eiswein. Grapes are harvested before dawn during the night and early morning hours of the first hard freeze. Typically an ice wine grape will yield one drop of nectar.
Intensity	Intensity is one of the most desirable traits of a high-quality wine. Wines with great intensity must also have balance. Intensely concentrated great wines are alive, vibrant, aromatic, layered, and texturally compelling. Intensity adds to a wine’s character, never detracts from it.
Jug Wine	American term for inexpensive table wine. (French: vin de table)
Kabinett	A German wine designation (also Prädikat)
Kosher Wine	Wine produced under the supervision of a rabbi so that is considered ritually pure or clean.
Landwein	German term for a wine slightly above table wines (tafelwine).
Late Harvest Wine	A late picked wine made from grapes that have been left on the vine longer than usual. Usually an indicator of a very sweet or dessert wine. Different than ice wine in that is harvested prior to the first hard freeze.
Leafy	A leafy character in a wine is similar to an herbaceous character, but only with respect to the smell of leaves rather than herbs. A wine that is too leafy is a vegetal or green wine.
Lean	Lean wines lack generosity and fatness, but may be enjoyable and pleasant.
Legs	A term used to describe how wine sticks to the inside of a wineglass after drinking or swirling.
Liquoreux	French term for “liqueur-like” and is used to describe dessert wine with a luscious, almost unctuous quality.
Lively	A synonym for fresh or exuberant, a lively wine is usually young with good acidity and a thirst-quenching personality.
Long	The term “long” relates to a wine’s finish. A desirable trait of a fine wine is that it be “long in the mouth:” after you swallow the wine, you sense its presence for a long time afterward.
Lush	Lush wines are velvety, soft, richly fruity wines that are both concentrated and fat. A lush wine can never be astringent or hard.
Maderization	Oxidation of some types of wines.
Mature	A wine that is ready to drink.
Mead	A wine-like alcoholic beverage made from fermented honey and water rather than grape juice.
Meritage	Originally created in California, these are blended wines made from at least two of five specific grape varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. White Meritage is a blend of at least two varieties: Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Vert, and Semillon.
Moelleux	French term describing wines having a mid-level sweetness or liquoreux.
Mousse	The sparkling effervescence of a wine. In the glass it is perceived as bubbling. Premium quality sparkling wine has a mousse composed of small, persistent strings of bubbles.
Mulled Wine	Wine that is spiced, heated, and served as a punch.
Must	Freshly pressed fruit juice that contains skins, seeds, and stems of the fruit. Making “must” is the first step in winemaking. Because of its high glucose content (10% - 15%) it is also used as a sweetener in a variety of foods.
Musty	Wines aged in dirty barrels or unkempt cellars or exposed to a bad cork take on a damp,

Terminology of the Oenophile

Term	Definition
	musty character. Musty wine is flawed wine.
Nose	The aroma or bouquet of a wine.
Oaky	A term used to describe woody aromas and flavors; butter, popcorn, and toast notes are found in “oaky” wines.
Oenophile	A wine aficionado or connoisseur.
Palate	Sense of taste.
Peppery	A term used to describe wines that have an aroma of black or white pepper and have a pungent flavor.
Perfumed	A term used more frequently with fragrant, aromatic white wines than red wines.
Piquant	French term for a simple, quaffing white wine with pleasing fruit structure and balance of acidity.
Plonk	British English slang for an inexpensive bottle of wine. The term is thought to originate from the French word for white wine, “blanc.”
Port	A sweet fortified wine which is produced from grapes grown and processed in the Douro region of Portugal. The wine is fortified with the addition of grape spirits to boost the alcohol content and stop fermentation, which preserves some of the natural grape sugars. If the grapes used are not grown in the Douro region of Portugal, the “port” is an imitation. Ruby Port: Ruby port is younger, spending less time in the cask so that it retains its natural color and sweet, fruity characteristics from the grapes. Tawny Port: Tawny port has aged longer (as much as 20 years) in the cask producing a brownish, tawny color, less sweet flavors, and deeper, more complex characteristics.
Precocious	Wines that mature too quickly are said to be precocious. However, the term can also be used to describe wines that evolve gracefully over a long period of time, but taste as if they are aging quickly because of their tastiness and soft, early charms.
Prädikat	A German wine designation for “high quality” based on grape ripeness and must weight. Prädikats include Kabinetts, Spätlese, and Trockenbeerenausleses.
Prädikatswein	The highest classification of German wine, formerly called Qualitätswein mit Prädikat. These wines always display a specific Prädikat on their label.
Punt	The indentation found in the base of a wine bottle. Punt depth is often thought to be related to wine quality, with better quality wines having a deeper punt.
Qualitätswein	A designation of better quality German wines.
Racking	The process of moving wine from barrel to barrel while leaving sediment behind.
Recioto	An Italian sweet wine made from passito grapes.
Redox	A term describing the reductive way that wine ages. As one part gains oxygen and becomes oxidized, another part loses oxygen and becomes reduced. Early in its life, a wine will exhibit oxidative aromas and traits due to the relatively recent influence and exposure to oxygen when the wine was barrel aged and/or bottled. As the wine ages and is shut off from a supply of oxygen in the bottle, a mature wine will develop reductive characteristics.
Round	Roundness occurs in fully mature wines that have lost their youthful, astringent tannins, and also in young wines that have soft tannins and low acidity.
Shallow	A weak, feeble, watery or diluted wine lacking concentration.
Sharp	An undesirable trait in that the wines are bitter and unpleasant with hard, pointed edges.
Sherry	A fortified wine that has been subjected to controlled oxidation to produce a distinctive flavor.

Terminology of the Oenophile

Term	Definition
Silky	A term used to describe a wine with an especially smooth mouth feel.
Sommelier	A wine expert who often works in restaurants.
Sparkling Wine	Effervescent wine containing significant levels of carbon dioxide.
Spätlese	German for “late harvest.”
Spicy	A term used to describe certain aromas and flavors that may be sharp, woody, or sweet.
Spritzig	German for a light sparkling wine.
Spumante	Italian for “sparkling.”
Steely	A term used to describe an extremely crisp, acidic wine that was not aged in barrels.
Stickies	An Austrian term for a broad category of sweet wines.
Strohwein	A German word for “straw wine,” that refers to a dried grape wine.
Structure	An ambiguous testing term implying harmony of fruit, alcohol, acidity, and tannins.
Supple	A term used to describe smooth, balanced wines.
Sweet	A term used to describe wines that have perceptible sugar contents on the nose and in the mouth. A tasting sensation perceived on the tip of the tongue.
Table Wine	Generally any wine that is not sparkling or fortified. In the US, these wines must also be between 7% and 14% alcohol by volume. The term table wine is also used to describe a wine that is considered good for everyday drinking.
Tafelwein	German for table wine.
Talento	An Italian sparkling wine made according to the traditional method of Champagne.
Tannins	Compounds in wine that produce a bitter taste and dry mouth sensations.
Tastevin	A silver, shallow cup used for tasting wine.
Tasting Flight	Refers to a selection of wines, usually between three and eight glasses presented for the purpose of sampling and comparison.
Texture	How wine feels in the mouth.
Trocken	German for “dry.”
Trockenbeerenauslese	German term for “harvest of selected dry berries.”
Ullage	The space between the wine and the top of the wine bottle. As wine ages in the bottle, the space of ullage will increase as the wine gradually evaporates and seeps through the cork. The winemaking term of “ullage” refers to the practice of topping off a barrel with extra wine to prevent oxidation.
Unctuous	A term used to describe a wine that has layers of soft, concentrated, velvety fruits. Unctuous wines are lush, rich, and intense.
Varietal	Wines made from a single grape variety.
Vegetal	A term used to describe the tasting characteristics of fresh or cooked vegetables detected on the nose and in the flavors of the wine. (i.e., bell peppers, grass, and asparagus are common vegetal descriptors.)
Vendange Tardive	French term for a “late harvest wine.”
Vertical Wine Tasting	In a vertical tasting, different vintages of the same wine type from the same winery are tasted.
Vieilles Vignes	French for “old vines.”
Vintage	Vintage is the process of picking grapes and creating a finished product. A vintage wine is one made from grapes that were all, or primarily, grown and harvested in a single specified year.
Weissherbst	A German rosé made only from black grape varieties such as Pinot noir.
Zymology	The science of fermentation in wine.