

decanter.com's guide to hosting your own wine tasting



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This is our quick and easy guide to setting up a wine tasting for friends and family. You will have to provide your own wine but this small package should cover the rest.

This pack contains:

- The guide to hosting a wine tasting
- The grape varieties guide
- A tasting guide
- An aroma chart
- A Decanter tasting note sheet

Getting started

First of all, select and buy your wines (these can be your own personal preferences or some bottles you've never tried before). You can use our list of wine choices for inspiration or as a guide in choosing bottles.

What you will need:

- A good table
- A spittoon (optional)
- Paper, pens and a tasting sheet (see p.?)
- A sink
- 1 glass per person

Types of wine tasting

There are several different ways of organising a wine tasting and these will affect the wines you buy:

- **COMPARATIVE TASTING.** This is a tasting in which you and your guests taste three or more examples of a particular grape or style (for example, tasting 3 bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon, one from California, one from Australia and one from Bordeaux).
- **TASTING BY VARIETIES.** This is a mix of grape varieties, vintages and styles, starting with the whites and ending with the reds, going from the least powerful grape to the more perfumed and full-bodied, and going from the youngest to the oldest vintage. Our guide to wine tasting lists the order



of grape varieties and styles. This is the type of tasting we do at Decanter for our Wines of the Month recommendations.

- HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL TASTINGS. These are at the more professional (and therefore more costly) end of the spectrum.
 - a) A horizontal tasting compares wines from a specific region and vintage. Most Decanter panel tastings are horizontal.
 - b) A vertical tasting compares the wines of one estate or producer. This will show the evolution of the wine and the effect different growing conditions have on the production of a wine.

Once you have decided on your tasting, assemble your wines and refrigerate them if necessary. Sparkling and white wines should be refrigerated, but not for too long. Allow refrigerated wines a little time out of the fridge to warm as most refrigerators are too cold for wines (aim to serve them at around 10-14°C). Reds should be stored in a cool cellar (ideally) and served just below room temperature (aim for 18°C).

Blind tasting

It is always more interesting to serve wine blind. Not only does covering the bottle remove any prejudice attached to a particular wine, it also allows beginners, amateurs and experts alike the chance to rate the wine on a level playing field – that of pure taste. This gives beginners more confidence to analyse a wine in the company of others.

You can cover the bottle with a small opaque bag or pre-pour the glasses before



your friends arrive. Obviously, pre-pouring will change the temperature of the wine if it sits in the glass for an extended period of time. Reveal the identity of the wines when your friends' curiosity has peaked or, as the host, you can play the options game (see below).

The Options Game

Len Evans OBE is credited with having invented this game, in which players compete to guess, eventually, the name, grape variety and vintage of a wine. The host starts off by asking very general questions such as 'is this an Old World or New World wine?', gradually getting more precise, asking for a guess of the vintage ('is it pre-2000 or post-2000') and whether or not the wine is Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir. Those giving the wrong answer in each round are eliminated from the game until the producer and year (and possibly grape variety) has been correctly deduced or until there is no one left in the game.

Your friends can exchange their thoughts on smell and taste as they taste the wines or, no less convivial although slightly more academic, your tasters can take down notes (use our tasting note sheet) and compare them after each wine or collection of similar wines (known as a 'flight').

It's good to spit

Decanter consultant editor Steven Spurrier, regularly tastes a large number of wines at tastings.

'I get pretty light-headed,' he says. 'I can see by the quality of my handwriting between note 1 and note 100 that it's had an effect.'

Food

Although wine and food matching is a vast and varied topic in itself, it is worth thinking of a few matches. It is always worthwhile breaking for a small meal or snack. Having a good supply of crackers or any other neutral-tasting snack to cleanse the palate throughout tasting wine is worth the investment.

Try thinking of a few cheeses to match the wines. Hard cheeses (Gruyere or Cheddar), blue cheeses (Stilton, Roquefort or Gorgonzola) and creamier varieties (Pont l'Eveque, Camembert or Brie) go down well at the end of a tasting – often while sipping a glass of your favourite of the evening.

Other favourites include quiche, ham, saucisson, salad and, a particular favourite of Decanter's consultant editor Steven Spurrier, pork pies.



Members of the Decanter World Wine Awards Australian panel take a lunch break
(from left, Steve Daniels, Matt Skinner, Bill Baker, Michael Hill-Smith MW, Joelle Marti and David Gleave MW)

If you want more information on all aspects of learning about wine, don't forget, **decanter.com**'s Learning Route (<http://www.decanter.com/learning/>) is a comprehensive guide for anyone wishing to know more about wine and wine tasting.

Glasses

Glasses can make all the difference to your appreciation of a wine. Smell plays a major role in wine evaluation - it is the first sniff of a wine, rather than its taste, that gives the best indication of grape variety. The size, shape and type of glass can dramatically affect your tasting by enhancing your ability to pick up aromas and colours.

The best glasses are tulip-shaped with a stem. The glass should enable you to swirl a small sample of wine vigorously, allowing the wine to 'open up'.

Getting the wine to 'breathe' releases its aromas. To show what a difference this can make, pour a sample and sniff it. Then swirl the wine for about 30 seconds and smell it again. The difference should be apparent – the smell is stronger and it is easier to pick up more aromas.



The glass should also be clear, enabling you to judge the colour of the wine.

Not all glasses need be as expensive as the £12 Riedel Chianti (pictured above), the standard glass that we use at Decanter for all our tastings. The perfect tasting glass is the ISO standard 21.5cl glass, suitable for red, white and sparkling wines as well as fortified and distilled. A box of six costs about £13, available from wine merchants and on the internet. Otherwise, major supermarkets sell decent ranges of cheap but practical glasses.

If you're tasting sparkling wine, remember flutes are the best shape. Never go for the wide, flat champagne 'coupe' - the bubbles dissipate too quickly and the glass does not retain the aroma of the wine.

In most cases, including sweet and fortified wines, a tulip-shaped glass will do.

Wines

Here are a few suggestions as to which wines to serve at your tasting.

Budget – go for three Chardonnays: one Australian, one American and one French (ie Chablis) and three Cabernet Sauvignons: one Australian, one South African and one French (mainly Bordeaux, but not always). All of these should be available at your local supermarket where, even if Chardonnay is not represented by three different countries, alternatives such as three Sauvignon Blancs or three Merlots should be available.

Advanced – try pairing off less well-known varieties such as two Rieslings (one Australian, one German); two Sauvignon Blancs (one New Zealand, one French – Sancerre); two Pinot Noirs (one North American, one French – Burgundy); two Merlots (one Chilean, one French – most vin de pays will state the variety on the label or try St-Emilion) and compare two sweet wines such as a Hungarian Tokaji and an Italian Vin Santo or French Sauternes. Obviously, it will be tougher to pair off certain grape varieties between countries. Grapes like Tempranillo or Sangiovese (in Rioja and Chianti respectively) are harder to find from other areas of the world.

Exclusive – Taste several vintages of the same wine. You will more likely need the help of a wine merchant for this.

How to taste

Taken from 'How to taste' on [decanter.com](http://www.decanter.com/learning/basics/taste.php) by Jim Budd & Natasha Hughes (<http://www.decanter.com/learning/basics/taste.php>)

Mastering the art of tasting, although often considered a purely academic exercise, is essential in order to get the most out of your wine drinking.

As time goes by and you gain more experience, you will grow more confident in your assessment of the wines you taste. Some people have a remarkably good memory for tastes, and can sometimes even pinpoint the origin of a wine as well as the variety of grapes that have been used to make it.



The important thing to remember is that anyone can be a good taster, as long as they have an unimpaired sense of smell and taste, and are prepared to concentrate.

The ideal conditions for tasting are easy - a quiet room and good lighting. The glasses should, of course, be clean, and of the correct shape to allow you to indulge fully in both the aroma and taste of the wines.

If you are making notes, keep them – this will provide you with an invaluable source of reference when it comes to buying wines. Professional tasters keep their notes for years – Bordeaux expert David Peppercorn has tasting notes going back to the late 1950s.



Not all tasting rooms are as ideal as those of the Decanter World Wine Awards

Write notes

'Keep a notebook, with at least the names, producers' names and vintages of every wine you try. Write at least a brief note on each one – even a simple word such as “sharp” or “heavy”: it records your real reaction. Adding your own version of *Decanter's* five-star system is a good idea too. If you add the names of your companions and what food you ate it with, it will be a long book – but far more interesting.' Hugh Johnson

Appearance

Apart from the fact that our appetites are whetted by the anticipation of what is to come, looking can also tell us an awful lot about what we're about to put in our mouths. You should tip the glass away from you at an angle of 45 degrees and hold it against a white background - a piece of white paper is fine - to see the true colour of the wine.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of wine is its colour. Is it white, red - or a rose? Having



Miles and Jack study the appearance of a wine in the film *Sideways* – image courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox

determined the basics, take a closer look. The colour of your white wine could range between pale straw and rich golden yellow, depending on its age, its sweetness, its degree of oakiness and, of course, the grape variety from which it was made. As a rule, lighter wines such as Sauvignon Blancs tend to be paler than heavier Chardonnays, and the gold tinge of an aged Chardonnay will be more pronounced than that of a younger one.

Red wines can also be analysed in a similar way. The deeper the colour, the more concentrated the flavour. Stand a glass of Pinot Noir next to a glass of Syrah and you will easily see the difference between the two - the Pinot will be an almost transparent light ruby red, while the Syrah will verge towards a dense purpley red. A mouthful from each glass is bound to confirm the visual impression. Tilt the glass a little and take a look at the meniscus (the curved upper surface and rim) of the fluid - as a red wine ages, it will take on an amber-brown tinge, and this is most easily discernible at the rim.

As you tip your glass back towards you, you may notice clear traces of liquid sticking to the side of the glass as they slide slowly back into the body of the wine - these are called tears or legs, and indicate high alcohol or residual sugar content.

Finally, looking at your wine will give you advance warning of any major defects - if you find white filaments floating in your wine, reject it outright as these are almost certainly present due to unclean bottling.

Smell

The sense of smell and the sense of taste are so closely intertwined that one could not exist without the other. For this reason, your nose can tell you a great deal about a wine before you even taste it.

A properly designed glass can help capture a wine's aromas and funnel them in the right direction. While glasses intended for use with reds tend to have a larger bowl than those made for whites, both types should taper towards the top, 'steering' the bouquet towards your nose rather than allowing it to dissipate from a large surface area. Swirl the wine in the glass so that most of its interior surface is coated in liquid as this helps to release the wine's aroma. Put your nose well into the glass and sniff.

As with the colour of a wine, its perfume will vary according to its age and composition. The region where it was made can also influence its aroma, as can ageing in oak barrels. Think about the smell. Is it powerful and complex or simple and light? Does it linger or is it soon dissipated?

Grape variety has a profound influence on a wine's perfume. The aroma of Sauvignon Blanc, for instance, is classically described as 'cat's pee on a gooseberry bush', Cabernet Sauvignons are often characterised as having a blackcurrant quality and Pinot Noirs have something of the barnyard about them.

As a wine ages, its aroma may change - white wines often become more honeyed over the years, while young whites are often described with reference to fresh flowers, fruit or newly cut grass.



A guest at one of our Fine Wine Encounter Masterclasses noses a wine

A good sniff will also give you clues about a wine's condition - if it is corked it will smell musty. A whiff of burnt matches is the hallmark of a wine to which sulphur has been added as a preservative (quite common in cheap white wines). An oxidised wine will be given away by a rich burnt scent, similar to that of Madeira (an additional clue comes with looking at an oxidised wine, which usually appears brownish in colour).

Be as poetic as you want in your evocation of a wine's bouquet and have confidence in your ability to judge its qualities. After all, there is no right or wrong in anyone's description of a wine - it is just a highly personal reaction to the scent released from the glass.

Taste

Important as the senses of sight and smell are when it comes to our enjoyment of a wine, the ultimate test is its taste. Take a mouthful of the liquid and swish it around in your mouth quite vigorously. Breathe as you do so, as this helps to aerate the wine and increases its flavour. After holding the wine in your mouth for 15 to 20 seconds, spit it out - or swallow it if you're not intending to taste more than a couple of wines.

Your tongue has a range of taste receptors in different places - you will taste sweetness most at the front, acidity along the sides and bitterness at the back. High acidity will make your mouth water, while tannin (which tends to be most pronounced in young red wines intended for long cellaring) will have the opposite effect.

When you evaluate the wine, first take into account its complexity and weight. Again, these qualities will depend on many factors, including the grape varieties used and the age of the wine: a fine aged Bordeaux will be far denser than a young Beaujolais.

Certain characteristics are associated with the various types of grape and even with the area where a wine is grown - an Australian Riesling might be described as having tropical fruit flavours, while a Riesling from Alsace would be lighter and have a more mineral/citrus quality.

In Old World wines, certain grape varieties tend to be associated with particular areas. One could say with a reasonable degree of certainty that a wine made from Pinot Noir grapes probably comes from Burgundy. This is now increasingly the case in the New World as well. Marlborough in New Zealand, for example, is now concentrating white wine production on its famed Sauvignon Blancs.

There is no right or wrong conclusion to be drawn about any individual wine. Describe it according to your own perception - after all, tasting is meant to encourage you to create your own frame of reference for the wines you drink. Learn about the tastes that you enjoy - and those you don't - then follow the instincts that you have developed when it comes to buying wine in a restaurant or for drinking at home.



James Lawther MW, one of our Bordeaux experts, about to taste a St-Emilion at the Decanter World Wine Awards this year

Assessing

After you have sampled a wine with your eyes, nose and mouth, you will then be in a position to assess it. Is it simple and easy to drink or is it complex, with many different layers of flavours that will reveal themselves over time? Is it ready for drinking now or should you keep it for a while? Does it offer value for money? Most importantly, do you enjoy it?

A wine that gives immediate pleasure and doesn't have any tannins that need to soften is ready to drink. If a red has a lot of tannin, then it may well need several years to soften and to show its best. A wine that feels closed or tight at the back of the palate will generally improve with time. Some young wines that taste very oaky, especially if the oak and the fruit seem separate, may just need time for these elements to marry together.

One of the continuing fascinations of wine lies in determining when it will be ready to drink. The optimum moment depends upon the individual drinker - some enjoy their wines young, when the fruit is to the fore, others prefer to wait until the wine has developed the richness that is characteristic of age.

Whatever your budget, getting value for money is very important. Even if a wine costs £2.49 (US\$3.70), it's too expensive if it disappoints. A poor wine at £25.99 (US\$39) will be much more painful. Naturally, it is difficult to disentangle value for money from reputation, but past experience and a bit of research should help you to find your way through the maze of possibilities.

Fortunately, taste is very individual. We don't all like or appreciate the same things and everyone has different flavour associations. Of course, it is worth taking account of what established critics such as Oz Clarke, Malcolm Gluck, Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson say, as they taste a vast range of wines and their pronouncements carry the weight of experience. But as far as you're concerned, the most important assessment should be your own.

Faults

There are several wine faults. Most come from poor winemaking or from defective materials, especially corks. Faults vary in intensity - some merely lessening the potential pleasure from a bottle, others making it undrinkable.

Not all tasters are equally sensitive to particular faults - some notice a corked wine in seconds, while others may pick up on too much sulphur.



Judging by the expressions, Oz Clarke and Bill Baker have found one they don't like

Main faults:

- *Corked* - the wine smells and tastes musty and sour. Caused by a fault in the cork whereby a chemical called TCA destroys the wine.
- *Oxidised* - a wine that has had too much contact with oxygen. It has a sherry-like smell. Oxidised white wine is curiously dark in colour for its age while red is abnormally brown for its age. All wines gradually oxidise as they get older. This is an essential part of the ageing process. However, some wines are prematurely old. This may be due to poor handling of the grapes after they have been picked, faults in the winemaking or because the cork has provided an imperfect seal.
- *Over-sulphured* - a wine that smells of burnt matches and leaves a sour taste in the back of the throat. It will often leave you with a foul headache the next morning. Sulphur dioxide is widely used as a necessary 'disinfectant' in wine-making. Many winemakers now, however, try to use as little sulphur as possible. Today sulphur levels are generally much lower than they were twenty or thirty years ago.
- *Hydrogen-sulphide* - bad egg smells that come from winemakers not paying sufficient attention during fermentation. Equally, they can occur if the wine has not been racked adequately while it matures.
- *Unclean barrels ('barrel taint')* - can give wine an unpleasant musty taste which is often very similar to a corked wine. Barrels, especially any that are empty for a while, have to be kept scrupulously clean to avoid tainting the wine. Where possible winemakers prefer to keep their barrels full with wine.
- *Acetic acid* - common to all wines. In excess it will make the wine smell and taste vinegary.

**Don't take it too seriously though...**

'Don't over analyse,' says Karen Cakebread of Cakebread Cellars in Napa. 'Wine is meant to be enjoyed with yummy food and great friends, and when done so, it always tastes good.'



How to write tasting notes

Taken from *Tasting Notes and how to read them* on [decanter.com](http://www.decanter.com)
(<http://www.decanter.com/learning/tastingnotes.php>)

Believe it or not, there is a certain methodology to writing a tasting note. Generally speaking, the note follows the process of analysing appearance, smell, and taste, finishing with an overall appraisal of the wine.



You can rate the wine on a star system or a points system – both have their champions (Robert Parker, the hugely influential American wine critic scores his notes out of 100; Jancis Robinson scores her wines out of 20; and our Decanter tasters score wines out of 20 although the note is represented in star form – five stars being a top-notch wine).

Michael Broadbent's tasting notes

The UK's most revered taster, Michael Broadbent, has written more than 88,000 tasting notes since 1952.

'The best advice I ever received was from Tommy Layton when I joined Layton's wine merchants as a keen but totally ignorant trainee. He told me to make a note of every wine I tasted: its name, date of tasting, and price, with notes on appearance, nose and taste.'

'Why make notes? As an *aide-memoire*, to familiarise oneself with the multitudinous variety of wines, districts, qualities and styles. And, of course, to record one's own impressions briefly or in detail.'

Here are two tasting notes (one white wine, one red) we've deconstructed to give you an insight into the methodology of writing your own. See the *Aroma Chart* (below) for more help in writing your own.

White

Meursault 1998 Louis Latour

Clean, **limpid** medium yellow with a hint of green, quite **rich**, a really lovely colour. Touch of **new wood** on the nose, ripe **melony** fruit, slightly exotic, stylish and very **expressive**. Fine, **floral**, **honeysuckle** fruit on the palate, with **hazelnut** overtones, rich and quite **buttery**, yet good lemony acidity, very elegant but still young. Very good balance, oak and fruit well blended in, an excellent example of grape variety dominated by terroir, great persistence, very good future.

Limpid - Literally transparent, like clear water, while retaining its colour

Rich - Showing ripeness and viscosity, usually from the legs or "tears" that form on the sides of the glass than from depth of colour

New wood - The vanilla-vanillin aroma of new oak, whether French or American

Melony - Signifies ripe, slightly exotic fruit, usually referring to Chardonnay. More exotic fruits could be pineapple, guava

Expressive - Expressive of either its grape variety, terroir or both. Stylish + expressive would be a finely turned out wine with character

Floral - Usual on the nose, but on the palate means the blend of florality and flavour

Honeysuckle/hazelnut - Typical expressions of a the Chardonnay grown in Meursault, rounded and attractive

Buttery - The impression of ripeness with a certain fleshiness, often the result of barrel fermentation or barrel ageing

Red

Valpolicella Classico Superiore 1998 Allegrini

Brick red colour, very fresh and young looking. Fine, **rose-like** like bouquet, some sweetness in **attack**, drier on the **second nose** Clean, **cherry-like** fruit flavours on the palate, a hint of **wood** and a touch of **bitter almonds**, good balance, long, dry finish. Fine long flavour despite the liveliness, natural acidity present, a wine for **food**

Brick red - Denotes the absence of violet or purple colours of some very young wines, more a lack of intensity than a sense of maturity

Rose-like - A delicate aroma, yet with a certain ripeness, always floral

Attack - The strong first impression, one that jumps out of the glass

Second nose - The more studied reflection gained by swirling the wine in the glass to release more than it does on the first impression

Cherry-like - Unless cited as 'black cherries' which carry a definite impression of ripeness, cherry-like indicates firm, vibrant fruit with a touch of acidity and none of the sweetness of, say, blackcurrants

Wood - A sense of firmness and tannin, as opposed to 'oaky', which refers to the new casks in which the wine will have been aged

Bitter almonds - Often associated with cherries, a certain fruity bitterness, more refreshing than unpleasant

Food - Wines with exuberant, unrestrained fruit do not go well with food, for their fruitiness dominates. A 'food wine' is one that complements a meal



What do the grapes taste like?

compiled by Anthony Rose

(taken from <http://www.decanter.com/learning/grapes.php>)

More on nearly every grape variety from Aghiorghitiko to Zinfandel can be found here: <http://www.decanter.com/learning/grapeguide.php>

RED Varieties

BARBERA

- plummy and cherryish
- undertones of sweet vanilla

The high-in-acid BARBERA grape of north-western Italy is a chameleon-like grape which changes considerably according to yield. As an everyday variety, it is a juicy glugger but it can metamorphose into a concentrated, rich, plummy and cherryish wine with undertones of sweet vanilla and spice when aged in small new oak casks. In Argentina, it tends to the former style with a little less acidity thanks to plentiful Andean sunshine.

CABERNET FRANC

- grassy and raspberryish
- aroma of lead pencil shavings

CABERNET FRANC, the distant relative of CABERNET SAUVIGNON, can produce deliciously perfumed, supple, raspberry and blackcurrant-infused red wines in Bordeaux, while further north in the cooler regions of the Loire Valley and in north-eastern Italy, it produces a wine which is more herbaceous in style. It is often described as having the aroma of pencil shavings.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

- capsicum and blackcurrant
- a range of cedar, vanilla and coffee notes

CABERNET SAUVIGNON covers a wide spectrum of aromas and flavours. It tends towards herbaceousness when not fully ripe with capsicum and grassy undertones, but as it ripens it develops flavours of blackcurrant and, when very concentrated, cassis. In California and Chilean cabernet, you can often spot mint or eucalyptus. Its affinity with oak lends secondary characters with a range of vanilla, cedar, sandalwood, tobacco, coffee, musk and spicy notes.



The vineyards of Chateau Latour, providing us with one of the finest examples of Bordeaux Cabernet Sauvignon

GAMAY

- bubblegum and banana
- cherry and strawberry flavours

GAMAY, the beajolais grape, is the gluggiest of all grape varieties, partly because of the carbonic maceration or whole berry fermentation method used, which helps preserve the naturally refreshing juiciness of the variety. Carbonic maceration is responsible for a variety of aromas and flavours ranging from bubblegum and banana through to strawberry and cherry.

GRENACHE

- white pepper and raspberry
- thyme and rosemary scents

The light-coloured GRENACHE is a quintessentially Mediterranean red variety and as a result it often mingles the classic Mediterranean garrigue scents of thyme, fennel and rosemary with white pepper and its warming, raspberryish fruit flavours. It tends to be low in tannin and hence soft and supple and, at its apogee in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, it takes on heady aromas and spicy, robust fruit flavours which can border on the raisined.

MALBEC

- mulberry and blackberry flavours
- tarry and leathery

Harsh and rustic in its homeland of south-west France, the MALBEC grape is often improved in Cahors by the addition of the softening MERLOT grape. It really comes into its own however in Argentina, where it becomes altogether smoother and lusher with all sorts of plummy, red berry and earthy fruit flavours like raspberry, mulberry and blackberry allied to tar, leather and game-like characters.

MERLOT

- bell pepper and blackcurrant
- chocolate and spice-like characters

MERLOT's soft texture helps to give it a deliciously plummy, almost fruitcake-like flavour and a mellow smoothness which makes it more approachable than its sister grape, the CABERNET SAUVIGNON. Like cabernet, it can be a little grassy and bell-pepper-like from cool climate regions and it develops blackcurrant, blackberry, blueberry, chocolate and spice-like characters when fully ripe. Chilean MERLOT often produces juicy reds with blackcurrant pastille flavours.



Your guess is as good as ours... A line-up of regional Bordeaux varietal trophy-winners at the Decanter World Wine Awards 2006

MOURVEDRE

- brambly and blackberry-like
- animal, funky and meaty

MOURVEDRE is a darker, thicker-skinned variety than its Mediterranean counterpart, GRENACHE, producing a firm-structured, often tannic, brambly, blackberryish red with notable funky, meaty and animal-like characters. It's often blended with other southern French varieties. It can be spicy and as it ages, develop the aged meat character of game or even wet fur.

NEBBIOLO

- tar and roses
- truffle and liquorice spiciness

Northern Italy's thick-skinned NEBBIOLO grape of barolo and barbaresco fame is one of the most delightfully aromatic of red grape varieties and for that reason sometimes compared to PINOT NOIR, but the aromas and flavours are very different. Structured by high acidity and tannin, NEBBIOLO's bouquet encompasses violet, smoke and rose-like perfumes with flavours of truffle, fennel, liquorice and, most famously, tar.

PINOT NOIR

- raspberry and strawberry
- cola spice, incense and game

PINOT NOIR is one of the most sensuously fragrant red grapes in the world with a variety of scented aromas based on red berry characters closest to raspberry and strawberry, and often tinged with incense and cola-like (!) spice. It can be a little minty and vegetal but when ripe usually tastes of raspberry or strawberry as well as cherry and, when exotic, loganberry, mulberry and fraise du bois. If overripe, it becomes jammy. As it matures in bottle, it often develops silky textures and alluring undertones of truffles, game and leather.

PINOTAGE

- plummy and blackberryish
- hints of baked banana and burnt rubber

A difficult grape to grow and equally hard to make, PINOTAGE comes in a range of red wine styles from simple everyday glugger to the more serious structured reds. It is known for its characteristic burnt rubber character which most growers try to eliminate, and, when successful, produce a wine with plum, cherry, blackberry and banana flavours. With oak maturation, it can become smoky and spicy.

SANGIOVESE

- cherry and plum
- herby and savoury

SANGIOVESE, the main Chianti grape, produces a variety of styles from youthfully lively young reds with juicy, cherry flavours with mouthwatering acidity to the richer, more concentrated, long-lived, oak-aged style with dark cherry, plum, savoury and herby, bay leaf flavours. Tinged with tea, and spices picked up from oak maturation, they can develop gamey, leathery, almost animal characteristics as they mature.

SHIRAZ / SYRAH

- smoke and blackberry
- cool climate pepper and mint

SYRAH produces dark red wines whose purest incarnation in the northern Rhône produces a wine with memorable aromas which can be smoky, floral, peppery, minty or spicy and often linked to a kind of medicinal or creosote-like character. Cool climates, whether northern Rhône or Victoria and parts of Western Australia, bring out the mint, pepper and spice in SYRAH, while the warmer it gets the more it changes from raspberry to blackberry, becoming chocolatey and, with age, tarry and gamey.



John Avery MW and wine consultant Zar Brooks tackle yet another 12-bottle flight of Australian Shiraz at the 2006 Decanter World Wine Awards

TEMPRANILLO

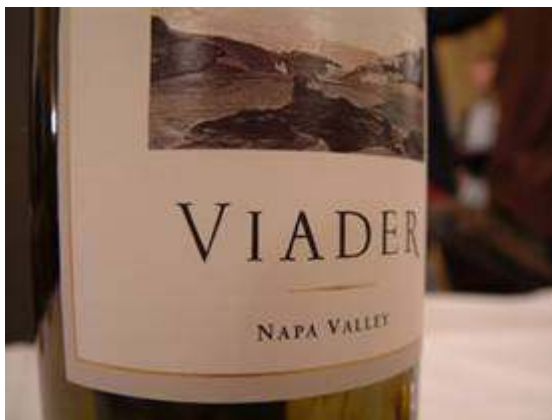
- strawberry flavours
- a veneer of vanilla and tobacco-spice

The mainstay of Rioja and a host of other Spanish reds, TEMPRANILLO is a versatile grape which is equally well used to making juicy young strawberryish reds as well as more serious, oak-aged reds with a veneer of vanilla, liquorice and tobacco spice characters overlaying the strawberry flavours. Like SANGIOVESE, it can be very savoury, a quality often defined as tobacco leaf, and it becomes leathery with age.

ZINFANDEL

- brambly and raspberryish
- headily spicy

In its pink incarnation, ZINFANDEL, sometimes known as white ZINFANDEL, tends to be light, sweetish and bland. Take it seriously though and it produces powerfully-constructed, brambly, reds with raspberry and blackberry-like flavours and plenty of tannins and spice. It is believed to be the same grape, or virtually the same grape as southern Italy's primitivo, which is equally capable of producing heady, robustly spicy reds.



WHITE Varieties

ALBARINO

- citrusy and crisp
- fragrant and spritz-fresh

ALBARINO, arguably Spain's best white grape variety, is sometimes referred to as Spain's RIESLING, as much because it resembles the citrusy side of RIESLING in character as because its fragrant, spritz-fresh style makes it the perfect seafood white. It has plenty of body and fresh acidity with grapefruity, citrus-perfumed flavours



CHARDONNAY

- melon, grapefruit and pineapple
- buttery and nutty

In Burgundy, CHARDONNAY ranges in quality from bland to intense and in style from oaked to unoaked and from the mineral, unoaked, lean, bone dry chablis style to the richer, classically hazelnutty intense dry whites of the Côte de Beaune. In the New World, CHARDONNAY varies from the melon, apple and grapefruit cool climate styles to more tropical fruit styles with flavours of peach, mango, lime and pineapple. As a non-aromatic variety, its affinity with oak brings both a textured, buttery roundness as well as smoky, toasty, clove and cinnamon-spice and nutty features.

CHENIN BLANC

- quince and apple
- sweet barley sugar and honey characters

CHENIN BLANC in its most classic form in the Loire Valley is full of floral and honeyed aromas and quince and apple-like flavours with good zippy acidity. When cool-fermented as in so many instances in South Africa, it can be quite pear-droppy, becoming more peachy in fuller dry whites. With botrytis, it becomes rich in barley sugar and honeyed characters, particularly in the sweet wines of the Loire.

GEWURZTRAMINER

- fragrant rose petal and lychee
- dusting of Turkish Delight

Like walking into the perfume section of a department store, GEWURZTRAMINER is the grape variety with the most overt and recognisable range of aromas in the world. It smells of ginger and cinnamon, fragrant rose petals and pot pourri with a dusting of Turkish Delight and tastes of deliciously exotic lychees and mango. It is so spicy as to be instantly appealing, but its fragrance can rapidly pall.

GRUNER VELTLINER

- white pepper and celery
- an alluring herbiness

Austria's widely planted grape variety produce an assertive, steely, rich dry white with a unique aroma and flavour. For some it hints at white pepper and celery, while others prefer the descriptors of gherkins and dill. Either way, there's often an unusual, alluring herbiness in what, at its best, can be an excellent, steely dry white.

MARSANNE

- marzipan-like and nutty
- opulently rich, honeysuckle aromas

MARSANNE is the blending partner of the higher quality ROUSSANNE and has a faintly peachy, nutty, blanched almondy character which can veer towards the flavour of marzipan. It is full-bodied, fat and becomes opulently rich with honeysuckle aromas and a mango-like tropical fruitiness in parts of Australia and California.

MULLER-THURGAU

- floral sweet pea
- faintly spicy

This early-ripening German grape produces floral, sweet-pea like and faintly spicy aromas. It is hard to think of complex examples but at low yields in Italy's Alto-Adige and in Württemberg in Germany, it is capable of rising above the bog-standard to develop mineral, more complex characters.

MUSCAT

- grapes and raisins
- exotically fragrant

MUSCAT is best-known for its fragrantly perfumed, grapey quality, whether as a dry white or one of the sweet, fortified MUSCATs grown around the Mediterranean. In its sweet, fortified incarnation, it takes on the aromas and flavours of candied fruits, which can be a little coarse, but, in a good quality MUSCAT, exotically spicy, with suggestions of roses, raisins, crystallised oranges and pineapples.



A flight of white wines being tasted at the Decanter World Wine Awards

PINOT GRIGIO / PINOT GRIS

- smoky and spicy
- occasionally oily

PINOT GRIS / pinot grigio, often lightly copper-coloured, can be a sort of halfway house between the more neutral-flavoured PINOT BLANC and the overtly spicy and fragrant GEWURZTRAMINER with a smokiness, delicate spice and an occasionally oily character.

RIESLING

- apples and lime
- honey and petrol characters

In its heartland of the Mosel and Rheingau Valleys, RIESLING produces elegant wines with crisp, lime, lemon, apple and peach flavours and honeyed richness. In the Mosel it is said to become slatey (easier to describe as mineral) developing honey, petrol and kerosene-like flavours. In Alsace it can be more floral and perfumed, while Australian RIESLING, particularly from the Eden and Clare Valleys, starts out lime and lemon-like and develops mineral, kerosene character with age.

ROUSSANNE

- white flowers, hawthorn
- almond and greengage

The elegant dry white grape of the northern Rhône, which reaches its apogee when blended with MARSANNE in fine white Hermitage, has plenty of herby aromatic power with a white flower, hawthorn and lime-blossom character, incisive acidity and a flavour sometimes reminiscent of almond and greengages.

SAUVIGNON BLANC

- from gooseberry to tropical passion fruit
- aromas of elderflower and blackcurrant leaf

SAUVIGNON BLANC is at its most fragrant and fresh in the cooler climate of the Loire Valley where cut-grass, nettles, elderflower, blackcurrant leaf and gooseberries are the key flavours with minerally, zesty, flinty undertones. It is at its most assertive in the pungently catty, elderfloral style of Marlborough in New Zealand, where, depending on ripeness levels it ranges from green bean, tinned pea and asparagus flavours and the riper, more tropical characters of grapefruit, guava, passion fruit and mango.

SEMILLON

- lime citrus and honey
- lusciously sweet and marmaladey

SEMILLON varies in character considerably according to its region of origin. In Bordeaux blends with sauvignon, it can be citrusy with a lanoline-textured, waxy, honeyed richness, while Hunter Valley semillon famously develops lime and buttered toast flavours with age, in contrast to the more pungently grass and asparagus-like characteristics associated with cooler climates. Made as a sweet wine, it makes some of the world's most lusciously sweet, exotically marmaladey whites.



Bottles of Chateau d'Yquem – possibly the world's greatest sweet wine – lined up before a Decanter Masterclass

VIOGNIER

- peaches and apricots
- heady scents of jasmine

The hallmark of the VIOGNIER grape is the scent of spring blossom and jasmine and the rich flavours of apricot and peach. Ripening in warm sunshine, it can become quite heady and exotic with spicy undertones and plenty of body. Because of its spiciness and body, it can be confused in blind tastings with Alsace PINOT GRIS.



The Aroma Chart

Use this chart to help guide your senses. Finding 'that smell' that you just can't place is a frequent frustration for those new to wine tasting. Although this should help, don't be afraid to name flavours that are not listed – this is, after all, just a guide. The previous section (How they taste) will give you an idea of what certain grapes should taste of.

More Broadbent wisdom...

'Be bold. Do not fall for the critics' mumbo jumbo. Say (or write) whatever you think. What you like, or dislike, is crucially important. Be sure to have confidence in your own opinion. But never cheat and don't fool yourself.'

Red/Black Fruit	Raspberry Strawberry Cherry Blackcurrant / Cassis Redcurrant Blackberry Jam	Earthy / Woody	Mouldy cork (!) Musty Mushroom Cedar Coffee Oak (smoke/toast/vanilla)
Tropical fruit	Banana Lychee Melon Pineapple	Floral	Rose Geranium Violet Blossom Acacia
Citrus Fruit	Lemon Grapefruit Orange	Chemical	Sulphur Wet animal hair Petrol/Diesel/Kerosene Plastic Rubber Tar Soap Fishy
Tree Fruit	Apricot Peach Apple Pear Quince	Biological	Yeast Milk/Lactic Acid Sweaty Mouse/Horse
Dried Fruit	Raisin Prune Fig	Spicy	Liquorice/Aniseed Cloves Black pepper Thyme
Vegetal	Grass Straw Bell pepper Eucalyptus Menthol Mint Beans Asparagus Olive (Green/Black) Tobacco	Others	Butter Wet Cardboard Almond / Walnut Leather Musk Farmyard
Caramelized	Honey Butterscotch Chocolate Syrup/Molasses Roasted hazelnut Caramel/toffee		

20 Outstanding (*****)	16 Good + (***)	12 Mediocre (*)
19 Excellent (****)	15 Good (***)	11 Poor (*)
18 Very Good + (****)	14 Fair (**)	10 Bad
17 Very Good (****)	13 Adequate (**)	

Name _____

Wine	Appearance	Nose	Taste	Drinkability (now/2-5/ 5-10...)	Rating; Please mark up to 20

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