

Enjoying California Wine

An Introduction to Appreciation

Courtesy of the Wine Institute

Throughout the history of civilization, wine has held a position of special prominence. It has been charged with sacramental meaning, used as a medicine and nutrient, recognized as the perfect accompaniment to food, and revered as a beverage that enriches life.

According to recent archeological discoveries, winemaking began more than 8,000 years ago. Since that time, virtually every major academic discipline, from literature to chemistry, has been applied to the advancement of the winemaker's art.

California's emergence into this vast, complex world represents just a few moments on the historical time-line. But its impact on winemaking has been significant. Winegrowing began in California in 1769, six years before the revolutionary war, when Father Junipero Serra planted vines at Mission San Diego. In September of 1772, the grapes were harvested and pressed, marking California's first vintage and the birth of an industry whose technological innovations have in many ways revolutionized winemaking throughout the world.

Wine is grown in every region of the state and California's wine industry is composed primarily of family-owned operations committed to the creation of wines with distinction. As a result, California is now recognized as one of the foremost winegrowing regions in the world.

As an important part of many diverse cultures and cuisines throughout history, wine has spawned a rich body of knowledge. However, wine appreciation does not require a textbook. All it takes is familiarity with a few simple concepts and an appreciation of your own preferences.

VARIETIES OF CALIFORNIA WINE

The characteristics that most distinguishes one wine from another is the type of grape — or variety — from which it is produced. When ripened to maturity, each variety contributes its own unique aromas and flavors — or

varietal character — to the wine.

Climate and soil, as well as specific viticultural (grapegrowing) and winemaking practices, greatly influence the final complexion of the wine. But a basic familiarity with the principal grape varieties is invaluable when seeking out wines you will enjoy.

Types of Wine

Champagne/Sparkling Wine. These names are used interchangeably in the U.S. for wines characterized by effervescence resulting from an additional step in the winemaking process. Champagnes and sparkling wines range in style from very dry (Natural), dry (Brut), and slightly sweet (Extra Dry), to sweet (Sec and Demi-Sec). (Wines with no noticeable sweetness are described as "dry.") Many sparkling wines are also identified as "Blanc de Blancs" (wines made from white grapes), or "Blanc de Noirs" (wines produced from red grapes).

Apertifs. Apertifs or appetizer wines, are generally served prior to meals. While Champagnes and sherries are traditional apertifs, a glass of light white wine is also appropriate.

Dessert Wines. Usually served after the meal with dessert or in place of dessert, these wines can be sweet or dry and are officially classified as those with an alcohol content of between 17 and 21 percent. This includes sherry, wines made from the intensely-flavored Muscat grape family, Tokay and Port, which is available in a range of styles based on the level of sweetness and time aged in wood. While not officially part of this classification, late-harvest varietals — wines with concentrated sweetness and an alcohol content between eight and 14 percent — are increasingly popular. Late harvest is a term for wines made from overripe or "botrytised" grapes. Botrytis is a mold that is cultivated on winegrapes to concentrate sweetness and impart them with distinct flavors and aromas.

Table Wine. This term commonly

refers to red, white and blush or rose wines that contain from seven to 14 percent alcohol, are still rather than effervescent, and are enjoyed mainly with meals. Table wines can be made from any grape or combination of grapes, and in any style a vintner chooses. They can carry varietal names, generic names describing color (blush) or the region that originally inspired the wine (Chablis), or a proprietary name coined by the winery.

Varietal Wines. These are table wines that carry the name of the grape variety from which they were produced, such as Chardonnay or Merlot. Wines must be made from a minimum of 75 percent of a particular grape variety to carry the varietal name.

***Wine is constant proof that
God loves us and loves to
see us happy.
- Benjamin Franklin***

White Wines

There are many styles to choose from among white wines. While some are aged in oak, most stay out of wood to preserve their freshness and varietal character. White wines can range in style from bone dry to sweet.

Chardonnay (*shar-doh-nay*). Chardonnay is the most widely planted variety in the state covering more than 56,000 acres. It is a dry wine with an appealing balance of fruit, acidity and texture. Winemakers play an important role in the style of Chardonnay which can range from clean and crisp with a hint of varietal flavor to rich and complex oak-aged wines.

Chenin Blanc (*sheh-nan blanc or blahn*). This variety has been thriving in California for more than a century and is known for its ability to grow in warmer climates and produce light, well-balanced wines. It has fresh, delicate floral characteristics and is made in dry to off-dry (slightly sweet) styles.

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French Colombard. After Chardonnay, French Colombard is the most widely planted varietal in California, covering 55,000 acres. Traditionally used in white wine blends to add acidity (crispness), it also produces a light, generally off-dry varietal wine.

Gewurztraminer (*geh-vertz-tra-mee-ner*). Gewurztraminer produces distinctive wines rich in spicy aromas and full flavors. With styles that range from dry to sweet, this varietal is a popular choice for Asian cuisines and pork-based sausages.

Johannisberg Riesling (*reece-ling*). These wines are floral, with fruity-yet-delicate aromas and flavors. Riesling is made in every style from dry to concentrated sweet wines.

Sauvignon Blanc (*so-vee-n'yohn blanc or blahn*). As one of the most successful quality white wines produced in California, Sauvignon Blanc (also known as Fume Blanc) is best known for its grassy, herbal flavors and is very popular with fish and shellfish.

Red Wines

Red wines are usually dry and have some tannic astringency (a rough, puckery sensation in mouth). Aged in wood for depth and complexity, or produced in light, fruity styles, red wines gain their color through the extraction of pigments from the skins of red winegrapes (most grape juice is naturally clear) during the winemaking process.

Cabernet Sauvignon (*cab-air-nay so-vee-n'yohn*). One of the great winegrapes of the world, Cabernet Sauvignon is prized for its depth of flavor and aroma and its ability to age (often 10 to 30 years). It is a full-bodied, rich, intense wine with cherry-currant, sometimes herbal flavors and noticeable tannins. California vintners often blend Cabernet with other red varieties, such as Merlot and Cabernet Franc, to soften its astringency.

Merlot (*mair-lo*). Long prized as a partner in blending with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot is rapidly becoming a popular varietal wine in its own right in California. Merlot is a medium- to full-bodied red with herbaceous flavors. Softer than Cabernet, Merlot usually

requires less aging to reach full potential.

Petite Sirah (*pet-teet see-rah*). Petite Sirahs are firm, robust, tannic wines, often with peppery flavors that stand up well to meals with rich meats.

Pinot Noir (*pee-no n'wahr*). Recognized as one of the most challenging winegrapes to bring to full potential, Pinot Noir makes a light- to medium-bodied red that is delicate, smooth and rich in complexity. This cool climate varietal does exceptionally well in California's coastal valleys.

Zinfandel. Its origins a mystery for most of its 130-year history in California, Zinfandel is now thought to have originated in Southern Italy. Zinfandel is one of the most widely planted red winegrapes in the state covering 34,000 acres. It produces a light-, medium- and full-bodied wine rich in berry-like — sometimes spicy — flavors. It is also widely used in the popular, off-dry blush wine known as White Zinfandel.

Blush Wines or Roses. These light, pink wines are made from a number of red winegrapes and derive their color from a very short period of contact with the grape-skins during the winemaking process. These wines are light and usually have some sweetness.

HOW TO BUY WINE

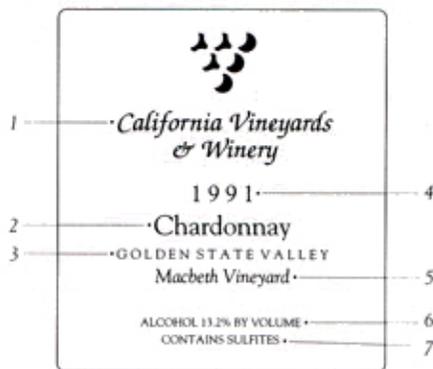
There are three ways to select and purchase wines: choose something you know, try something new, or ask for

help. The first option is safe and offers you the pleasures of enjoying your favorite wine. The second option is the riskiest, but often the most fun when you discover a new wine. The final option is to ask someone you know for assistance. Knowledgeable store clerks and waiters are usually happy to help you select a wine to suit your taste and price range. Depending on where you live, wine can be purchased at a wine shop, liquor store, grocery store, deli, or gift shop.

The experience of purchasing wine at a restaurant may seem like a mysterious and intimidating ritual, but in reality, it is very simple. Most restaurants have a wine list organized either by country or region of origin followed by wine types. If you are not certain what you would like to try, let the waiter or sommelier (French for wine waiter) know what you plan to eat and ask for a recommendation. Wine-by-the-glass service is an excellent way to taste new wines and experiment with a variety of foods.

When you have chosen a bottle, the waiter will present it to you. Examine the label to make sure it is the wine you ordered. The waiter will offer you the cork, but it is more important to taste the wine than to dwell on the cork's appearance. Finally, the waiter will pour a little wine in your glass. Check the color, aroma and taste. Let the waiter know if the wine is satisfactory. If it is spoiled (musty or

The Label



1. Brand/Producer name. This is the name chosen by the bottler.
2. Type of wine. This may be varietal, generic, or proprietary. Varietal wines must be made from 75 percent of the variety.
3. Place of origin. This is the geographical growing area. To state "California," 100 percent of the grapes used must be grown within the state; to use a county name, 75 percent of the grapes must come from that county; and to use an AVA (a federally approved viticultural area) 85 percent of the grapes must come from the defined area.
4. Vintage. This is the year the grapes were grown. Wines must contain a minimum of 95 percent of the stated vintage.
5. Individual vineyard. A minimum of 95 percent of the grapes must have come from the named vineyard.
6. Alcohol Content. Wines designated as "Table Wine" (seven to 14 percent) are not required to show alcohol content. However, if a wine exceeds 14 percent, the label must show that.
7. Sulfite Statement. Sulfur dioxide is a natural by-product of winemaking, and has been used for centuries as a preservative in virtually all wines. Federal law now requires the statement on the label that wine contains sulfites.

vinegary), do not accept it. However, it is extremely rare to get spoiled wine and is generally not acceptable to return sound wine that falls short of your expectations.

The Label

Wine labels afford a winemaker an opportunity to show a wine's individuality and uniqueness. Styles of labels may range from a straightforward presentation of the required information, to artistic paintings and drawings. Federal and state regulations require that certain information appear on every bottle, some of which can be useful in understanding what is in the bottle (see previous page).

SERVING WINE

When serving wine there are really only two rules: avoid spilling it and always serve it for enjoyment in moderation. A few other guidelines can serve as bench marks for an exploration of your personal preferences.

Temperature

White and blush wines are most often chilled to household refrigerator temperature (45°F, which can also be reached by immersing the bottle in ice water for 30 minutes) and held at that level until served. However, it is important to remember that the colder the wine, the less of an impression it will make on the senses. One may find, for example, that a white wine reveals more of its character if it is served about 10 to 15° warmer than refrigerator temperatures.

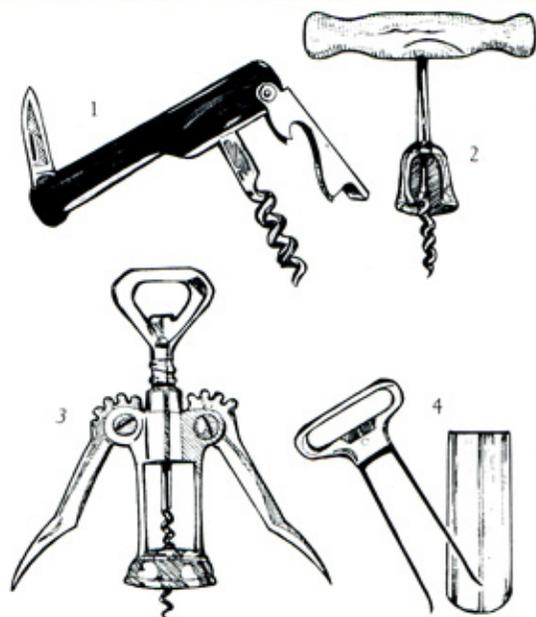
Red wines are generally served at "cool" room temperature or 55 to 65° which can be reached by placing the bottle in the refrigerator for a short period. A red wine that is too cold will often exhibit excessive tartness. However, blush wines and lighter reds lend themselves to chilling.

Sparkling wines are traditionally chilled to 45° or cooler. This slows the release of bubbles and permits the fruit aromas to linger for a longer period. Dessert wines exhibit their finest qualities when served at temperatures similar to those of reds.

Cork Pullers

The traditional way to open a bottle of wine is with a corkscrew. Be sure

Cork Pullers. To remove corks with ease, make sure the cork puller has an efficient helix of about 1½ inches long and insert it all the way. (1) Bootlever (folding) cork puller; (2) Traditional T-style cork puller; (3) Winglever cork puller; (4) Pronged or also-type cork puller (also known as the "dishonest butler").



the corkscrew has a helix (the spiral part that is driven into the cork) that is at least 1½ inches long. The point of the helix should be exactly in line with its spiral — not the center of the spiral — to assure that the spiral grips properly in the cork and is not pulled through the center when leverage is applied. With pronged pullers, insert the prongs between the bottle and the cork on each side with a rocking motion. Remove the cork with a twist.

Opening Wine

There are four basic steps to properly open wine before serving. First, cut the capsule (the plastic or metal wrapper covering the cork) with a cutter well below the lip of the bottle. Then, insert

the cork puller and pull with steady pressure to remove the cork. Next, wipe the lip of the bottle thoroughly with a damp cloth to remove any deposits from the capsule or cork, and pour.

Use care when opening sparkling wines as they are under pressure. Always point the cork away from you and any bystanders.

Remove the wire tie and grip the cork with one hand and the bottom of the bottle with the other, and work the cork free by twisting the bottle, shifting your grip as needed. Tilting the bottle at a 45° angle while opening tends to prevent the wine from foaming over when the cork is free.

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Opening. Opening the wine bottle is really a simple, four-step process. (1) Cut the capsule well below the lip of the bottle; (2) Insert the corkpuller into the center of the cork and remove it; (3) Thoroughly wipe the lip of the bottle to remove residues left from the cork and the capsule; (4) Pour and enjoy!



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Glassware

Glassware suitable for wine should have three characteristics: it should be clear to show the color and clarity of the wine; it should have a rounded bowl that cups inward at the top to concentrate the aromas; and it should have a stem to hold the glass so the hand does not warm the wine. A good wineglass usually has an 8 to 12 ounce capacity. All-purpose glasses are generally suited for most still wines. However, there are many glasses designed specifically for certain wines.

Proper care should be taken when cleaning wineglasses. Extra rinsing is usually necessary because residues from detergents can remain in the glass and affect the taste of still wines and cause sparkling wines to go flat.

Portions. Wine glasses should be filled to one-third full (three to five ounces) and certainly no more than one-half. These levels allow for a sizable airspace so the aromas can collect and concentrate. Champagne glasses are usually filled to about three-quarters full.

Pairing Wine With Food

The old rule of pairing white wines with fish and red wines with meat has loosened recently paving the way for new considerations when matching

wine with food. This is primarily due to the growing influence of ethnic foods and the emergence of American regional cuisines. Another factor is the steadily expanding variety of wine styles, such as light-, medium- and full-bodied Zinfandels, that allow for successful, non-traditional pairings.

As a general rule, the food and the wine should complement one another, not compete. The style of the dish and the ingredients used in its preparation loosely dictate the choice of wine. Highly seasoned foods, such as Thai food or some Chinese foods, need wines, such as a dry Gewurztraminer, that can stand up to assertive flavors. Lighter foods, such as grilled fish, work best with more delicate whites such as Sauvignon Blanc or a light Chardonnay. Hearty reds such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Petite Sirah work best with roast meats or meats in dark sauces.

Tasting

To fully appreciate the complexity of wine, the senses of sight, smell, taste and even touch must be employed. Tasting begins with the eyes by noting the color and clarity of the wine. Next, swirl the wine in the glass to release the aromas (the distinctive scent related to the odor of the grape variety) and bouquet (the complexity of odors a mature wine develops with bottle-age).

The smell of the wine is very important as the nose can make thousands of discriminations while only four tastes — sweet, sour, bitter and salty — are discerned through the taste buds.

Hold a small amount of wine in your mouth. Chew it, pull air through your teeth to draw the aromas to the nasal passages. Note any tartness or sweetness. Temperature, tannins and the effervescence of sparkling wines are perceived through the sense of touch in the mouth. All of these sensations combine to form the impression of the wine.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF CALIFORNIA WINE

Winegrapes are grown in 45 of California's 58 counties, from as far south as San Diego to near the Oregon border in the north, covering over 327,000 acres of land with vineyards. The temperate climate zone and long coastline of the state, with its warm days and cool nights, make near-perfect growing conditions for winegrapes.

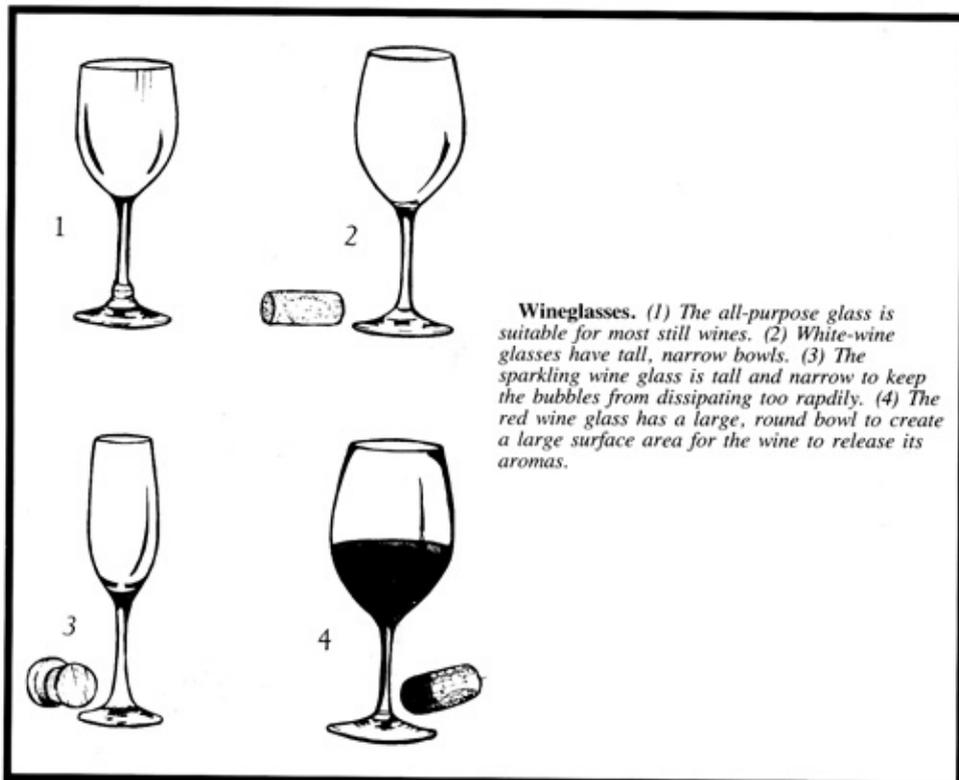
California's five wine regions — North Coast, Central Coast, South Coast, Central Valley and Sierra Foothills — are broken down into over 60 Approved Viticultural Areas (AVAs). The system of approved viticultural areas was established by the federal government as a means of organizing winegrowing regions. Each area is clearly delineated and distinguished by geographical features, natural boundaries, topography, soil, and climate. Viticultural areas can be as large as whole California county, or as small as a single vineyard.

North Coast

The North Coast encompasses the winegrowing areas in Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Solano, and Sonoma counties. Accounting for less than a quarter of the state's total winegrape acreage, large percentages of high-quality Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot are grown in this area. The North Coast region is also home to most of California's 800 wineries.

Central Coast

From the San Francisco Bay in the north to Santa Barbara in the South, the Central Coast is a diverse



Wineglasses. (1) The all-purpose glass is suitable for most still wines. (2) White-wine glasses have tall, narrow bowls. (3) The sparkling wine glass is tall and narrow to keep the bubbles from dissipating too rapidly. (4) The red wine glass has a large, round bowl to create a large surface area for the wine to release its aromas.

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winegrowing region. It includes the Livermore Valley, Santa Cruz County, Santa Clara County, the Monterey Bay Area, San Luis Obispo County and Santa Barbara County. It ranges from the densely populated urban and suburban areas of San Francisco Bay Area, to the Santa Cruz Mountains, to the cool areas along the coast that have proved to be a good home to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes.

South Coast

Although the Southern California winegrowing region has changed due to urban expansion, new areas have appeared in Riverside County's Temecula area and San Diego County's San Pasqual Valley. This warm region is predominantly white wine country, with plantings of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Johannisberg Riesling.

Central Valley

Really two valleys — the Sacramento Valley to the north and the San Joaquin Valley to the south with the Sacramento Delta in-between — the Central Valley is the most productive agricultural area in California. Its high temperatures and rich soil make this area an excellent place to grow grapes with high yields, and as a region it accounts for over half of all wine produced in California. Over 180,000 acres of vines are spread across the Central Valley's winegrowing counties.

Sierra Foothills

The historic Gold Rush region has slowly become an important region for winemaking. About two dozen wineries are now settled in these foothills and hearty Zinfandels account for about half of all the vines in the region, with Sauvignon Blanc a distant second. This mountain climate, with its high altitudes, moist springs, and warm, dry summers, produces wines with deep, concentrated flavors and aromas.

HOW WINE IS MADE

Wine is one of the most natural and simple food beverages on earth; one that will, literally, make itself. Yeast cells, one of the key components in the winemaking process, are naturally present on the outside of grape skins.

Once the skins are broken, the yeasts convert the natural sugars in the fruit to alcohol and carbon dioxide gas, beginning the "magic" of fermentation.

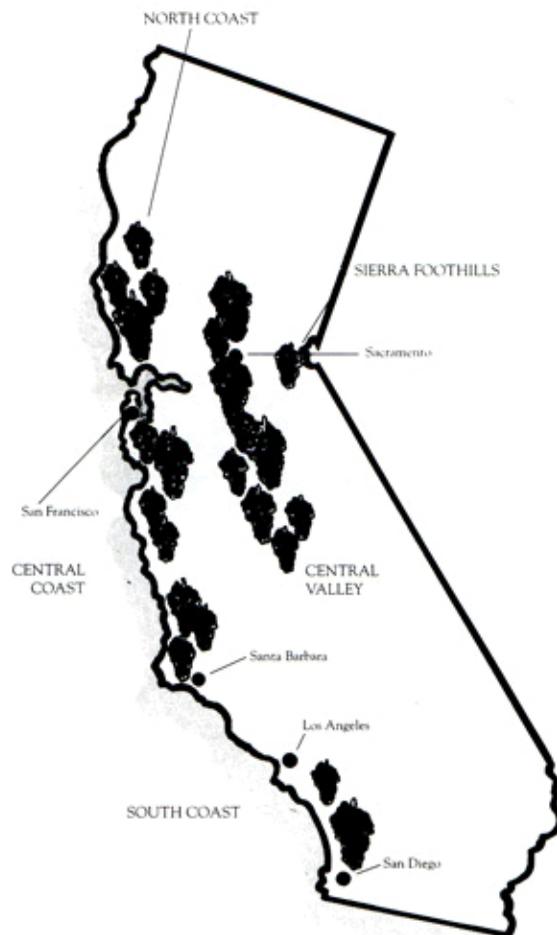
Still Wine

All wines begin in the vineyard. Soil, climate, weather and cultural practices directly affect the quality and character of the grapes. Harvest in California usually begins in late August to early

September and can last through November depending on the weather and variety. Once the grapes are harvested, they are placed in a destemmer/crusher which separates the stems from the fruit and breaks up the berries. The stems are then discarded leaving the "must," a combination of juice, seeds, pulp and skins. At this point, the processes for red and white wine production begin to differentiate.

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California Wine Regions



California Wine Regions. In 1960 the total area devoted to winegrapes in California stood at 100,000 acres. Today, over 327,000 acres of winegrapes are scattered across the state.

Most of California's 800 wineries are located in the North Coast region which includes Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma and Solano counties. This area also has sizeable percentages of the state's Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon acreage.

The Central Coast includes the winegrowing areas from the San Francisco Bay Area south to Santa Barbara and includes the Livermore Valley and Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo counties. The Central Valley accounts for most of California's wine production covering over 180,000 acres.

The South Coast includes the Temecula area in Riverside county and the San Pasqual Valley in San Diego county. The Sierra Foothills include Amador and El Dorado counties and is a region prized for its rich Zinfandels.

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White Wine

The juice from both red and white winegrapes is without color. In red wine production, the skins are fermented with the crushed juice to give it color and flavor. Unless a full-bodied white wine is desired, the skins and seeds are usually removed from the must after only a few hours leaving juice known as "free-run." The skins are pressed to extract all the remaining juice, called press juice. The free-run and press juice are then filtered in preparation for fermentation. At some point in production, the press juice may be blended back into the free-run. Next, the juice is placed in stainless steel tanks or oak barrels where the wine will ferment following the addition of yeast. White wine fermentation lasts from three days to three weeks.

When fermentation has run its course, the vintner will stop the process and filter the wine to remove solids and yeast remnants. The wine is then aged for a period of one week to a year in stainless steel, oak or redwood containers, or it can be aged in the bottle. After aging, the wine may be blended with other wines with different characteristics to create the desired style. The next stage is finishing, a process by which the wine is stabilized and filtered before bottling. Substances such as egg whites or gelatin are added to remove astringent substances or proteins which can cloud the wine and give it off flavors. Sulfites may also be added to prevent oxidation and bacterial spoilage.

Red Wine

Red wines are fermented with the grape skins and seeds at warmer temperatures than white wines. The skins float to the top forming a cap during fermentation and must be moistened regularly with juice to extract color and flavors. Red wines are usually fermented for a period of five to ten days and then are filtered, clarified and preserved with the addition of sulfites.

It is common for red wines to be aged in oak barrels for a period of about one to two years. As with whites, the vintner may choose to blend

at this stage. The wine is then finished, filtered and clarified before bottling.

Blush wine

Blush wines, such as White Zinfandel, White Grenache or White Cabernet, are in contact with the skins for a very short period — usually six to eight hours. Fermentation is halted before all of the sugars can be converted to alcohol, giving these wines a slightly sweeter or off-dry

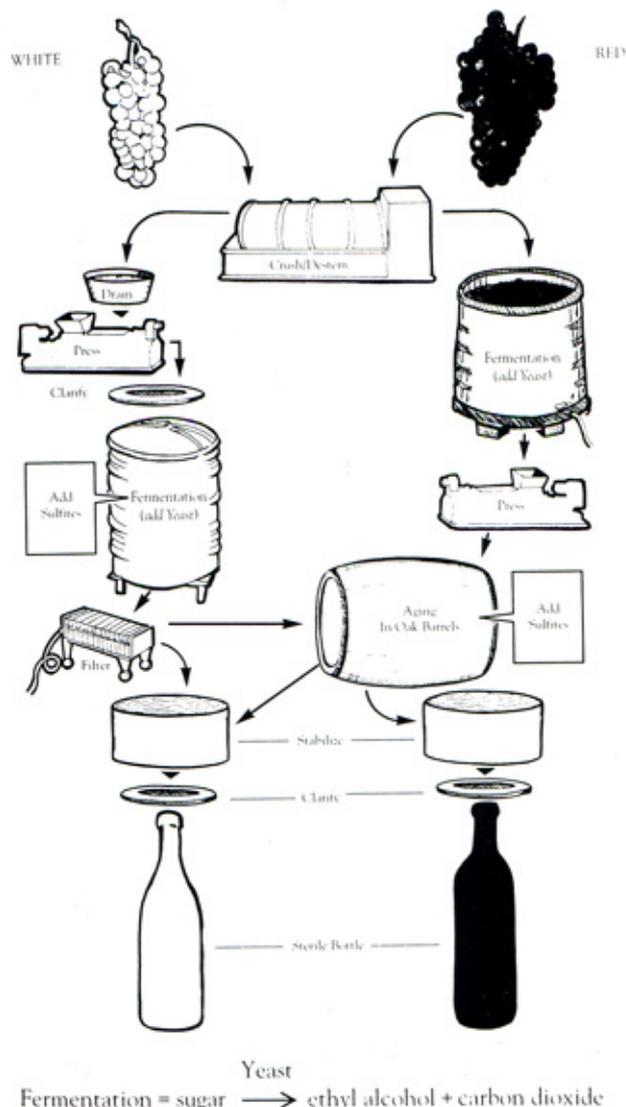
taste.

Sparkling Wine

Sparkling wines are made from still wines, such as Chenin Blanc, French Colombard, Chardonnay or Pinot Noir, which serve as a base wine for the next stage in this unique winemaking process. A "tirage" — a blend of the base wine, yeast nutrient and a source of sugar — is added to the base wine

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Stages in the Winemaking Process



Stages in the Winemaking Process.

Winemakers can choose from numerous variations on the basic winemaking process to craft the desired style of the wine. For instance, a white wine can be fermented and aged in oak barrels, fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, or any combination of stainless steel and oak barrel fermenting and aging can be used. These stylistic differences can produce completely different wines from the same grapes. Diagrammed above is an outline of the winemaking process for both red and white wines.

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and the mixture is fermented a second time in a sealed container which traps carbon dioxide producing the effervescence or bubbles.

There are two basic methods of secondary fermentation: *methode champenoise*, or bottle fermented; and the *charmat* or bulk process. Each process produces a different style of sparkling wine. In *methode champenoise* production, the more time-intensive of the two processes, the tirage and the base wine are bottled and cellared for a period of six months to two years or more. The yeast cells break down during the second fermentation giving the wine unique aromas and flavors. When fermentation is complete, the sediment is collected and removed before a "dosage," a blend of wine and sweetener, is added to replace any wine lost during sediment removal.

The bulk or *charmat* process is similar except the wine undergoes fermentation in a large tank, instead of the bottle, and is fermented for a shorter period of time.

Dessert Wine

Grapes for dessert wines are harvested at slightly higher sugars than those for table wines. Fermentation is stopped before all the sugar can be converted to alcohol by the addition of

brandy. The wines are often aged in oak or stainless steel.

Wine Appreciation

You really don't have to know much about wine to enjoy it. All you need to do is open and pour. However, as with other pursuits and interests, a greater appreciation of wine can be developed by learning a little — or a lot — more about it.

The subject of wine is diverse and fertile, which is why people from many backgrounds and professions are drawn to it. Wine is, and has been, a cultural force of tremendous importance functioning as a profound religious symbol; a prized object of pleasure, celebration and inspiration; a medicine; and a simple beverage that enhances daily meals.

Wine also offers an inexhaustible dimension of sensory enjoyment and personal discovery, aspects which can be heightened through an understanding of how wine stimulates the senses of sight, smell and taste. Exploring a variety of wines — always with an open mind — will help reveal just how full of nuances even similar wines can be. This is one element of wine appreciation.

But true appreciation of wine derives from the realization that it is meant to be shared with those around us, without pretense or affectation, in proper measure, and as an enhancement to our lives.