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The Good Bottle
A Guide to Getting the Most From Your Wine Experience

Welcome!

Every wine has a distinct personality. As with all living things, wine possesses natural complexity derived from its grapes and uniqueness imparted from the region in which it is grown.

This handy booklet is designed to help you further enjoy wine by familiarizing you with some basic terminology and little known facts. We hope you find it both fun and functional. Most of all, our collective interest is to ensure you a great wine experience!

Attend Cellar Rat Classes

Wine Essentials

Are you just discovering wine, or an enthusiast who wants a refresher course? Wine Essentials gives you the building blocks. With the guidance of an expert, discover the proper tasting process, learn common – and sometimes confusing – terminology, and dispel wine myths and misconceptions. As you begin to understand how wine is made you will appreciate how the decisions of the wine makers and viticulturists influence a wine's taste and character. Each class will taste ten different wines with the focus on the “classic varieties.”

The Old vs. the New

The Old World – Europe – is the birthplace of most varieties including: Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc. These same varieties also grow well in New World countries such as the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina. However, there are surprising differences in the wines! Explore the territorial and regional differences and learn about winemaking traditions and innovations. Each class will taste two examples of the five varieties listed above.

\$10 versus \$100

Is it really worth it? Here is your opportunity to sample wines ranging in price from \$10 to \$100. This special 'blind' tasting will compare, contrast & discuss eight different wines from either the same region or from the same grapes. This is the perfect chance to discover how much you *really* want to spend on a bottle of wine!

Grapes you should look for ...

Listed below, in alphabetical order, are some of Cellar Rat's favorite grape varieties. Nine of those included are considered classics *. These are merely a few of the 5,000 different varieties that exist. Most of the grape varieties have multiple names. If you travel around, grapes you know by one name might be called something different!

List of red grapes varieties

List of white grapes varieties

Call Out Wine grapes are biologically different from table grapes, which actually makes terrible wine. The species most known for wine grapes is *Vitis Vinifera*, which has approximately 5,000 different varieties. A “varietal wine” displays certain qualities, which are inherent in the grape's personality. For example, the Chardonnay grape is as different from the Sauvignon Blanc grape as a Dalmatian is from a Chihuahua. They are both *Vitis Vinifera* (or canines) but each has specific genetic characteristics that make them uniquely different.

Call Out The first and most basic thing to understand about a wine (or dog) is the grape varietal (or breed) and its typical or innate personality elements. Similar to dogs, grape varieties can be crosses, hybrids and clones. For example, Pinotage is a cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsaut, much like a Puggle is a cross of Beagle and Pug.

What you can expect them to taste like...

Know the Nine – a general understanding of the distinctive personalities of the nine classic grapes is the key to getting the most from your wine experience.

Cabernet Sauvignon is planted widely around the world. Most remarkable, is its ability to absorb the taste from the land where it is grown. It is often blended with other varieties. Cabernet tends to be very tannic, medium to full bodied with notes of black cherry, currants, cedar, leather, green bell pepper, and black tea.

Merlot has played a major role in many Bordeaux blends, adding a delicate softness and smooth texture. Merlot is softer than Cabernet, with less acidity and tannin. Don't be surprised by traces of licorice, tobacco, or mint!

Pinot Noir is a very fickle grape dominated by the fruity perfume of cherries, currants, plums, violets, fresh earth and sometimes a little smoke. It is usually light in body with a silky texture. Pinot can be the most complex tasting of the nine classics.

Syrah/Shiraz is very food-friendly as it goes well with almost anything. Syrah is often packed with notes of strong black fruits, some spice, pepper and occasionally, a little barnyard funk. It possesses approachable tannin and silky textures.

Chardonnay is produced in several styles, varying from heavy with hints of butter, toast, oak and vanilla to crisp, with notes of pear, pineapple and honeysuckle. The amount of oak used, if any, and the fermentation process contribute significantly to the end product.

Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio is grown in many different regions and produces a light-bodied, moderately crisp wine as well as a more layered, full-bodied white. Typically Pinot Gris greets you with a soft nutty aroma, giving way to notes of pear, apple, honey and spice.

Riesling is a grape with two personalities. Dry Riesling offers refreshingly crisp acidity and delicate aromas of ripe peaches, pears and floral perfumes. Sweeter Rieslings can exude the scents of clover, honey, tropical fruit and orange blossoms. They are highly age worthy.

Sauvignon Blanc/Fume Blanc is fresh, lively, dry and crisp. Typical taste characteristics of Sauvignon Blanc include: grassy, steely, and tart citrus fruits like grapefruit, apple, and gooseberry.

Semillon is highly susceptible to the mold *Botrytis Cinerea* (“noble rot”), and consequently is used in the production of luscious dessert wines, such as Sauternes. Semillon in dry, still wine is well rounded with a mild fruit character of peach, apricot, pear and honey.

The regions in which they grow...

In many parts of the world, wines are labeled by the region they come from rather than the grape variety from which they are made. It may be helpful to familiarize yourself with some of the world’s famous wine regions:

Bordeaux is an area in the southwest of France that has produced many world renowned wines. Red Bordeaux wines are almost always blends of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot while the whites are usually blends of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. Bordeaux wines are often noted for their intense flavors and elegance. Only wines produced in that region are permitted by law to be labeled as Bordeaux, though many are also labeled by their appellation name such as Margaux, St. Emilion, and Graves.

Burgundy is in the eastern central part of France. Both red and white Burgundy is highly sought after. The red is made from Pinot Noir, while the

white comes from Chardonnay grapes. Keep in mind that in Burgundy, where the grapes are grown is far more important than the fact that they are Pinot and Chard. In Burgundy, there are five main wine growing sub-regions each containing many distinctive villages. The most respected sub-region is Cote d'Or, where you can find the Premier Cru and famous Grand Cru.

Champagne is a sparkling wine made in the old province of Champagne, France. The region includes five areas and the towns of Reims and Epernay. The only grapes allowed in Champagne are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Making Champagne is very complicated and includes a secondary fermentation process, which occurs in the bottle – trapping all the CO₂, or bubbles, inside. Not all Sparkling wines are Champagne, but all Champagne are Sparklers.

Chianti is in the center of Tuscany, a classic wine growing region in Italy. The dominate grape used in Chianti is Sangiovese. One unique characteristic of Sangiovese is its ability to alter its identity; consequently, there are many Sangiovese clones, such as Sangiovetto, Brunello (believed to be the best), and Prugnolo. Chianti Classico is one of the seven sub-zones within Chianti.

Rhone Valley is located in the southeast of France. Wines are generally referred to as northern Rhones or southern Rhones, as the two areas are extremely different. The Rhone Valley is most known for its red wines. The northern Rhone wines are made from Syrah, while the southern Rhone are blends of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Cinsaut, and Carignan. Rhone wines tend to pack a punch. It could be spice, barnyard, black fruit or smoke, but they will definitely kick you in the teeth!

Rioja is a large wine region in the north of Spain. The dominant grape used in Rioja is Tempranillo. The red Rioja is usually labeled as Crianza (aged two years, one in oak), Reserva (aged three years, one in oak), or Gran Reserva (aged five years, two in oak). Gran Reservas are only made in exceptional years and make up less than 10% of all the Rioja produced.

Mosel-Saar-Ruwer is in the west central part of Germany. Riesling grapes remain in contact with the sun for a very limited time in the cold Mosel region and are most known for the slatey, stoney, and mineral characteristics they possess. Though most wines in Germany are trocken (dry), there is a classification system to help you understand the level of ripeness: (from least ripe to most ripe) QbA, Kabinett, Spatlese, Auslese, Beerenauslese, Eiswein, Trockenbeerenausles

Tasting With The Five S's

The five S's of wine-tasting combine nearly all your senses, allowing you to fully experience the beauty, aromas, flavor characteristics and intricate nuances of the wine. You want to take the wine in with first your eyes, than your nose, and finally your palate.

See – Pour one third of a glass and pick it up by the stem, so your

fingerprints don't blur its color and the heat of your hand doesn't alter its temperature. Focus on hue, intensity and clarity. See the true color by tilting the glass and looking at the wine through the rim. The color will vary from the deepest part of the liquid to its edges. Intensity is gauged by looking straight down through the wine from above, and clarity is most evident when light is shining sideways through the glass.

Swirl – Rest the base of the glass on a table, hold the stem between your thumb and forefinger, and swirl. The real purpose of swirling is to expose the wine to oxygen, making aromas more discernable. As the wine settles back into the bottom of the glass, a transparent film will appear on the inside of the bowl, falling slowly and irregularly down the sides. These are the wine's "tears," or "legs," an indication of the amount of alcohol in the wine: the more alcohol, the thicker and more bulbous the tears.

Sniff – After swirling, the wine is agitated and the aromas are intensified. Stick your nose right into the bowl and inhale, drawing the aromas deep into the nose. Humans can identify up to 10,000 scents, and with some instruction you'll be amazed what your nose will tell you about wine! 80% of what you taste is really what you smell.

Sip – Take a sip – enough to roll the wine around in your mouth. Purse your lips and inhale gently through them. Second, "chew" the wine vigorously, sloshing it around in your mouth and drawing out every last nuance of flavor from the wine. Again, the point is to introduce air, releasing subtle aromas.

Savor – After you swallow, exhale gently and slowly through both your nose and mouth. The passage connecting the throat and nose is another avenue for aromas, which can linger long after the wine is finally swallowed. The better the wine, the more complex, profound and long lasting these residual aromas can be. With great wines, sensitive tasters and minimal distractions, the finish can last a minute or more.

Call Out One of the reasons that fine restaurants use white tablecloths is to create the optimum backdrop for looking at wine!

Call Out Restaurant Etiquette: First, talk to your server. If the server struggles with answers or seems uncertain, ask for the sommelier. He or she is an expert on the restaurant's wine and food, and should be able to help you select a wine suitable to your palate, meal – and wallet!

Dispelling Top Wine Myths

The Cork – Smell the wine, not the cork. Check the cork to make sure it's a bit damp, meaning the wine was stored properly, on its side.

When Wine Goes Bad – Most wines will last three days after opening, sometimes more. Older wines are more delicate and will deteriorate faster. Champagne and sparkling wines will lose their bubbles if they're not sealed with a Champagne stopper. Keep all opened wine chilled.

Letting the Wine Breathe – Just uncorking a bottle does very little to allow the wine to breathe. Pouring the wine into a glass or decanter increases the surface area exposed to air, enhancing the taste.

Cork vs. Screw Top – There is no difference in terms of taste and quality between the wines in bottles sealed with a cork, versus those with a screw top or glass closure.

The Wine Glass – There is a glass specifically made for virtually every kind of wine, but generally your glass should be taller than it is wide, allowing you to swirl the glass and incorporate air neatly. Clear crystal is better than glass, which has a green tint.

Private Reserve – This description, along with Reserve, once stood for the best wines a winery produced. However, lacking a legal definition many wineries use the term for ordinary wines. They may still signify excellent quality.

New versus Old – Older wines are not necessarily better than more recent vintages. The majority of all wines produced today are made to drink immediately.

Storage Conditions – Wine with a cork should be stored on its side, so the cork stays moist. The wine should be out of direct sunlight and ideally at a temperature of 50° to 60° F and away from vibrations. Wine with a screw top can be stored upright.

Call Out The 30/30 rule: White wine should be chilled, not cold. Take it *out* of the refrigerator 30 minutes before serving; red wine can be placed in the refrigerator 30 minutes *before* serving to achieve its ideal serving temperature. If the wine is too cold, the aromas remain trapped. If it is too warm, the alcohol evaporates faster making the wine smell “hot”.

Pair food and wine like a pro

Wine and food were meant for each other. Each enhances and strengthens the experience as a whole. There are no hard-and-fast “rules” about matching wines with your favorite recipes. There are hints and popular matches, but ultimately the best match is what pleases your palate.

Some Simple Guidelines

- Match the intensity of the food with the wine. Subtle, nuanced flavors go together. Likewise, rich, hearty fare goes best with highly ripe, wines with heavy alcohol and tannin.
- Consider acidity – the levels in *both* the food and the wine should match.
- Sometimes it’s better to match the wine with the sauce or seasoning of your dish.
- Your dessert wine should be sweeter than your sweet dessert!
- Sweet, fruity wines have a cooling sensation when paired with spicy meals, like Thai or Mexican.
- If it grows together, it goes together. Think about the area that your food comes from and what else grows in that region. What type of

wines might you find there? The wines that would be easily accessible to natives of the region would likely pair very well with the foods from the same area.

Learn basic terminology

Acidity is experienced mostly in your cheeks and on the sides of your tongue. Acidity keeps the wine alive, helps it to age and should be perceived as balanced. Without enough acidity, the wine will be dull; too much acidity and it will be sharp.

Alcohol content of a table wine is usually between 9 and 15%. Riper grapes produce wines higher in alcohol. Alcohol contributes to the body and flavor. Low alcohol wines will be light while high alcohol wines will possess a heavier body. Alcohol should be in balance with the fruit and acid. Higher alcohol wines need heavier fruit and acid characteristics - otherwise they could seem "hot".

Aroma is the fresh and fruity smells that a wine has as a result of the grapes.

Balance is a subjective descriptor referring to the interplay in wine between the important elements of tannin, acid, fruit, and alcohol. Well-balanced, or well integrated, wine should have relatively similar amounts of these elements so that not one of them stands out and wine overall seems harmonious.

Blend is a wine consisting of multiple grape varieties. It is very uncommon for a wine to be 100% of one grape. Generally, when labeled by grape name the wine must contain 75% of that grape. Sometimes wine blends are referred to as a cuvee, meritage, or claret. At Cellar Rat, we call them "kitchen sink reds".

Body is the sensation of weight and thickness on your palate (mouth). Body is commonly expressed as full, medium, or light. Think of it like milk: cream, 2% or skim. Water has NO body.

Bouquet is a collection of aromas, the more complex smell of wine after it has been bottled and aged. Bouquet is the puzzle picture of smell, while aromas make up the individual puzzle pieces.

Decanting is the act of slowly pouring the wine from a bottle into a special container. The shape of the container - decanter - separates sediment from the juice and introduces air, allowing the wine to "breathe" thus enhancing flavor.

Dry wines have no perceptible taste of sugar. Most table wines are dry. It is possible for wine to be dry AND fruity.

Earthy is a positive attribute used to describe both the taste and smell of some wines; a pleasant, clean quality that reminds one of fresh earth, grass, dirt, etc.

Finish is a wine's aftertaste or lingering impression. Great wines have a variety of rich, long, complex and well balanced finishes. Practice timing how long a wine's finish stays with you.

Oak is traditionally used for wine barrels. French oak supplies vanilla, cedar and butterscotch flavors. Less expensive, American Oak (most is from the Ozarks) is a popular alternative. Vanilla, dill and cedar notes mark wines aged in American Oak. "Oaky" describes the aroma or taste a wine will impart if aged in oak.

Sediment occurs naturally and will not harm you. It appears as flakes in your glass. You would probably prefer not to drink (or chew) the sediment, which is one of the reasons your wine glass should taper slightly so the bowl can catch the sediment. If you suspect sediment, you can always decant the wine!

Sulfites are naturally occurring in ALL wine. Additional sulfur dioxide can be added during the wine-making process to inhibit the growth of yeast, stop fermentation, or prevent oxidation. *There is no wine without sulfites.* There are wines without additional sulfites *added*. White wine has more naturally occurring sulfites than red wine. Sulfites are harmless and generally undetectable.

Table Wine represents the vast majority of wines produced. Table wines are non-fortified, still wines, and contain no more than 16.5% alcohol. They are usually suitable for serving with food or drinking alone.

Tartrates are naturally occurring in white wine and are not harmful. The little flakes are a result of colorless, order-less salts from tartaric acid.

Terroir is a French term meaning 'taste of the earth'. Wine lovers believe that grapes absorb elements from the earth in which they're grown, which influence the wine in unique ways.

Tannin is known for its astringent, mouth-drying qualities and is essential in providing the wine with structure, flavor, texture and ability to age. Tannin comes from the skins and pips of the grapes; the longer the juice is left in contact with them, the more tannic the wine becomes.

TCA is short for trichloroanisole, which is the primary cause of "corked" wine. TCA is an airborne chemical that infects wood products, including cork; an infection that can transfer to wine, giving it a musty, wet cardboard-like smell. Though harmless, you probably won't like the wine. This gives screw tops an advantage over corks. If you detect a "corked" bottle purchased from Cellar Rat, we'll happily to replace it!

So, why Cellar Rat?

Sure, the name is cute and we would love to take credit for it; but, Cellar Rat is an actual wine term used long before our inception. At a winery, the Cellar Rat is a title given to those who toil behind the bottles and barrels,

often behind the scenes. He or she usually fills an entry level position or internship and performs pretty much whatever tasks they are asked to do. The Cellar Rat does anything from cleaning out barrels and tanks, mopping the floor, helping the winemaker to working in the tasting room. Regardless, the Cellar Rat knows the inter-workings of the vineyard, the winery and the cellar. If you really want to know what is going on...talk with the Cellar Rat!

At Cellar Rat Wine Merchants, we have seen all sides of the business from restaurants, catering, wholesale, to retail. It gives us a unique and fresh perspective. Though we like to be thought of as your personal Sommeliers and Event Planners, you can still find us sweeping floors, taking out the trash and cleaning out dump buckets. But like the traditional Cellar Rat, if you really want to know – Ask US!