

DiWINEtaste

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Wood or No Wood?

The story begins by using it for practical reasons, then followed the improvements and the intuitions that every discovery originated by technology has to go through, then it became a charming fashion therefore abuse, and finally became an argument where opposed and warily parts were ready to fight each other, just like a crusade, in order to support their own right and indisputable theories and positions.

Wood, capable of giving sensational qualities to wine, according to some, or to drastically change its nature, according to others, is often cause of many arguments among the ones who love the nectar of Bacchus. We think there is something we can say about the way wood has been used with wine: let's admit this, we really exaggerated with it. For too much time they relied on the magic of casks and of wood to turn a mediocre and coarse wine into something acceptable. We should remember, not only the ones who make wine but, first of all, the ones who like it and appreciate it, wine is made from grapes and it is not an infusion of wood. Wine is what is produced by the winemaker, it is not something produced by the carpenter, in respect and with the most profound admiration we can have for this profession. Good wine originates from vineyard, a good vineyard, and grows up in the cellar but, in order to properly grow up, it needs good and solid bases, that is an excellent matter created by the works accomplished in the vineyard. We are not saying, of course, wood should not be used with wine, indeed, we believe wood should be considered as a tool a winemaker can use, hopefully used with intelligence and in a proper way. Wood and cask are surely useful in making many styles of wine; the many benefits, the refining process and the development a wine gets from staying in wood are surely precious and indisputable, but when we happen to smell a glass of wine and the only aroma it comes out is the one of wood, well, frankly speaking, this just gets us puzzled.

What can we say about the ones who associate the smell and taste of wood in wine as a main factor of quality? We should remind them this aroma and this taste can be easily added to wine not only by using a cask, but in most cases by simply soaking a sack of cheap and simple wood chips in the wine, therefore, smell and taste of wood in wine does not just mean "cask". We are not saying the ones who like a strong smell and taste of wood in wine are wrong, we just wanted to say that, please, do not evaluate the quality of a wine just for the intensity and the preponderance of wood aromas.

To be honest, we should notice that exaggeration of wood aromas and tastes in wine are the result of a certain kind of wine making process and of speculative marketing strategies, so famous and looked forward in the past years, where the indiscriminate use of wood (wood, not just cask!) has produced

so many wines, all alike, all the same, and gave origin to what is now called the "international taste" and maybe, for a matter of habits, has been associated with quality. It is sad to admit that grapes and the area of origin of a wine have been, not only considered as marginal, but mainly ignored: every wine that had wood smell and taste could be considered as a quality wine as well as considered as exceptionally good. It is sad as well to admit this is still happening nowadays.

Does this make any sense? Does it make any sense to have so many grapes varieties, so different one each other, and so many areas that make wine, factors that, along with wine-makers' skill and competence, make unique wines, full of their typical aromas and taste, when everything has to be hidden with wood? We could just use one kind of grape, get rid of the others as they would become useless, have good wood chips, or in the best cases, a good cask, and here we have the excellent and good "international wine". Honestly speaking, we have no interest on this kind of wine, not really. Once tasted a wine like that, it would mean to having been tasted every other wine. Maybe the ones who make use of so much wood are just trying to hide some defects or the mediocre quality of their wines? Well, the temptation to believe to this hypothesis is pretty strong.

We do not want to be misunderstood: we are not trying to discourage the use of wood, what we say is that wine and cask can wonderfully get along only when they complete one each other, when the typical aromas of the grapes used are well recognizable and the aromas of wood, being pleasantly perceivable, should not play the part of the only actor on the stage, maybe the main actor, and having all the others playing just

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marginal and useless roles. This is true for any kind of wine, no exception. In case a winemaker decides to refine a wine by using a cask (we like the idea of him or her using a cask instead of wood chips) he or she should make a wise use of it without outraging or plagiarizing the proper qualities of the wine. In case he or she truly needs a lot of wood in order to have his or her wine drinkable and appreciable, we invite him or her to reconsider and to improve the qualities of the grapes and to think about the work done in the vineyard. We invite him or her to invest more money and more time on the care and on the quality of grapes, not just on the casks. After all, one of the most appreciated qualities of wine is balance; exaggerating one particular aspect, including wood, would mean to make an unbalanced and scarcely interesting wine.

However, there is another side of the story. Talking with some wine producers they complain the fact that the wines they sell the best are the ones which have strong and predominant wood aromas, just because this is what their customers want the most. According to this indisputable marketing rule, surely capable of giving good profits, the production is regulated according to this. Anyway, it should be noticed that a good number of producers would like to use less wood as opposed to what they are actually using, even because, using casks, not wood chips, is a considerable cost which is repeated almost every two years.

We believe this is because of the fault of both wine producers and consumers, they are equally responsible for this. Wine producers who made for a long time "wood-wine", and had their customers to get used to associate the taste of wine to the one of wood and they ended up believing good wine should taste or smell of wood. Consumers have their faults because they did not want to improve their culture about wine and they exclusively relied on certain products, perhaps there was nothing else to choose from or simply because they have been just lazy in finding something better, or even because what was better was also too much expensive. It is more likely there are consumers out there who really like wood smell and taste, therefore there is no argument or dispute; personal taste is surely indisputable. In case these very consumers like this kind of wine because they did not have the chance to try something different and therefore they have nothing to compare to, or just because they got lazy and are not interested in discovering something new, then we invite them all to try something new and different. Fortunately we are having a sort of different and renewed trend and wine makers are looking forward to make things different, there are a lot of excellent wines out there where the personality of the grape is fully respected and very well expressed, even by making use of wood, without exaggerating too much,

and they allow the consumers to rediscover a new, as well as ancient, enological emotion. Does wood mean quality? Surely yes, as long as the wine and the grapes used to make it are of high quality long before they get into the cask. Welcome back wine!

MailBox

In this column are published our reader's mail. If you have any comment or any question or just want to express your opinion about wine, send your letters to our editorial at Mail@DiWineTaste.com.

I just finished reading your publication and I found it very interesting and useful, particularly, I appreciated the report about grappa which has been a very pleasant discovery to me. I also found interesting the report about serving temperature: I could not imagine temperature played such an important role in evaluating a wine. I tried myself the experiments you suggested and I was very surprised by the fact that as the temperature was getting higher the wine tasted so different! The next time I will offer some wine to my friends, I will make sure to pay attention to serving temperature and I will make use of your suggestions. Thank you!

Elizabeth Goodman – San Francisco, California (USA)

Dear Ms. Goodman, we are very glad to know you found DiWineTaste interesting and, above all, that it was useful to you to understand an important aspect like serving temperature. Thank you for what you wrote about our publication. We sincerely hope you will continue reading and appreciating DiWineTaste with the same enthusiasm and satisfaction. Thank you.



*Dear DiWineTaste,
I downloaded your magazine and I read it and found it very interesting. Congratulations for everything, I will surely continue reading DiWineTaste and to download it every month. I would like to ask you a question. Some friends of mine gave me as a gift for my birthday a bottle of Barolo 1990 and, as I am not going to open it, I was asking myself for how long I can keep this wine without having it ruined. Considering the year, maybe the time to open it has just come?*

Alberto Ghisolfi – Parma (Italy)

First of all thank you for your words of appreciation about DiWineTaste, we are glad to know you found it interesting. Keeping wine is a relatively complex subject because it is based on many factors, each one of them determining the success and the longevity. First of all, the place and the way used to keep it, the well-known rule of keeping the bottle in horizontal position must be applied for sure. Barolo, which is produced with Nebbiolo grape, is usually long lasting and, as for every wine, year and area of production have to be considered. Barolo can last, in best cases, for even 20 and more years and you can consider yourself lucky because 1990 was one of the best vintages

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of the past century. If you wish, you can open your bottle and enjoy an excellent vintage, however, you can keep the wine to develop for many years, provided you have proper place and condition for keeping wine.



First of all, my best congratulations for this new publication about wine, it is very interesting as well as comprehensive, I particularly found interesting the report about wine tasting and I hope you will continue discussing this subject in the next issues. One night some friends of mine and I went out and we had a very good German wine that had "Mosel-Saar-Ruwer" written on the label. With what grapes is this wine made from?

Jean-Jacques Bouard – Corbeil-Essonnes (France)

Dear Mr. Bouard, thank you for what you wrote about our publication; we are glad to know you found the first issue of DiWineTaste interesting. The subject of wine tasting will be discussed every month as we believe it is essential for spreading wine culture and for being properly appreciated. Talking about the wine you had the chance to drink with your friends, the "Mosel-Saar-Ruwer" is one of the most appreciated and renowned areas of Germany. Unfortunately the information you provided us is not enough to tell what grapes they used to make that wine, however, we can try to figure them out. The most cultivated grape of that area is Riesling as well as Müller Thurgau and Elbing. As the majority of the wines made in that area are produced with Riesling, it is likely to be that the wine you enjoyed with your friends was made with that grape.

ABC WINE

France

If we have to tell a wine making country that had, and still has, a strong influence on all the others and that almost anyone tries to imitate its production model and style, this country would surely be France. This country understood, long before than anyone else in the world, that quality of wine was one of the most important and determinant factors for success. Nowadays, most of the quality wine production in the world is largely based on the French model. Every wine area of France is, in a way or another, considered as a reference model to follow in order to make most of the style of wines: Bordeaux, Bourgogne and Rhône Valley for red wines; Bourgogne, Loire Valley and Alsace for white wines; Champagne for sparkling wines. The secret of French success, besides having a territory suited for viticulture, was mainly determined by the attention they paid on grapes quality and on wine making techniques, last but not the least, an efficient commercial strategy supported by an excellent product.

Just like Italy, France has a very ancient tradition about wine making and its history is as ancient as about 2500 years. The first traces about the presence and the culture of grape in France are dated back to 600 B.C., when Greeks established *Massalia*, the modern Marseille, and introduced vine. How-



Fig. 1: France

ever, just like the majority of the wine making countries of Europe, it is believed that wild vines were present in France before Greeks times. The strong development of enology and viticulture in France started with Romans, at the end of the second century BC, as they were used to consume huge amounts of wine, a precious beverage for their army, Romans had the custom of introducing their traditions and products everywhere they went to conquer new lands for their empire. Before those times, Gauls, the local people of France, were used to consume lots of Italian wine, as at those times it was more renowned and famous than French wine. Even Etruscans exported wine in France and some amphoras found in the Bourgogne area confirm this ancient trade. Pliny the Elder, in his monumental *Naturalis Historia*, wrote that in *Vienna*, the modern Vienne, in the Rhône Valley, a "resinated" wine was made and it was sold at very high prices. The Rhône Valley is what can be historically considered as the very first wine area of France. It was in this area that Romans established *Narbo*, also known as *Gallia Narbonensis*, the modern Narbonne, the city considered at those times as the most important French one for production and for quality wines. Vine and wine were very cultivated and produced in Narbo and from there they spread all over France. Commercial history of French wine started soon after when the city of *Burdigala*, the modern Bordeaux, became a strong and important city of trade, also thanks to the vicinity of the Atlantic ocean. It is believed in that very time they started producing and selling wine in Bordeaux.

During the sixth century viticulture was very common and spread everywhere in France's territory, they were mainly monks that were used to cultivate vine in their monasteries because it was used to make wine for the Mass. Special thanks must go to the precious work of the monks for the enology; their valuable contribution allowed the improvement and the development of wine technology, even modern technology is still largely based on the work of those monks.

Viticulture in France is currently spread almost everywhere in the territory, only Spain and Italy have a higher quantity of land destined to vine culture, however quality production areas of France are about ten and they all are enclosed and defined in determined geographical areas. Grapes cultivated in France are generally spread everywhere in the territory and, of course, there are species that give better results in determined areas instead of others, and they become the enological symbol of those areas. For example, Bourgogne is renowned for Pinot noir and Chardonnay; Bordeaux for its very popu-

lar *Bordeaux blend*, that is Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon; Loire Valley for Sauvignon blanc and Alsace for Riesling and Gewürztraminer. The most cultivated white grapes species of France are: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Chenin Blanc, Sémillon, Pinot Blanc, Silvaner, Muscat blanc, Muscadet and Ugni Blanc. The most cultivated red ones are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Grenache, Gamay and Carignan.

These grapes have been spread from France to practically all the other wine making countries of the world and, trying to imitate the French model, they want to emulate quality and style as if the only factor to make a good wine is the kind of grape used. The success of French wine is not only determined by the grapes they use: territory and climate are other fundamental factors for their success that, as well as a very ancient experience oriented to quality of matters and techniques, they strongly contributed to the success of the French enology.

French Quality System

The need of defining a quality production system for wines in France, emerged in the years of 1920, when, mainly because of the terrible devastation of phylloxera, production of ordinary and coarse wine was very high and the fame of French enology declined and the availability of quality wine was scarce and limited. Frauds and adulterations of wine were also very popular at that time and, to tell the truth, not only in France. The French quality system started to be defined in the beginning of the 1930 and they named it as *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (Appellation of Controlled Origin), abbreviated as *AOC* or, in short *Appellation Contrôlée*, abbreviated as *AC*. They actually created the most imitated wine quality production system in the world. Examples of quality systems based on the French model include the *AVA* (*American Viticultural Areas*) used in the United States of America, the Italian *DOC* system (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata*), Spain's *DO* (*Denominación de Origen*) and Portugal's *DOC* (*Denominação de Origem Controlada*): they surely had not the same success and efficiency.

The fundamental principles on what the French quality system is based mainly derived from the work done in 1923 by Baron Le Roy, an influential and important producer of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. He set and adopted rigid and strict rules for the production of his wines. These rules included the exact definition of the geographical area, grapes varieties permitted, cultivation and pruning methods as well as the minimum percentage of alcohol by volume. In 1935 was established *INAO* (*Institut National des Appellations d'Origine*, National Institute of Appellations of Origin), with the explicit scope of defining, determining and strengthening the production's disciplinary for each *AOC* and they were largely based on the model set and determined by Baron Le Roy.

The majority of the production's disciplinary of the most renowned French wines were defined just after *INAO* was established, however, they have been largely and continuously improved and revised during the course of time. It was only in 1949 that *INAO* introduced the category of *VDQS* (*Vin D'élite de Qualité Supérieure*, Delimited Wine of Superior Quality) which is at a lower level than *AOC*. French quality system is not perfect, even though it cannot ensure the quality of a spe-

cific producer's wine, it surely sets and defines rigid criteria that strongly influence and regulate the production of wine.

The main factors that allow French wines to belong to the *AOC* category are seven:

- **Territory** - vineyard area is exactly defined according to historical facts about location and traditions of the past centuries. Other factors are typology of land, position and altitude
- **Grapes** - allowed grapes for wine production are defined for each area according to historical and local traditions, also based on yield and quality according to local conditions and climate
- **Cultural practices** - defines the maximum number of vines per hectare as well as pruning and fertilization techniques
- **Yield** - every *AOC* defines the maximum quantity of wine that can be produced from every vineyard, the value is expressed in hectoliters per hectare
- **Alcohol by volume** - every *AOC* defines the minimum percentage of alcohol by volume in a wine
- **Wine making techniques** - every *AOC* defines techniques and procedures for wine making, they are usually based on area's traditions, the ones that allowed to obtain the best results in the course of time
- **Organoleptic tests** - Since 1979 every wine which is candidate to be entitled as *AOC* is evaluated by a commission

Categories allowed by the French quality system are four and they are listed as follows, from the highest to the lowest level:

- **Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, AOC** - is the highest and strictest quality level of the system. An *AOC* can also define sub zones
- **Vin D'élite de Qualité Supérieure, VDQS** - has similar rules to the ones of the *AOC* category although less rigid and strict. About 2% of the total French production belongs to *VDQS*. Wines belonging to this category are usually waiting to be entitled as *AOC*
- **Vin de Pays** - has rules like the above categories, however they are less rigid and strict. They allow, for example, higher yields and a lower percentage of alcohol by volume. Wines belonging to this category are usually produced in wider areas as opposed to *AOC* wines.
- **Vin de Table** - is the category to which belong all the wines that cannot be entitled to the other and higher levels, either for lack or insufficiency of requirements

In French wine labels can also be used special terms that often have a direct meaning, although sometimes vague and confusing, with quality. The most frequent terms found in French wine labels is listed as follows.

- **Château** - even though this term means "castle" in French, when used in wine business it has no connection with the evocative and massive medieval buildings. A *Château* is a wine business that makes wine and it is usually used in the Bordeaux area. The term is always followed by the specific name of the winery

- **Clos** - the meaning of this word is “closed” or “enclosed”. In French wine business indicates a delimited or enclosed vineyard or estate. This term is usually used in the Bourgogne and only wineries that own vineyards, make and bottle their wine can make use of this term in the label. The term is always followed by other indications defining the vineyard or property
- **Domaine** - the meaning of this word is “property” and is usually used in Bourgogne. It defines a property, belonging to a single winery, made of one or more vineyards, even located in different areas
- **Côte** - “side” in English, this term indicates the side of a hill or a slope and it is usually referred to a delimited quality production area, mainly Bourgogne
- **Cru** - although its meaning is “grew”, in French’s wine parlance indicates a determined area, usually a single vineyard or a tiny area, having specific qualities, climate, geological and environmental conditions, which produces quality wines having superior characteristics as well as unique and well identifiable qualities
- **Grand Cru** - this term is used in Bourgogne and indicates a wine produced in a vineyard having superior quality and it is the highest quality level to which a Bourgogne wine can belong to. The same meaning is used in Champagne and in Alsace as well. In Bordeaux this term has not the same importance as in the other areas and it is used for some Château, mainly the ones in the Saint-Émilion area
- **Grand Cru Classé** - the term is mainly used for Bordeaux wines. In Saint-Émilion area is considered as the second level of classification, whereas in the Médoc and Sauternes areas indicates a wine belonging to a category from the second one to the fifth one
- **Premier Cru (1er Cru)** - in Bordeaux, except Sauternes and Barsac areas, indicates a wine belonging to the highest category of classification. There are currently only five Château that belong to this category. In Sauternes area is considered as the second category of classification. In Bourgogne indicates the second level of classification, just under the Grand Cru category
- **Premier Grand Cru (1er Grand Cru)** - is the highest level of classification for Sauternes wines. There is currently only one Château belonging to this category. It can also be indicated as *Premier Cru Supérieur*
- **Premier Grand Cru Classé (1er Grand Cru Classé)** - in Saint-Émilion area indicates the highest category of classification for a wine. This term can also be found in Médoc and Sauternes wine labels having the meaning of “Premier Grand Cru”
- **Cru Classé** - it mainly indicates the renowned classification of the 1855 for Médoc wines in Bordeaux. The system has five categories, from one to five (*Premier Cru, Deuxième Cru, Troisième Cru, Quatrième Cru, Cinquième Cru*). In this same classification system, Sauternes/Barsac wines were classified in just two categories (*Premier Cru, Deuxième Cru*). The term is also used for the classification of the wines of Graves, in the Bordeaux area, and does not allow any subclass, therefore every quality wine from Graves, both white ones and red ones,

are defined as “Cru Classé”. The name used for the classification system in Saint-Émilion uses “Cru Classé” term as well.

- **Cru Bourgeois** - it is a category of classification for Bordeaux wines, in particular, to the wines having a lower quality level than the ones belonging to the “Cru Classé”. The highest level for this classification is *Cru Bourgeois Supérieurs Exceptionnel*, usually indicated in short as *Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel* or *Cru Exceptionnel*. The second category is referred as *Cru Bourgeois Supérieurs* or *Cru Grand Bourgeois*, followed by a third and last category named as *Cru Bourgeois*
- **Supérieur** - this term usually indicates a wine having a higher percentage of alcohol by volume than the ones belonging to the same category. Sometimes the term indicates, besides a higher percentage of alcohol by volume, a lower yield than the one defined for the wines of its category.

Production Areas

Wine production in France is, considering quantity, the second of the world, only Italy has a higher production. According to climate and geographic location, France can be divided in three regions. In the north, where Champagne, Bourgogne and Alsace are located, there is a continental climate, having cold winters and rainy autumns. In the south, where the climate is typically Mediterranean, grapes reach full maturation and the wines produced here are full bodied and rich. Lastly, the western area, where Bordeaux and Loire Valley are located, the strong influence of the Atlantic ocean creates a sea climate, wet and rainy, tempered by the gulf’s air streams.

The number of grapes varieties used in France for making wine are a little less than forty, however the variety of the territory and the characteristics of each area, allow a production of wine very different one from another: from delicate white wines to refined sparkling wines of indisputable elegance, from pleasing and interesting rose or blush wines to full bodied and magnificent red wines.

Quality production areas belonging to France’s AOC are ten and about the half of them actually and mainly contributed to make France one of the most famous and prestigious wine countries of the world.

Alsace

This region is located in the north-east area of France, bordering Germany, and mainly produces white wines and the most renowned and famous wine is surely the one made from Gewürztraminer grape. Alsace actually represents an exception in the French quality system because it is the only area where the name of the grape can be indicated in the label, mainly for traditional reasons, whereas in all the other areas it is not allowed. Production of red and rose wines is scarce, about the eight percent of total production. A very famous wine from Alsace is the *Crémant d’Alsace*, a sparkling wine produced with the classic method of the second fermentation in bottle.

Alsace also produces excellent wines obtained from late

vintages (*Vendanges Tardives*) and the renowned *Sélection de Grains Nobles*, sweet, complex, concentrated and aromatic wines produced with strict selections of grapes, usually harvested berry by berry, where a beneficial mold (*Botrytis Cinerea*) developed on grapes. The main white grapes used in Alsace are Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot gris and Muscat blanc: these are the only grapes allowed for making the *Alsace Grand Cru* AOC wines. Other white grapes cultivated in this area are Silvaner and Pinot blanc. The main red grapes cultivated in Alsace are Pinot noir and Gamay. A special mention should go to the wines of Moselle and *Les Côtes de Toul*, both produced in the Lorraine area, and the so called *Edelzwicker*, a wine made by assembling more grapes together and their names are not written in the label.

AOC: **white:** Alsace, Alsace Grand Cru (*Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot gris, Muscat blanc*) **sparkling:** Crémant d'Alsace (*Pinot blanc, Riesling, Pinot gris, Pinot noir, Chardonnay*)

Bordeaux

Bordeaux represents the widest and broadest area of appellation of origin in France besides being one of the most renowned ones. This area is located in western France and benefits of a particular tempered climate because of the vicinity of the Atlantic ocean and because of the influence of the estuary of the Gironde, whose coasts are extensively cultivated with vines. Bordeaux area includes more than 50 AOC, both regional and communal AOC. The Médoc, located between the Atlantic ocean and the Gironde, has two regional AOC, the *Médoc* and the *Haut-Médoc* which comprises six communal AOC (*Saint-Estèphe, Pauillac, Saint-Julien, Listrac-Médoc, Moulis en Médoc e Margaux*). Wines produced in the Médoc and in Haut-Médoc areas are red and are the most renowned ones of the area, of course, they are not the only ones produced here. The area of *Graves* produces both white wines and red wines and it is located south from Médoc. Recently, the north-east area of Graves has been entitled to a specific appellation: *Pessac-Léognan*.

Another renowned and important appellation area in Bordeaux is *Sauternes/Barsac*, renowned for its sweet and complex wines produced with grapes where a beneficial and noble mold (*Botrytis Cinerea*) developed on its berries. Other areas producing similar wines are *Cérons, Cadillac, Loupiac* and *Sainte-Croix-du-Mont*. In the *Entre-Deux-Mers* area, located between the rivers Garonne and Dordogne, are produced white wines from *Sémillon* and *Sauvignon blanc* grapes. Another interesting area of Bordeaux is *Libournais* which includes the areas of *Saint-Émilion, Pomerol* and *Fronsac*.

The main wine produced in Bordeaux is red which is made from *Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc* and *Merlot* grapes, in different proportions according to the specific areas. White grapes cultivated in this area are *Sémillon, Sauvignon blanc, Muscadelle, Colombard* and *Ugni Blanc*. The most famous grapes of this area which originated the so called *Bordeaux blend* are *Merlot, Cabernet Franc* and *Cabernet Sauvignon*. Other grapes varieties cultivated in this area are *Malbec* or *Côt, Petit Verdot* and *Carmenère*, which is unfortunately getting more and more rare.

Main AOC: **white:** Sauternes et Barsac (*Sémillon, Sauvignon*

Blanc, Muscadelle), *Cérons, Cadillac, Loupiac, Sainte-Croix-de-Mont*(same grapes used for *Sauternes*) *Entre-Deux-Mers* (*Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc*) **red:** Médoc, Haut-Médoc (sub zones: *Saint-Estèphe, Pauillac, Saint-Julien, Listrac-Médoc, Moulis en Médoc, Margaux*) *Graves, Pessac-Léognan, Libournais* (sub zones: *Saint-Émilion, Pomerol, Fronsac et Canon-Fronsac*) (*Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Malbec* in different proportions)

Bourgogne

In this area, located in central France, are produced both white wines and red wines, elegant and refined, and last but not the least, renowned everywhere. Bourgogne is divided in five main production areas: *Chablis, Côte d'Or, Côte Chalonnaise, Macônnaise* and *Beaujolais* and they comprise more than one hundred AOC. Wine production is equally distributed between whites and reds and the main white grapes cultivated in this area are *Chardonnay* and *Aligoté*, whereas the most cultivated red grapes are *Pinot noir* and *Gamay*.

The northern area of Bourgogne, pretty distant from the main area, is *Chablis*, whose production is mainly dedicated to white wines made from *Chardonnay* grape. *Chablis* wines are classified, from lowest to highest level, as *Petit Chablis, Chablis, Chablis Premier Cru* and *Chablis Grand Cru*, they are very elegant and refined and are considered as a model for white wines as well as being imitated by most wine producers in the world.

The northern side of the main area of Bourgogne is occupied by the renowned *Côte d'Or*, which is divided in two distinct areas, the one to the north is called *Côte de Nuits*, whereas the one to the south is called *Côte de Beaune*. Both areas have two subzones which are respectively called *Hautes Côte de Nuits* and *Hautes Côte de Beaune*. *Côte d'Or* produces both white wines and red wines and this is the most looked for and renowned wine area of Bourgogne, a true reference model for the enology of this area. In *Côte de Nuits* are mainly produced red wines made from *Pinot noir* grapes, red wines from this area are the most long lasting and looked for of Bourgogne. From this particular area come the renowned *Gevrey-Chambertin, Vosne-Romanée* and *Nuits Saint-Georges*. In *Côte de Beaune* are mainly produced white wines made from *Chardonnay* grapes, however here they also make excellent examples of red wines made from *Pinot noir* grape, such as *Corton* and certain *Pommard*. The most renowned and representative white wines of Bourgogne are the ones from *Corton, Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet e Chassagne-Montrachet*.

South from *Côte d'Or*, there is the *Côte Chalonnaise*, where white and red wines are produced. The most important red wines of this area certainly come from *Mercrey* and *Givry*, whereas the most important white ones are from *Montagny* and *Rully*. South from this area is located *Mâconnais*, a very renowned area for its excellent white wines, made from *Chardonnay* grapes, which also include *Pouilly-Fuissé* and *Saint-Véran*. In this area there is also a modest production of red wines made from *Pinot noir* and *Gamay* grapes.

The southern side of Bourgogne is occupied by the area of *Beaujolais*, which is mainly renowned for its fruity *Beaujolais nouveau*, ready and released on the third Thursday of November. The main grape, and surely the most important one of this area, is *Gamay*, however, although in scarce quantities, in

Beaujolais are also produced white wines made from Chardonnay grape. The most important areas of Beaujolais all produce red wines and the most renowned and important one of them all is *Beaujolais-Villages*.

Main AOC: white: Chablis, Puligny-Montrachet, Chassagne-Montrachet, Aloxe-Corton, Pouilly-Fuissé, Saint-Véran, Montagny, Rully (*all produced with Chardonnay*) Bourgogne Aligoté Bouzeron (*Aligoté*) **red:** Gevrey-Chambertin, Vosne-Romanée, Nuits Saint-Georges, Aloxe-Corton, Pomard, Santenay, Mercurey, Givry, Rully (*all produced with Pinot noir*), Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages, Fleurie, Brouilly, Moulin-à-Vent (*Gamay*)

Champagne

This area, which does not certainly need any introduction, produces almost exclusively sparkling wines with *Méthode Champenoise* and they all are famous and looked for in every part of the world. This area is divided in five regions, *Montagne de Reims*, *Vallée de la Marne*, *Côte de Blancs*, *Côte de Sézanne* and *Côte de Bar*, and the only white grape cultivated here is Chardonnay, whereas red grapes cultivated in Champagne are Pinot noir and Pinot meunier. Champagne also has two AOC producing still wines, that is non sparkling, *Coteaux Champenois* which produces both white and red wines, and *Les Rosés des Riceys* which produces rose wines.

Wine mainly produced in Champagne is, of course, sparkling, a known symbol for centuries of elegance, refinement and joy, this is the wine that everyone associates to celebrations and parties. Champagne wines are produced with Chardonnay, Pinot noir and Pinot meunier in different proportions and according to the preferences and choices of the producers, however, when this wine is made with part of these grapes, two specific indications are used to refer to the typology: *Blanc de Blancs*, is a Champagne produced with Chardonnay grape only, *Blanc de Noirs* is a Champagne produced with Pinot noir and Pinot meunier, or simply one of them, but no Chardonnay. There is another typology, *Champagne Rosé*, which is produced with a base white wine to which is added a small amount of red wine, both produced with typical grapes of the area. In exceptional years are also produced the so called *Champagne Millésimé* exclusively made from wines of the vintage written in the label.

Jura and Savoie

This area is located east from Bourgogne, in central France. The main white grape cultivated in Jura is Savagnin, whereas the main red varieties are Poulsard and Trousseau. Jura is renowned for its *Les Vins de Paille*, sweet and "passito style" wines, and for its *Vins Jaunes*, produced with Savagnin, particular wines refined for six years by using a technique similar to the one used in Jerez (Sherry). White grapes of Savoie are Altesse, Chasselas and Jacquère, whereas Mondeuse is the main red grape. Savoie also produces white, rose and red wines.

AOC of Jura: Côtes du Jura, Arbois, L'Étoile, Château Châlon, Crémant du Jura e Macvin du Jura. **AOC of Savoie:** Crépy, Seyssel, Vin de Savoie, Roussette de Savoie

Languedoc-Roussillon

This area is located in the southern side of France and it is renowned for the production of *Vins Doux Naturels*, naturally sweet wines produced with Muscat of Alexandria and Muscat à Petits Grains grapes. From this area also come the famous *Muscat de Rivesaltes*, *Muscat de Lunel*, *Muscat de Frontignan*, *Muscat de Mireval* and *Muscat de Saint-Jean-de-Minervois*. These wines are sweet and concentrated, rich in aromas and tastes. Another renowned wine of this area and belonging to the *Vins Doux Naturels* category is the *Banyuls* produced with Grenache noir. This area also produces many white and red AOC wines as well as a good amount of *Vins de Pays*. The main white grapes cultivated in Languedoc-Roussillon are Macabeu, Grenache blanc, Bourboulenc, Clairette, Picpoul, Muscat of Alexandria and Muscat à Petits Grains, whereas red grapes of the area include Carignan, Grenache noir, Cinsaut, Mourvèdre and Syrah.

Main AOC: Minervois, Côtes du Roussillon, Limoux, Clairette du Languedoc, Fitou, Corbières, Côtes du Roussillon-Villages, Saint-Chinian, Collioure, Coteaux du Languedoc, Faugères

Provence and Corsica

Provence, located in the southern side of France, is mainly renowned for the production of rose wines, however in this area there is also a good production of white and red wines as well as a good amount of *Vin de Pays*. The main white grapes cultivated in this area are Rolle, Ugni Blanc, Clairette and Sémillon, whereas red varieties are Grenache noir, Syrah, Cinsaut, Carignan, Mourvèdre, Tibouren and Cabernet Sauvignon. The most important production areas of Provence include *Bandol*, *Bellet* and *Cassis*.

In the island of Corsica are produced both white and red wines and the main cultivated white grape is Vermentino, whereas the most cultivated red grapes are Sciacarello and Nielluccio. The most important production areas of the island include *Patrimonio*, *Ajaccio* and *Calvi*. In Corsica they also produce a *Vin Doux Naturel: Muscat du Cap Corse*.

Provence's AOC: Côtes de Provence, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence et Les Baux-de-Provence, Palette, Cassis, Coteaux Varois, Bellet, Bandol. **Corsica's AOC:** Ajaccio, Vin de Corse (sub zones: Cap Corse, Calvi, Sartène, Figari, Porto-vecchio) Muscat du Cap Corse, Patrimonio

Loire Valley

Loire Valley is the indisputable homeland of French's Sauvignon blanc. This area is located on the northern side of the country and it is spread from Atlantic ocean to the inner land of France. Production of this area includes white wines as well as red ones, rose ones and *Vin de Pays*. The main white grape varieties cultivated in this area are Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Muscadet, whereas red grapes include Pineau d'Aunis, Grolleau, Gamay, Cabernet Franc, Côt and Pinot noir.

The western side of Loire Valley, the one located in the coasts of the Atlantic ocean, mainly produces Muscadet in the Nantes area and rose wines in the Anjou area. The central area

of Loire Valley, located near the central part of France, is called *Touraine* and produces white, rose and red wines and the most important ones are *Touraine*, *Vouvray* and *Chinon*.

In the southern side of this area, near the center of France, are produced the renowned wines of *Sancerre*, *Pouilly Fumé* and *Pouilly-sur-Loire*.

Main AOC: Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine, Muscadet des Coteaux de la Loire, Muscadet des Côtes de Grandlieu, Anjou, Saumur, Touraine, Vouvray, Chinon, Cheverny, Sancerre, Pouilly Fumé.

Rhône Valley

Rhône Valley, which is located in the southern side of France, south from Bourgogne, is very famous for its red wines. White grapes mainly cultivated in this area are Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne, Clairette, Grenache blanc and Bourboulenc, whereas red grapes include Syrah, Cinsaut, Mourvèdre and Grenache noir.

The northern side of Rhône Valley mainly produces full bodied and potent red wines made from Syrah grape. The most renowned wines of this area include *Hermitage*, *Côte Rôtie*, *Crozes-Hermitage* and *Saint-Joseph*. In this area we also find an important production site, having a tiny surface of about 3,4 hectares (8.4 acres), which produces refined and elegant white wines made from Viognier grape: *Château-Grillet*.

South from this area, we find the most representative wine of the whole Rhône Valley, the wine that allowed this area to be known and looked for in every part of the world: *Châteauneuf-du-Pape*, a wine that can be produced with even thirteen different kind of grapes. Other interesting production areas include *Gigondas* and *Côtes du Rhône-Villages*.

Main AOC: Château-Grillet, Saint-Joseph, Côte Rôtie, Condrieu, Crozes-Hermitage, Hermitage, Clairette de Die, Crémant de Die, Côtes du Rhône, Côtes du Rhône-Villages, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Lirac, Tavel, Gigondas, Vacqueyras

Southwest France

This area is located south from Bordeaux, with the exception of Bergerac which is located to the east. The main white grapes varieties cultivated in this area are Petit Manseng, Gros Manseng, Mauzac, Len de Lel (Loin de l'œil), Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle, whereas red grapes include Tannat, Fer Servadou, Duras, Négrette, Auxerrois, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. The main production areas of southwest France are *Madiran*, *Jurançon* and *Gaillac*. Very interesting wines are produced in the area of *Bergerac*, east from Bordeaux, where *Monbazillac* is certainly one of the most representative ones.

Main AOC: Madiran, Jurançon, Gaillac, Côtes du Frontonnais, Côtes de Saint-Mont, Tursan, Monbazillac, Buzet, Pécharmant, Saussignac, Côtes de Duras, Côtes du Marmandais.

WINE TASTING

ISO Tasting Glass

The most important tool for a wine taster, when correctly used, is capable of revealing any secret of a wine

A glass, when it is shaped in particular forms is also known as wineglass, is a container whose purpose is to hold a liquid substance, wine in our case, and by watching its apparent simplicity, it can also be considered as an accessory having little importance: the only property it seems to have is the capacity to hold a liquid and an opening on the top in order to let this liquid get into the mouth; it does not seem to need anything else to do its job. However, despite its apparent simplicity, glass plays an essential and determinant role during wine evaluation, first of all, it plays a fundamental role during the evaluation of one of the most exciting and amazing aspects of a wine: its aromas. Last but not the least, the shape of a glass also contributes to develop, or better, to give a higher priority, to the perception of specific tastes and allowing all the others to be perceived next.

While gustatory perception of a wine by means of a glass depends on the habits everyone has to introduce a liquid into the mouth, perception of aromas is accomplished, generally speaking, in the same way and with the same conditions by anyone. If you happen to watch a person while he or she drinks a liquid from a glass, you will notice that some of them suck the liquid, other allow the liquid to fall into the mouth, and others, with their lips almost sealed, suck with force the liquid into the mouth and, by doing so, they actually break the liquid mass with the result of a strong oxygenation of the liquid. The shape of the glass, compared to the gustatory perception of each person, greatly varies according to the ones who make use of it, just because of the habits and customs every one has to drink a liquid from a glass, except when exact instructions on how to use a glass are provided and these instructions are scrupulously followed.

The fundamental importance of a glass is mainly associated to the perception of aromas, last but not the least, to the evaluation of its aspect as well. The vast availability of glasses on the market, coming in many and different shapes, is well known to anyone, every glass producer continuously introduces new kind and styles and most of the times they also end up to create a sort of confusion and doubts about when using that particular glass or how to use a glass with a particular wine. Glass has a determinant importance during the organoleptic analysis of a wine, this is absolutely true and indisputable. However, one can be puzzled by the fact that professional wine tasters, that is those competent people who should pay a scrupulous attention on setting and arranging the best conditions when they are about to taste a wine, do not make use of a wide variety of glasses. Every wine taster, at least the professional ones, agree on the fact that to properly evaluate organoleptic qualities of a wine, that is the particular activity which requires the best conditions possible for analyzing a wine, is accomplished with success by using only one and particular kind of glass and always having the same shape: the so called ISO tasting glass (See figure 2)

If one considers the huge amount of glass shapes available



Fig. 2: ISO tasting glass filled at 50ml (1½ ÷ 1¾ fl.oz)

on the market, each one surely having a proper function and purpose according to any particular kind of wine, it can be seen as a paradox the fact that the ones who professionally determine the quality of a wine always make use of the very same type of glass. Indeed, no matter how versatile and perfect it can be, this glass has a limit for the evaluation of the appearance of lightly-sparkling and sparkling wines, however, we will see later, this glass can be used with success for this purpose provided it is properly “modified”.

The secret of the “success” for this glass is based on a long series of experiments and studies that finally led to the determination of the best and useful shape suited for the development of aromas and their best evaluation. One of the main researchers who allowed the definition of this particular and efficient glass is Mr. Jules Chauvet, a talented and esteemed wine taster and wine maker from Beaujolais, France, whose studies, conducted during the years of 1950 and based on the theory that volume to surface ratio of a glass has a direct connection with the development of aromas, have greatly contributed to understand the importance of the shape and of volume of a glass and led to the creation and determination of the characteristics and specifications of the ISO tasting glass. The typical shape of this glass is commonly referred as “stretched egg” and thanks to this particular and stretched shape and to its dimensions, result of exact and scrupulous ratios, wine aromas can better develop and express. Another fundamental characteristic of this glass is its opening, narrower than the body, which allow aromas to be concentrated in a more limited area and however sufficiently wide in order to allow the nose to accomplish a correct and useful olfactory analysis.

The dimensions of this particular glass, loyal fellow of any wine taster, was defined and determined by the *International Standards Organization*, ISO, and are specified as shown in figure 3.

When this glass is correctly filled, that is when it contains a quantity of wine of about 50ml (1½ ÷ 1¾ fl.oz), wine creates a perfect hemisphere where the surface wine-air is in perfect relation, both logic and geometrical, with the volume of the wine under this level and a sufficient air space above it is deter-

ined in order to allow aromas to get fully developed, this process is also promoted by the sides of the glass that concentrate smells to the opening, therefore to the nose. Air surface to wine volume ratio has been carefully studied in order to prevent as much as possible the development of “coarse” aromas, giving a higher priority, so to speak, to refined and elegant aromas.

The ISO tasting glass, whose specifications have been defined in the first years of the 1970, must be made of transparent glass, no color, and it will be made of “half-crystal”, that is having a percentage of lead of about 9%. Dimensions should exactly be as the ones indicated in figure 3 and its capacity will be of 210 ÷ 225 ml (7½ ÷ 8 fl.oz). Besides being transparent and having no color, this glass must not have any decoration or facets: its aspect will absolutely be smooth and clear in order not to distract the taster during the evaluation of the appearance of a wine as well as not to present the wine under a false aspect. This characteristic is valid for any glass used for drinking wine, not only to the ones used for the evaluation of wine. Despite the fact this glass seems to be so perfect, according to the description we gave so far, it is actually not well suited for the evaluation of the appearance of sparkling or lightly sparkling wines. This glass has been designed in order to allow the full development of aromas and it has a proper surface to promote this, however this surface is too wide and cannot properly keep carbon dioxide (CO₂) of sparkling wines, the effect is that carbon dioxide is rapidly released and the “perlage” does not last that long. This is the main reason why, for example, sparkling wines are usually served in “flûte” glasses, which have a narrow diameter and the carbon dioxide is released more slowly and therefore lasts longer. The ISO tasting glass can be properly used with success in tasting sparkling wines, their aromas will surely be enhanced and developed, provided this glass has a little emery point, of about 5 mm (a little less than a quarter of inch) in the bottom and in the center of the body. This “trick” will properly allow the development of carbon dioxide.

Using the ISO tasting glass

After having bought a ISO tasting glass, it can be easily found in wine shops or in shops who sell glassware, you need to properly wash your new glass before using it. As a gen-

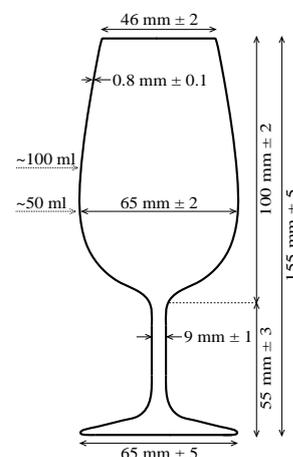


Fig. 3: Dimensions of ISO tasting glass

eral rule, and this rule will be valid and used every time the ISO tasting glass is being washed, soap will never be used. To understand the reason of this apparently unhygienic rule, one should consider the characteristics of soap. The first drawback is represented by the perfumes found in every kind of soap; these perfumes, surely pleasing, would be easily perceived during the olfactory analysis of a wine, in particular, in any delicate and light wine. One should remember ISO tasting glass has been designed in order to promote the full development of the aromas in it, of course, this principle is also valid for any other smell found in the glass, not only the ones of wine. The second drawback in using soap is represented by the thin and invisible film which is left on the side of the glass, in particular on the inner sides of the glass, and this film will drastically alter the surface tension: the wine will “slip” more easily along the sides of the glass therefore altering the result of part of the analysis of the appearance. So, no soap and therefore no dishwasher.

The first wash of your new tasting glass starts by rinsing the glass with hot water, and then it will be washed with pure vinegar. Make sure vinegar will wash every part of the glass, in particular the inner side, wash your glass accurately and thoroughly with your hands and with fingers wash the inner part of the glass. Also make sure not to use too much strength or twist movements as the glass could easily break. The best way to hold a glass while it is being washed is to grasp the body of the glass with the palm of the hand and having its stem between the forefinger and the middle finger, while washing it on the inside and on the outside with the other hand. It is strongly not advised to hold the glass by its base, or even worse by the stem, because twists and strength used to handle the glass could easily break it. After having washed the glass with vinegar, this operation will remove any fatty substance and residuals of production, a thoroughly rinse will follow, still using hot water and this will eliminate any trace of vinegar including its strong odor. Final rinse of the glass should be done by using distilled water in order to wash away any calcareous trace as well as chlorine which could be present in the water used to wash the glass. The glass should be drained by leaving it upside down. In case distilled water was not used for the final rinse, it is advisable to dry the glass by using a clean cloth in order to completely remove water which could leave calcareous traces. When using a cloth, particular attention must be paid to any possible smell of it, usually odors of the soap used to wash it. The best thing to do is to always use the same cloth, hopefully used for drying your tasting glasses only. In this case, the cloth must not be washed with soap in order not to leave any unwanted soap odor in the glass.

As we have a properly cleaned tasting glass, we can start using it. The very first thing to do before using it is to make sure the glass does not have any extraneous odor, for example, in case the glass has been kept in a box made of cardboard, it may happen to find a smell of cardboard on the inside of the glass. Always smell your glass before using it and make sure it has no odors. In case the glass has some extraneous odor, it can be quickly rinsed with water and then it will be dried. In case the glass cannot be rinsed because of lack of water, here it is a useful “trick” that can save your glass. Blow in the glass and then breathe in its inside. Smell the glass again: it is likely odors have been attenuated or, in best cases, they are



Fig. 4: How to grip the tasting glass

disappeared.

Before tasting a wine with your glass, it is advisable to rinse it with wine. This simple procedure will prepare the glass to receive wine and to eliminate any possible odor from the inside of it. Start pouring a small quantity of wine, the very same wine to be tasted, and holding the glass by the base and the stem, never by the body in order not to smear the glass, rotate it in order to let the wine to completely wet the inside. When the glass is perfectly wet with wine, empty the glass and discard the wine. As soon as this operation is done, the wine to be tasted can be finally poured into the glass. The right quantity of wine to be poured should be 50 ml ($1\frac{1}{2} \div 1\frac{3}{4}$ fl.oz), anyway not more than 60 ml ($2\frac{1}{4}$ fl.oz), in order to make the best use possible of the technical characteristics of the glass, the characteristics that allow a proper and efficient development of aromas. Anyway, the glass should not be filled with more than 100 ml ($3\frac{1}{2}$ fl.oz) of wine: besides diminishing the development of aromas, it also makes difficult to swirl the glass without not spilling the wine out and therefore it cannot be properly oxygenated. For your reference, the glass in figure 2 is exactly filled with 50 ml ($1\frac{1}{2} \div 1\frac{3}{4}$ fl.oz) of wine. This level is also shown in figure 3: it should be noticed that this level corresponds about to the point where the body of the glass reaches its widest diameter.

After having poured some wine into the tasting glass, we are ready to take it and to start evaluating the wine. Even though the act of taking a glass with the hand could be seen as obvious and banal, indeed there are some ways that should be used every time this special glass is held with the hands, this grip also applies to any other wineglass. Let's see how not to hold a glass: a glass will never be held by the body. Despite any consideration that could be said about the scarce elegance of holding a glass by the body, there is another and more important fact that should be considered by anyone who is going to taste a wine: the heat of the hand would warm the wine and, as we learnt in the previous issue, temperature is a determinant

factor for a proper evaluation of wine. Besides this, it would make things difficult during the analysis of the appearance of a wine, as the hand would not allow the wine to be seen. Another reason that would be considered when holding the glass by the body is that the olfactory analysis would be altered by any possible odor of the hand and these odors would surely disturb the whole process and some aromas of the wine could also be ignored. In consideration of all the above, the first rule to be followed when holding a glass is that the hand must be held as far as possible from the body of the glass and therefore from the nose. The tasting glass, or better saying, every wineglass, must be held by its base or by the part of the stem near the base. The preferred grip is by the base, with the thumb over the base and near the stem while the forefinger is held curved under the base. Figure 4 shows the correct and right way to grip the tasting glass.

A correct grip of the tasting glass makes things easier when the glass is to be swirled in order to promote the development of the wine's aromas. This important movement is achieved by rotating clockwise the hand holding the glass, in order to have the wine to go up to the side of the glass; this operation will increase the surface of the wine in contact with air and by doing so a better and increased oxygenation of the liquid is obtained as well as a better development of the aromas. (See figure 4) The curved shape of the sides prevent the wine to spill out from the glass, provided this movement is not achieved with much strength. Holding a glass in this way also allows a more comfortable and easy movement of the wrist, in particular, when the glass is to be tilted in order to assess the color and the tint of wine.

When correctly filled, the height of the body of the glass allows to keep the nose at the right distance from the wine and, when correctly held, the glass allow the hands to be kept at a sufficient distance both from wine and nose. A very important characteristic of this particular glass is the diameter of its opening. As can be seen in figure 3, the opening is narrower than the body and it is sufficiently wide in order to have enough space for the nose and prevent too much air to be inhaled from the outside of the glass therefore ensures that most of the air inhaled comes from the inside of the glass. This characteristic, determined in this glass by an exact ratio, is generally common to any wineglass: the body is always larger than the opening and the sides are always curved in order to concentrate aromas to the opening and therefore to the nose.

Sometimes it may happen that there are no more fresh glasses available to taste a determined number of wines. In this case one may use again glasses already used, provided they are rinsed with some wine, the wine to be tasted, as explained above, in order to eliminate any previous taste or aroma in the glass left by the previous wine.

Taking Good Care of the Glass

After having used the tasting glass, a thoroughly and accurate wash is needed in order to keep the glass in perfect state and condition for the next tastings. We already talked about how to wash a tasting glass for the first time; the same rules also apply to this case with the exception of some small differences. In this case vinegar will not be used, the glass will be washed with hot water only. Washing the tasting glass in this way is enough

in order to remove any trace or smell of the wine. Particular attention should be paid to fingerprints and lipstick traces, however it is advisable for ladies not to use any lipstick during a wine tasting in order not to alter the sensorial perception of aromas and flavors. In case these traces are hard to remove, we can use the same procedure used for the first wash of the glass; it can be washed by using some vinegar. After having washed your glass with vinegar, an accurate rinse with hot water will follow and the final rinse will be done by using distilled water.

After having washed the tasting glass, the next thing to be done is to dry it. In case distilled water has been used, the glass will be left upside down in order to completely drain. This is the best way to dry a glass and it should be preferred to the use of clothes because they could leave some odors in the glass, mainly odors of the soap used to wash them, as well as leaving lint on the inner sides of the glass that would disturb the evaluation of the appearance of a wine during the next tasting. Cloth is to be used only when the glass has not been rinsed with distilled water, and in case a cloth has to be used, it will be better to use one that does not leave lint and has been washed with the least perfumed soap possible. The best solution is to make use of a cloth exclusively destined to this purpose, in this case the cloth can be simply washed with hot water and no soap, as the sole operation of drying clean glasses does not get it dirty.

Rinsing a glass with distilled water is a good way to remove any possible trace of chemical compounds that may be dissolved in water, such as chlorine, any possible water's odor as well as calcareous traces present in water. If the tasting glass has been washed with calcareous water and it would be left to drain, the sides would be stained with whitish calcareous stains, surely not much attractive as well as not useful when the wine's aspect is being evaluated. This is the reason why a cloth may be used to dry glasses not rinsed with distilled water, however, it should be remembered a cloth may leave lint as well as odors in the glass.

After the tasting glass has been properly washed, particular care must be taken for its storage and it must be kept in a proper place. Any place, including furniture, boxes, containers having strong smells must be avoided in any case, because such odors would be transferred to the glass as well. In case you choose to keep your glasses in a piece of furniture or in a container, such as a box, the glasses must be kept upright. In case glasses are kept in special containers, such as a case, it is best to make sure this does not have any odor, in particular chemical odors. However, before using any tasting glass, it will always be good to smell it and make sure it does not have any odor, to be more clear, the tasting glass must have no odors. In case a tasting glass has some extraneous odor, it is best to do what we already said above. In case tasting glasses are not used for a long time, it is good to regularly wash them from time to time, anyway, they will be thoroughly washed before making use of them and they will also be rinsed with wine.

Even though the methods illustrated so far for taking care and keeping a tasting glass to its best condition may be considered as maniacal and excessive, bordering paranoia, one should remember that thanks to this important tool a wine can be properly evaluated; this is the main tool for anyone who wants to seriously evaluate the organoleptic characteristics of a wine, therefore it must always be kept in best conditions and state. A bad glass will surely alter the evaluation of a wine

and it will not allow a proper, honest and objective job to be done. Every professional wine taster, however any wine taster who deserves to be considered as a professional, takes excellent care of its tools and the ISO tasting glass is the main wine taster's tool. To make things clearer and to understand this concept, let's suppose a wine taster is about to evaluate a wine having light and delicate aromas. Let's also suppose that the wine is being tasted in a glass washed with soap and kept in a piece of furniture used to keep foods having strong smells. As a first consequence, the delicate and light aromas of that wine will not be perceived at all as they will be hidden by all the other smells present in the glass because of a bad care, moreover, the wine will be considered to have "improbable" aromas for its typology, odors that could also be considered as defects, whereas those smells are not present in the wine at all.

The ISO tasting glass is an essential tool for the proper evaluation of a wine and for a proper organoleptic analysis, it was expressly studied for this purpose and it is derived from a long and hard research; however when it is not treated with proper care, the only thing it can do is to do a very bad job, surely not because of its fault, but surely because it has been treated improperly and the only one responsible for this is the owner. A serious wine taster is also a person who takes excellent care of his or her tasting glasses.

Wines of the Month

Score legend

- ◇ Fair – ◇◇ Pretty Good – ◇◇◇ Good
- ◇◇◇◇ Very Good – ◇◇◇◇◇ Excellent
- ★ Wine that excels in its category

Prices are to be considered as indicative. Prices may vary according to the country or the shop where they are bought



Roero Arneis Vigneto Dalmazzo 2001 Luigi Giordano (Italy)

Grapes: Arneis

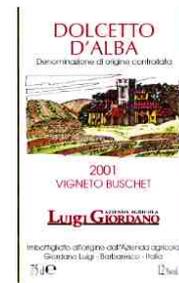
Price: € 4,80 (\$ 3,88)

Score: ◇◇◇

A good example of Roero Arneis. The wine is crystalline and has a light straw yellow color with an evident greenish-yellow tint. It has very good and intense aromas, mainly fruit aromas, in particular pear, hazelnut, apple, hawthorn, pineapple and litchi are easily recognizable. A very pleasing and typical bouquet. In the mouth the wine is pretty crisp and it is well balanced with alcohol, the body is good and typical for this kind of wine. Flavors are intense and persistent and it has a finish

of almond and hazelnut. This Roero Arneis is refined in bottle for 2÷3 months

Food match: Appetizers, Pasta, Eggs, Vegetables, Fish



Dolcetto d'Alba Vigneto Buschet 2001 Luigi Giordano (Italy)

Grapes: Dolcetto

Price: € 4,80 (\$ 3,88)

Score: ◇◇◇★

The wine shows a nice light ruby red as well as good transparency. The olfactory profile of this wine is mainly and pleasantly fruity; intense and typical aromas of black cherry, cherry and raspberry are perceived, as well as a pretty uncommon for this kind of wine, light and pleasing hint of rose. Fruit is also what emerges in the mouth and it fully confirms what has been perceived by the nose. The wine is well balanced and has a good crispness, has good and well balanced tannins. The finish is persistent with evident flavors of almond and fruit. This Dolcetto d'Alba is refined for at least 3÷4 month in bottle.

Food match: Pasta with structured sauces, White meats, Young cheese



Barbaresco Montestefano 1998 Luigi Giordano (Italy)

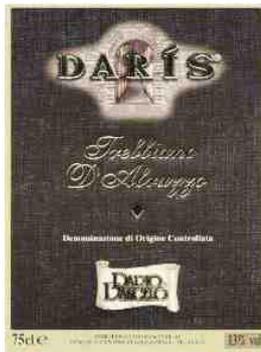
Grapes: Nebbiolo

Price: € 10,56 (\$ 8,25)

Score: ◇◇◇★

This wine shows a light ruby red color with an orange-red tint. The aromas of this wine are mainly and pleasantly of fruit, and, among others, aromas of black cherry, dried plum, cherry jam can be perceived as well as leather, cocoa, dried violet and a light hint of enamel. This Barbaresco is balanced in the mouth, has a good quantity of alcohol and tannins as well as a good sapidity and good body. Wood aromas, although well perceivable, are not intrusive and do not prevail over the other organoleptic characteristics of the wine. The wine finish is persistent and has good flavors of dried plum and cherry. This wine is refined for 12÷24 months in casks followed by 6 months in bottle.

Food match: *Hard cheese, Roasted meats, Braised meats*



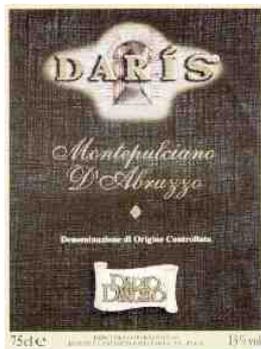
Trebbiano d'Abruzzo Daris 2000
Dario d'Angelo (Italy)

Grapes: Trebbiano d'Abruzzo (Bombino Bianco)

Price: € 12,91 (\$ 13,29) Score: ◇◇◇

This wine shows an intense straw yellow color with a golden tint. Good aromas of wood are perceived by the nose, followed by aromas of toasted wood. The olfactory profile of the wine is completed with pleasing fruity aromas in particular pear, litchi, bergamot, followed by aromas of citrus fruits and hawthorn. This Trebbiano has a pleasing crispness in the mouth as well as a good alcohol, good balance and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with evident flavors of wood and fruit. The wine is produced with a controlled fermentation and it is refined for six months in barriques

Food match: *Young cheese, Roasted fish, White meats, Pasta, Soups*



Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Daris 1998
Dario d'Angelo (Italy)

Grapes: Montepulciano

Price: € 36,15 (\$ 37,22) Score: ◇◇◇◇

The wine shows a very good and intense ruby red color and has good, intense and pleasing fruity aromas, in particular strawberry, ripe fruit and dried plum. Moreover, others aromas follow, such as tobacco, dried rose and vanilla. The wine also has a good balance in mouth with good tannins, well balanced by alcohol. Its flavors are intense as well as persistent. The finish has flavors of black cherry and dried plum. This Montepulciano d'Abruzzo is produced by macerating skins at a controlled temperature followed by a refinement in barrique for 8÷12 months and 6÷8 months in bottle

Food match: *Hard cheese, Broiled meat and Barbecue, Roasted meats*



Trentino Müller Thurgau - Bottega Vinai 2001
Cavit (Italy)

Grapes: Müller Thurgau

Price: € 8,40 Score: ◇◇◇★

This is a very interesting Müller Thurgau from Trentino, Italy. The wine shows a greenish yellow color and the nose is rich of typical aromas of the grape as well as fruity aroma such as apple and peach, followed by flower aromas of hawthorn and broom. The wine also has pleasing aromas of sage, elder and citrus fruits. In the mouth the wine is crisp and has good alcohol, well balanced. It has intense and persistent flavors and a typical body for its typology. The finish is persistent and pleasing with evident aromatic flavors and some lightly flavors of almonds. This wine is produced with fermentation in steel containers.

Food match: *Appetizers, Risottos, Vegetable soups, Eggs, Fried fish*



Trentino Lagrein Dunkel - Bottega Vinai 2000
Cavit (Italy)

Grapes: Lagrein

Price: € 9,75 Score: ◇◇◇

The wine shows a beautiful ruby red color and has a very interesting as well as intense varieties of aromas, mainly of fruit, such as black cherry, raspberry, bilberry, strawberry jam and black cherry jam. The olfactory profile is completed by a pleasing hint of violet and vanilla. The gustatory analysis reveals a good balance as well as a good intensity of flavors, good body and tannins are well balanced by alcohol. The finish of this wine is persistent and has flavors of black cherry. The wine is produced with long maceration in skins and it is refined for 12÷14 months. Before being bottled, the wine is refined for 4÷6 in barriques

Food match: *Well structured pastas, Steamed meats, Roasted meats*

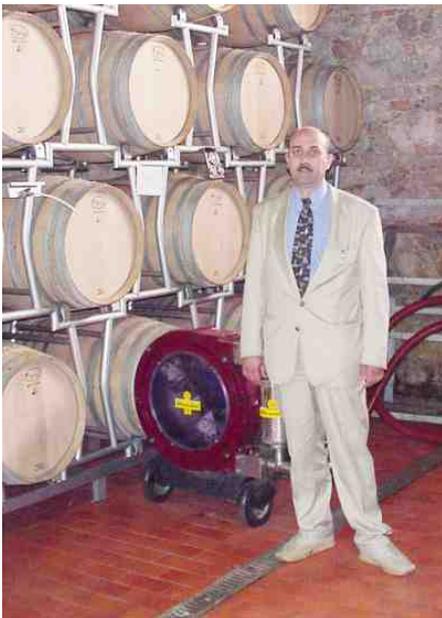
WINE PRODUCERS

Fattoria di Castel Pietraio

In Monteriggioni, not far from Siena, Italy, among an enchanting view, there is the ancient Castel Pietraio, where excellent quality wines are produced

Just few kilometers from Siena, in the heart of Tuscany, Italy, among an enchanting view, there is the town of Monteriggioni, located in the Chianti Colli Senesi area and few kilometers from the Chianti Classico area, where stands the majestic and ancient Castel Pietraio, with its high tower, dated back to about 1 000 AD, embellished with particular Guelph merlons. The building of Castel Pietraio is now the headquarter of a prestigious winery that also produces olive oil as well as being an agricultural tourism structure. The winery, after having been renewed few years ago, is now run by Baron Mauro Neri del Nero, who welcomes us to the castle.

Let's start by getting to know the winery better; Baron Neri del Nero introduces his winery to us «Fattoria di Castel Pietraio has a very long and ancient tradition in wine making. In 1996, when my father passed away, I succeeded him in the management of the winery and I decided to change the production style of the company and aimed for quality and innovation while keeping and respecting the tradition of this land. The culture of Sangiovese is therefore the basis of our products and we also cultivate Merlot for making red wines as well as Chardonnay for producing white wines. The winery is part of the "District of the Montagnola Senese" and it has been built in the castle and the most ancient part of this castle is represented by a tower, built around 1 000 AD, as well as other buildings dated back to 1300 and 1500. The castle also comprises cellars dated back to 1700, and these cellars are still functional and renewed in 1999. In 1996 we planted new vineyards and we increased the previous density of vines and in 1999 we had our



Baron Mauro Neri del Nero in his cellar

first vintage under the direction of our winemaker, Dr. Stefano Chioccioli. The renewal of the cellar allowed us to introduce new technologies as well as new and modern machineries in order to promote and aim toward a quality production. Since 1999 we produce wine by refining it in small casks instead of large casks, and we also have particular cask's supports that allow us a better and easy care of cask's maintenance».

The castle where the winery is located is a beautiful monument of high historical value, and in this castle lived important persons of the local history. Concerning this aspect, Baron Neri del Nero said «the castle includes an ancient tower dated back to the 1 000 AD that was used as a defense for the "Montagnola Senese", and it was subsequently expanded with other buildings dated 1300 and 1500. In this castle lived, besides the founder, Countess Ava, of Longobard origins, who donated, about in the year 1000 AD, part of the castle's land to some Benedictine Monks and they established an abbey near Abbadia a Isola, a town not far from here, and they reclaimed the valley in order to allow cultivation of lands. In order to honor the history of this places and the memory of the renowned persons who lived in this castle, we decided to dedicate them our products and we named our wines after them: Tegrino, who was the son of the founder of the castle, is an interesting wine made of Sangiovese grape and it is refined for six months in barrique; Sindrada, who was Tegrino's wife, is our white wine and it is produced with Chardonnay and Malvasia bianca grapes. Another famous couple who lived in this castle was Ghinibaldo Saracini and Sapia Salvani; Ghinibaldo is our most prestigious wine and it is made from Sangiovese and Merlot grapes; it is refined for 12 months in barrique and for 3 months in bottle. To Ghinibaldo's wife, Sapia, we dedicated our rose wine, which is made from Sangiovese and it is left to ferment for three days with the wine used to make Ghinibaldo. After three days, we take the wine to make Sapia away from the container and the process is completed by means of typical techniques used for making white wines. This drawing of wine from Ghinibaldo actually improves its structure and its body».

Castel Pietraio, besides being the headquarter of the winery, is also an agricultural tourism structure and they also allow people to visit the castle. Baron Neri del Nero talks about this particular aspect «we offer the possibility to visit the castle as well as guided tour to our cellars and we also offer the possibility to stay in our apartments. The castle also has an agricultural tourism activity as well as apartments for anyone who wants to stay here for at least one week and we also have a swimming pool as well as guided paths in the woods. We also have elegant rooms finely decorated with furniture styled as the ones of the 1700».

Let's continue talking about the wine produced in the castle. Winery's vineyards are all located in the Chianti Colli Senesi area and the production of the wine is completely made in the winery which is in the castle. Baron Neri del Nero says «winery's activity is done in the castle and it is located in the area of controlled and guaranteed denomination of origin (DOCG) of Chianti Colli Senesi, about one kilometer and a half (about one mile) from the border of the Chianti Classico area; for this reason many consider our wine similar to the ones produced in Chianti Classico. The winery has been renewed in regard and full respect of local traditions and in that occasion

we made the decision, unfortunately not well agreed by most but in our opinion represents a traditional aspect, of keeping and using our old wine containers made of concrete, however these containers, because of their thickness and a lower thermal dispersion, allow us to keep the wine to a more constant temperature. These wine containers have been restored and adapted in order to allow a modern wine making process and we installed in each of them special system for temperature control. Of course, we also have steel containers and we mainly use them to keep the wine before bottling or to blend wines».

Being in a such an important area of the Italian viticulture represents a factor which can play a determinant role; Chianti is among the most celebrated and renowned red wines of Italy and Tuscany is one of the most famous regions of this country. In this regard, this is the comment of Baron Neri del Nero «the most important thing is to be in Tuscany. This region is not probably much appreciated by Italians, however it is highly regarded and appreciated by foreigners and, as we also sell our wine outside Italy, this is certainly a prestigious factor».

Talking about the forthcoming vintage and the harvest of this year, Baron Neri del Nero says «thanks to the technical management of our wine maker, Dr. Stefano Chioccioli, we always prefer waiting for Sangiovese to get overripe, and according to the meteorological conditions of this year, this will probably be impossible, however, while other wineries are working on vintage already, here at Castel Pietraio we are trying as has as we can to delay harvesting in order to have a riper grape. In order to promote grape's ripeness we worked in the vineyard and thinned out grapes and got rid of some leaves in order to take the most benefits from the sun. Unfortunately this year we had lots of rainy days and we had some damages in the vineyard, mainly mold on grape's berries and our personnel is working in order to prevent any other damage and they are manually removing any mouldy berry in order not to contaminate the good ones. We just hope to have better meteorological conditions in the forthcoming weeks in order to have a good vintage, even though it will be pretty hard, we are confident to have good surprises and interesting results». In regard to the countries where Castel Pietraio's wine is sold «we are currently selling our wine in the United States of America, which is also our main market, where a young importer agrees with our philosophy. Our products are sold in Colorado, Cali-

fornia, Washington DC, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon, Texas and Washington. Besides Italy, in Europe our wines are sold in Holland and in Great Britain. Last but not the least, Castel Pietraio also sell its wine directly at the castle».

Castel Pietraio, besides producing the wines we shortly talked about, also produces a Chianti Colli Senesi. Talking about the production of the winery, Baron Neri del Nero illustrates its products: «Chianti Colli Senesi represents our basic product and it is the typical wine of this land, even though the typical grapes defined by Baron Ricasoli were revised, as well as being a common habit of all the producers of the area, white wines are not part of this wine anymore and at present it is produced with 95% of Sangiovese and 5% of Canaiolo nero. Chianti Colli Senesi was the first wine we produced after winery's renewal and we had our first vintage in 1999 and produced about 6 600 bottles, the same as for the year 2000, whereas we plan to produce about 13 000 bottles in 2001. In 1999 we also produced for the first time Ghinibaldo and it was released in January 2002 with a production of just 2 400 bottles. This wine is produced with 80% of Sangiovese and 20% of Merlot and within few days we will start bottling the vintage 2000, we plan to produce 4 800 bottles and they will be released in the market at the beginning of 2003. In 2000 we produced for the first time Tegrino, a red wine produced with Sangiovese and refined in barrique for 6 months; in the same year we also produced Sindrada, a white wine made of 90% of Chardonnay and 10% of Malvasia bianca; we had a production of 1 200 bottles and 2 400 bottles for the vintage 2001. In 2000 we also produced our rose wine, Sapia, and we produced 1 200 bottles. The production of this wine will probably be dropped because it did not meet our commercial expectations. Besides wines, Castel Pietraio produces a grappa made of Chianti Colli Senesi's pomace which is distilled within 24 hours».

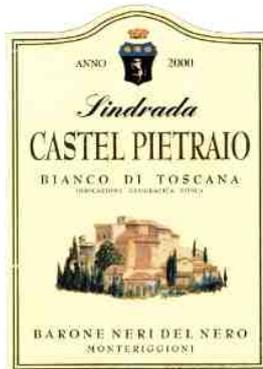
At the end of our visit at Fattoria di Castel Pietraio, Baron Neri del Nero opens to us the doors of its cellar and we have the chance to see the modern machinery they use for making wine and their characteristics and, before leaving, in respect of the most genuine and traditional custom of any visit in a cellar, Baron Neri del Nero gives us the chance to taste his new wines, each one of them very convincing and well made. In particular we had the chance to taste the Ghinibaldo 2001, which is currently refining in barriques, and it seems to be impressive as well as promising: a great wine, no matter of its young age, it is already full of rich and astonishing promises. Lastly, a special mention goes to "Bianca di Castel Pietraio", the grappa produced with Chianti Colli Senesi's pomace. A very well made grappa, clean, rich of fruity aromas and that leaves a clean mouth as well as a persistent flavor of hazelnut and fruit.

In conclusion to our visit at Castel Pietraio, we remind our readers that they offer guided tours to the cellars and they directly sell their products, including wine, at the castle.



An ancient wine press of 1700, one of the many historical patrimonies of Castel Pietraio

Wines are rated according to DiWineTaste's evaluation method. Please see score legend in the "Wines of the Month" section.



Sindrada 2000
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio

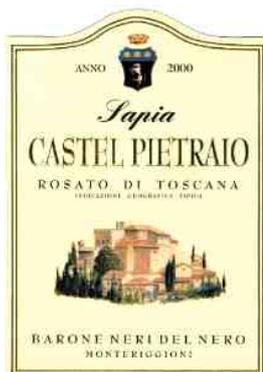
Grapes: Chardonnay (90%), Malvasia Bianca (10%)

Price: € 5,00 (\$ 11,40)

Score: ◇◇◇

This wine shows a light straw yellow color and a tint of greenish yellow. The olfactory profile of the wine perfectly corresponds to the typical aromas of the grapes used: the mark of Chardonnay is completed by the pleasing aromatic mark of Malvasia bianca. Fruit aromas are the main perception in this wine, in particular, pineapple, banana, pear and apple followed by flower aromas of acacia and hawthorn. The bouquet is completed by a light and delicate hint of bread crust. The wine is balanced in the mouth, has good body and roundness, it is crisp and has a balanced quantity of alcohol as well as intense and persistent flavors. The finish is good and persistent with lightly crisp flavors.

Food match: Pastas, Appetizers, Fish



Sapia 2000
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio

Grapes: Sangiovese

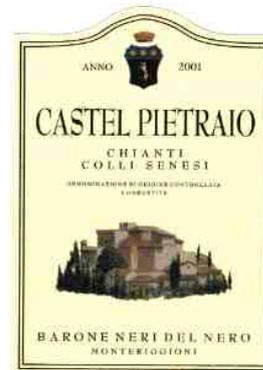
Price: € 5,00

Score: ◇◇◇

Interesting rose wine made of Sangiovese. The wine shows a light cherry-red color with a tint of pink. The nose is intense and persistent as well as having a good and rich variety of fruit aromas such as black cherry, cherry, strawberry and bilberry followed by an elegant hint of dried rose. In the mouth the wine has good body, a pleasing crispness and a right quantity of alcohol as well as a light hint of tannins which give the wine

a good balance. The wine is also persistent and the finish has flavors of fruit confirming the sensations perceived by the nose.

Food match: Pastas, Fish soups, White meats, Roasted fish



Chianti Colli Senesi 2001
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio

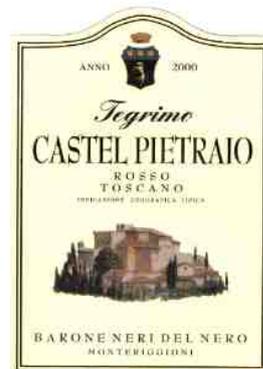
Grapes: Sangiovese (95%), Canaiolo nero (5%)

Price: € 5,50 (\$ 10,75)

Score: ◇◇◇

The wine is limpid and has a ruby red color with evident hints of purplish red and has an intense bouquet mainly composed of fruit aromas, in particular black cherry, black currant and dried plum followed by pleasing hints of licorice and vanilla. In mouth the wine is balanced and pretty round, good tannins well balanced by alcohol, which is easily perceivable. The finish is persistent with evident and pleasing flavors of black cherry.

Food match: Hard cheese, Broiled meat and Barbecue, Structured pastas



Tegrino 2000
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio

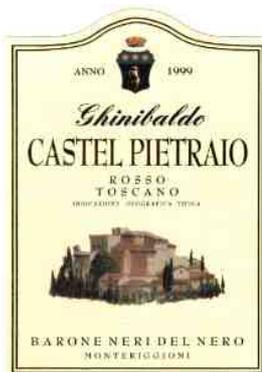
Grapes: Sangiovese

Price: € 13,00 (\$ 15,15)

Score: ◇◇◇

This wine shows a beautiful ruby red color and the olfactory analysis reveal an intense and convincing bouquet, mainly of fruit: black cherry, mulberry, dried plum, raspberry and strawberry jam. Moreover the wine has a pleasing hint of vanilla which elegantly completes the bouquet. The mouth is convincing as well: the wine has a good balance and body, good intensity of flavors and tannins well balanced by alcohol, pretty perceivable. The finish is persistent with evident flavors of mulberry and black cherry. Tegrino is refined for 6 months in barrique.

Food match: Roasted meats, Hard cheese, Braised meats



Ghinibaldo 1999
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio

Grapes: Sangiovese (80%), Merlot (20%)

Price: € 19,50 (\$ 26,99)

Score: ◆◆◆★

Ghinibaldo shows an intense ruby red color and has intense and elegant fruit aromas of ripe cherry, mulberry and plum jam. The bouquet is completed by an intense aroma of chocolate and hints of vanilla as well as good aromas of wood. The wine has good body in the mouth as well as a good structure, alcohol is easily perceivable and however it is well balanced by tannins, pretty round. Flavors are intense and the finish is persistent with a long flavor of plum jam. Ghinibaldo is refined for 12 months in barrique.

Food match: Braised meats, Stewed meats, Roasted meats, Hard cheese

Fattoria di Castel Pietraio - Strada di Strove, 33 - 53055 Monteriggioni, Siena (Italy) - Tel. ++39 0577 300020 - Fax. ++39 0577 300977 - **Winemaker:** Stefano Chioccioli - **Production:** 40 000 bottles
E-Mail: castelpietraio@tin.it
WEB: www.castelpietraio.it

Cellar Journal

This section is reserved to wine producers who want to publish news and information about their business, to announce new products or just for communicating to its customers informations and promotions about their products and activity. Send news to be published at the e-mail address CellarJournal@DiWineTaste.com.

EVENTS

News

In this section will be published news and informations about events concerning the world of wine and food. Whoever is interested in publishing this kind of information can send us a mail at the address Events@DiWineTaste.com.

CORKSCREW

Serving a Bottle of Wine

Opening and serving a bottle of wine correctly is not just a matter of style. Bottle's opening ceremony, besides being aesthetical, is also a practice that allows to better present and appreciate a wine.

Opening and serving a bottle of wine can be seen as a marginal aspect, it probably can be seen as a sumptuous ceremony where the one who is opening the bottle, has a reverent composure and formality, almost bordering incomprehensibility; these acts are probably considered useless and ceremonious. Indeed, it is not just a matter of style and formality, this operation, first of all, allows to make sure both bottle and its accessories needed to keep and maintain wine, are in good health and condition as well as making sure the wine is not altered or damaged by any possible defect. Moreover, opening a bottle of wine correctly is a proper operation that allows to serve wine in respect of the product itself as well as guaranteeing its integrity. There are many inconvenient practices, such as the famous and loud "bang", usually and unfortunately heard during the opening of a bottle of sparkling wine in parties, which can also alter the organoleptic qualities of a wine or, at least, part of it. The one who opens a bottle of wine is therefore responsible to make sure what he or she is going to serve is in good conditions as well as not having any defect or flaw that could compromise the quality of the wine.

Among the many factors that allow to serve a wine in its best condition, temperature is one of them and plays a determinant role: this aspect will not be covered in this report because it has been already discussed in the previous issue. Every operation illustrated in this report assume the bottle of wine to be served has been properly chilled, or warmed, at its right serving temperature. Opening and serving a bottle of wine is what logically follows the operation of chilling or warming a wine to its serving temperature.

Order of service

Before illustrating the operations to be accomplished in order to correctly open and serve a bottle of wine, it is useful to understand how to arrange and set things properly according to the typologies of the wines to be served. A very important aspect, sadly to admit, often neglected, is the order in which the wines are to be served. In case the event has just one wine, or in case only one wine is going to be tasted, the conclusion is obviously evident, there will be no order of service. However, there are particular events, such as a dinner or formal ceremonies, where the possibility of serving more than one wine is likely to happen, the best thing would be to serve and match every wine with proper foods, in this case some good rules should be followed and applied, most of them are just logical and obvious rules, and they will allow to serve and appreciate every wine at its best.

In case more wines are going to be served in the course of the same event, here it is a useful list of rules that should be applied:

- White wines are always served before red wines. Rose wines are served after white wines and before red wines. White wines are less tannic than reds and they usually have less body and structure. If a white wine is drunk after having tasted a red one, the white will "disappear" and will not be expressed properly
- Wines having a lower alcohol quantity are served before the ones having a higher quantity of alcohol. Because of the "burning" sensation of alcohol in mouth, a least alcoholic wine will not be properly perceived in case it is served after a more alcoholic wine
- Young wines are served before aged wines. A young wine has a more fruity character, lively and "simple", whereas aged wines

have a more complex and developed character

- Light wines having little body are served before full bodied and well structured wines. Wine's body is mainly determined by the quantity of extracts, that is wine's solid parts, which is deposited in mouth and therefore they make lighter wines "slip". This can be easily understood by watching the tongue, as well as teeth, after having drunk a very robust and tannic red wine
- Cooler wines are served before wines having a higher temperature. A chilled beverage, as well as a cold food, when served after a warm or hot beverage or food cause a sensorial thermal shock. This rule has its exception. Wines served as aperitifs and the ones served at the end of a meal are usually consumed far before the main meal or when some time have passed after the end of a meal
- Aromatic wines are always served after the least aromatic ones. The perception of a delicate aroma will be hardly perceivable when the olfactory bulb has previously sensed strong and intense aromas
- Dry wines are served before sweet wines. This rule derives from the same one used for foods: sweet foods are always served at the end of a meal and the best match for a sweet food is mostly a sweet wine
- A wine should never make anyone regret the wine served before it. The success of this rule is ensured by applying and following all the preceding ones. A wine that make anyone regret the previous one, besides disappointing the good expectations for everything served next, also originates prejudices and a scarce predisposition for the wines that follow

Moreover wines must be served according to season. In summertime white and rose wines are preferred, whereas in cold seasons red and full bodied wines are preferred instead.

In case a sparkling wine is about to be served, besides following the above mentioned rules, it is also good to remember:

- Sparkling wines produced with "Charmat" or "Martinotti" methods are always served before sparkling wines produced with "Classic Method" or "Méthode Champenoise".
- Vintage sparkling wines are always served after non vintage ones. Vintage sparkling wines usually have superior characteristics compared to the others, have more aromas and a more complex structure, therefore they are served after

In case still wines and sparkling wines have to be served during the course of the same event, generally speaking, and in respect and according to the rules stated above, dry sparkling wines are usually served at the beginning, whereas sweet sparkling wines are served at the end, after dry and still wines. Passito wines and sweet or dessert wines are always served after any other wine, either still or sparkling. Particular attention should be paid to fortified wines, such as Marsala and Jerez (Sherry). In case dry fortified wines are to be served, such as a Marsala Vergine and a Jerez Fino, they can be served as aperitifs, las not the least, they can also be matched with foods during a meal; in case of sweet fortified wines, such as a Sweet Superior Marsala or a Jerez Pedro Ximénez, they are served at the end and after any other wine.

Accessories and tools

Corkscrew is surely the most important and indispensable tool used to open a bottle of wine. Corkscrews come in different forms and shapes, there is a huge variety of them available out there, as well as uncorking machines that can remove a cork from a bottle almost automatically. No matter how much this uncorking machines may appear useful and amazing, our personal preference is however for the most functional and classic form: the so called "waiter's corkscrew"

or "waiter's friend", the one used by professionals for this purpose such as, for example, sommeliers. The right side of figure 5 shows two different types of waiter's corkscrew, both being practical as well as functional.

This kind of tool is formed by a body or handle, which allows to grip it, and attached to it there are all the other mobile parts of the corkscrew such as the blade, the spiral and the lever. Every single element of the corkscrew plays an important role which allows to accomplish a perfect job. The handle should have an ergonomic shape in order to allow a safe and comfortable grip during the action of pulling. Corkscrew's blade should be made of stainless steel, resistant and sharp, the blade should possibly be toothed, in order to allow a precise and sharp cut of the foil. Straight blades work very well as long as they are sharp, a condition which is progressively lost with usage and time, a blade which is not sufficiently sharp will surely tear the foil and this is not neither pleasing nor aesthetically good to see.

The most important part of the corkscrew is surely the spiral. Its length should be about 5÷6 cm (a little more than 2 inches), it will be made of chromium-plated stainless steel, even better, covered with Teflon. Spirals covered with Teflon are to be preferred to chromium-plated ones because they ensure a lesser friction when screwed into the cork and this will also prevent any possible tearing of the cork, this characteristic is very important in particular when a fragile or old cork is to be extracted. As a reference, figure 5 shows two kind of corkscrews: the one at the bottom has a chromium-plated spiral, whereas the one at the top has its spiral covered with Teflon.

Another important element of the corkscrew is the lever which is usually of two kind: single lever and double lever. Figure 5 shows both lever types: corkscrew at the bottom has a single lever, whereas the one at the top has a double lever. Both corkscrews do their job excellently, however the double lever corkscrew greatly diminish the strength needed to pull a cork out, thanks to its double positions that can be used during the phases of the operation. By using this particular kind of lever, the operation will start by placing the upper notch of the lever on the opening of the bottle and, as soon as the cork has been pulled out for about the half of its length, the lower notch will be placed on the opening and this will allow the completion of the process of pulling the cork out.

Using a waiter's corkscrew is not difficult. The first operation to be accomplished is to cut the foil from the neck of the bottle. Foil will always be cut under the lower edge of the ring found near the opening of the bottle, anyway, it will never be cut on the upper edge. The



Fig. 5: Sparkling wine pliers and two types of corkscrews

reason why this operation must be done this way is mainly a matter of hygienics. Old bottles kept for a very long time in cellar, could have some mold developed between the foil and the neck as well as on the outside of the cork. This possible mold must be wiped out and cleaned by using a napkin: by cutting the foil under the edge of the rim allows to uncover a larger part of the neck, therefore it will allow to clean the neck better. As the foil has been cut, place the spiral's point on the cork, slightly off the center, and then it will be pushed in order to have the point of the spiral to enter a little into the cork. The next operation is about screwing the corkscrew in order to have the spiral screwed into the cork. Particular attention should be paid to the position of the corkscrew; it must always be kept perpendicularly and vertical and make sure the spiral does not go beyond the inner side of the cork. Before starting the operation of screwing the spiral, it is a good idea to realize the type and length of the cork in order to have an idea on how much the spiral should be screwed without having the wine spoiled with cork's debris. After having screwed the spiral into the cork, place the lever on the opening of the bottle and start pulling until the cork is completely extracted.

Another tool that may be useful when opening a bottle of wine, in this case a special kind of wine, is the sparkling wine pliers. (shown on the left side of figure 5) Pulling a cork out from a bottle of sparkling wine is not that difficult, however it may happen that cork, because of the effects of time, is firmly stuck to the neck of the bottle and removing or twisting such corks may be particularly hard. In this case sparkling wine pliers may be very useful. As can be seen, this pliers has two toothed jaws and can be used to have a more solid and effective grip on the cork, the handles of the pliers will allow twisting movements and the cork will unblock from its position. Pliers are exclusively used to unblock a cork, final extraction of the cork will be accomplished manually, as explained later. Sparkling wine pliers also has cutting nippers at the tip and they will be particularly useful to remove the wire cage in case, during its removal, it gets broken and there is no way to proceed with the usual manual operation. In case sparkling wine pliers are not available, the job can be accomplished by using a nutcracker.

This short and essential discussion about accessories useful to open a bottle of wine is completed by remembering the reader to get a white napkin, or simply a paper napkin, which will be useful to accomplish all the cleaning operations needed during the opening of the bottle as well as during the service.

Opening the Bottle

After having arranged all the needed tools and after having chilled or warmed a bottle to its serving temperature, the moment of opening the bottle has finally come. Before illustrating in detail the many procedures to be accomplished to open a bottle, in our case either still wines or sparkling wines as well as lightly sparkling wines, we will discuss about some aspects and drawbacks that may happen and some precautions to be taken in particular cases.

The most feared drawback that may happen when a bottle of wine is being opened is concerning the so called "smell of cork", or simply "corky wine" or "corkiness", a fault that, to be honest, happens quite rarely, but it may happen anyway and therefore it should be properly recognized in order not to serve a faulty wine. Describing a smell with words is not easy at all, particularly, the description of unknown smells for which it is not even possible to make use of analogy with others, is certainly hard. Corky smell, disgusting and easily recognizable, becomes unmistakably detectable as soon as it is perceived for the first time. As an example, an approximate example, corky smell can be associated to the degradation of the smell of a cork in good conditions, a smell very similar to a mixture of mold, wet newspaper, wet cardboard and putrefied organic substances. This disgusting odor is transferred to the wine contained in the bottle, of course, irremediably ruining both the taste and the bouquet. A corky wine is

easily recognizable during the olfactory evaluation because this defective odor will be the only one perceived and will cover all the rest. This defect is recognized in mouth as a disgusting flavor, similar to its odor. The cause of this defect is not because of some producer's fault or negligence and it is not even a fault of the one who was in charge to store and keep the wine. Technically speaking, the corky smell is originated by a chemical compound, 2,4,6-Tricloanisole, in short 246-TCA. There are many factors that may cause the development of this substance, most of the times is practically unpredictable for cork producers. Up to some years ago, cork producers used to bleach corks with a chlorine solution and they lately found out that this substance reacted with humidity, as well as with a fungus present in cork, which eventually developed the fearful 246-TCA which in turn originated corky smells. Although corks are not washed with chlorine anymore, what is certain is that corkiness may still happens in some bottles of wine. They will lately found out this substance is naturally present in corks, whereas in other cases it develops because of contamination for having being in contact with containers during storage. Recent figures state that the fault of "smell of cork" affects about 2÷5% of total production of bottles of wine. In order to make things clear and complete, a corky wine is not prejudicial to health, the only drawback of corky wine is the disgusting smell and taste, a condition that, of course, is absolutely disliked by anyone who appreciates wine.

Another drawback that could happen after having opened a bottle of wine can be found in corks, although with a relatively low frequency, is a deposit of tartrates that could be formed in the cork's side which is in contact with wine, this special and pretty uncommon condition is shown in figure 6; these crystals can also be found in the bottom of the bottle as well. First of all the good news: tartrates are never to be considered as a defect and they are not cause of any defect to the wine. Tartrates crystals are absolutely harmless and they can be, if we really want to consider them as source of defects, unpleasing when observing the wine while it is in the bottle as well as when observing the cork. Technically speaking, tartrates are a byproduct of tartaric acid, the most important acid of wine, and the exact name is *tartaric acid's salt of potassium*, or simply *tartrates*. The formation of these crystals can also be caused as a consequence of a prolonged stay of the bottles, usually several months, in particularly cold environments, such as a refrigerator. Tartrates are more common in white wines instead of red wines and, once again, they are not to be considered as defect and they do not damage the wine in any way.

An important precaution that must be taken when a bottle of wine is being opened, is to make sure the foil is cut under the rim which is near the opening. This practice, which can be seen ad banal as well as maniacal, is mainly determined by hygienic reasons and allows a



Fig. 6: Deposit of tartrates on a cork

better and thoroughly cleaning of the neck and of the opening from which the wine will be poured. In case this part of the neck would be dirty, in this part mold is usually found, these dirty components would be transferred into the glass and could alter the organoleptic qualities of the wine. Development of mold between the foil and the neck can frequently happen in old bottles which have been stored in cellar for a long time, whereas it is almost impossible to find in bottles containing young wine. Another good reason which justifies the cut of the foil under the rim, is the possibility of detecting some wine spilled out from the bottle because of some temperature change happened during storage. This spilled wine, trapped between the foil and the neck, turns into vinegar and then get oxidized and therefore it is source of bad smells and disgusting tastes. When this happens it is absolutely good to thoroughly clean the neck of the bottle with a napkin in order to prevent this oxidized wine to be transferred into the glass.

The custom of opening a bottle of wines, especially red wines, with some hours in advance, a custom which is often considered as a "golden rule" for wine lovers is, if we logically consider the effect of this practice, useless. Bottles are usually opened with some time in advance in order to aerate the wine or, as often said in wine parlance, "to allow a wine breathing"; let's consider the condition of a wine when the bottle is full. The only part of the wine in contact with air, and therefore oxygen, is the one which is in the neck, a very narrow surface if compared to the total volume of the bottle: in order to obtain an effective and appreciable effect, the bottle should be opened with several hours in advance. In this regard, it is more convenient and appreciable the effect of the oxygenation a wine can have while it is poured into the glass: a lesser quantity of wine and a wider surface exposed to the air, a condition that cannot be found in any bottle. Also consider the useful effects of swirling the glass which actually oxygenates a wine; this cannot compare to the amount of oxygen the wine can get while it stays in an opened bottle. Some support the idea that the oxygenation of wine in the bottle is indeed a slow process which does not cause any shock to the wine, in particular very old wines, and according to this point of view, the idea could also be agreeable. Therefore, what can be said about decanting a wine, that is the procedure of pouring a wine from a bottle to a decanter which is usually accomplished for particularly old wines? This operation, even when it is accomplished in the best and correct way possible, that is by slowly pouring the wine, will completely and rapidly oxygenate the whole content of the bottle and, as soon as the wine is completely poured in the decanter, the surface of wine in contact with air is very wide compared to the surface of the neck of the bottle: the quantity of oxygen a wine can get when it is in a decanter is obviously high. Before illustrating the procedures for opening a bottle of wine, it is good to remember that before serving the wine to the guests, it must be rapidly checked. Just pour a small quantity of wine in a glass, preferably an ISO tasting glass, and by rapidly evaluating all its aspects, make sure the wine has no defects; this will surely avoid bad surprises as well as disappointments for you and your guests.

Still Wines and Lightly Sparkling Wines

The opening of a bottle of still wine, as well as the opening of bottles having the cork completely submerged in the neck, starts by cutting the foil, when present. This operation will be accomplished by using the blade of the corkscrew. Foil must always be cut under the rim of the neck. The exact point where the foil is to be cut is shown in figure 7. After having cut the foil, with a napkin thoroughly clean the opening of the bottle and the rim; in this part of the bottle may have developed molds and could ruin the first wine poured in a glass. Moreover make sure there is no trace of oxidized wine spilled out from the bottle during the long stay in cellar and because of change of temperature, in this case, it must be completely wiped out with a napkin.

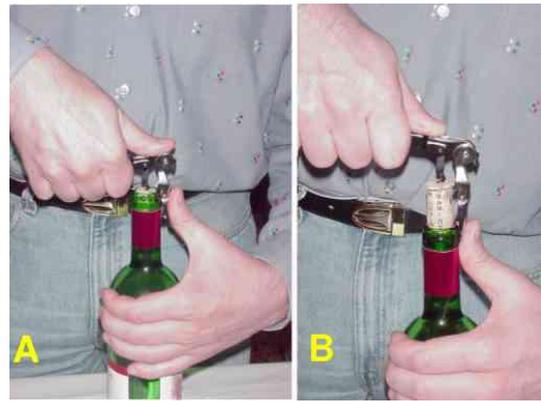


Fig. 7: Opening of a bottle with submerged cork

Extract the spiral of the corkscrew and place its point on the cork, slightly off center, and push it down in order to allow it to enter the surface of the cork. Keep the corkscrew perpendicular and in vertical position and start screwing the spiral into the cork; pay attention to the quantity of spiral screwed into the cork and make sure it does not go beyond it as cork's debris could fall into the wine. In order to prevent this, check the length of the cork before screwing the spiral into it and screw it according to this. After this has been done, place the lever on the rim of the opening of the bottle and grip the handle of the corkscrew while pushing the lever with other hand's thumb in order to prevent the lever to slip down during the pulling movement achieved for extracting the cork. (See figure 7.A)

Start pulling the handle of the corkscrew until the cork has been almost extracted from the neck as illustrated in figure 7.B. At this point, the extraction of the cork will be completed by hand: using a napkin grasp the extracted part of the cork and it will be removed by twisting the cork or with moving it side by side, the cork will never be pulled up. This operation prevents the not very elegant "bang" and, therefore, the "piston effect" that could damage the wine which is in the upper side of the bottle. The "bang", which frequently happens while opening bottles of sparkling wines, is to be avoided because it is cause of this "piston effect" and part of volatile substances in a wine would be sucked up to the neck and they would get concentrated in the upper side of the bottle, therefore in the wine which is in the neck. This can be source of a false "smell of cork" as well as other bad odors in the wine that would be poured in the first glass. In case the cork of a slightly sparkling wine is to be extracted, the procedure will be accomplished with higher care and attention because the bottle has a higher internal pressure and this could suddenly pop the cork out and would cause the piston effect we already discussed about.

As soon as the cork has been removed, while holding it with a napkin, it must be checked and make sure its condition is good, in particular, it will be checked in order to detect the so called "smell of cork". Cork must be held with a napkin in order to prevent the perception of any possible odor coming from the hand. The cork must be completely checked and must be examined in order to check for its good condition as well as the absence of any rotten substance. After this preliminary examination, the cork is being smelt on its side and for all its length, therefore it will be smelt the part of the cork that was in contact with wine. A cork in good conditions must always have odors which resemble the one of the wine contained in the bottle, any other odor may be sign of possible defects. In case the cork is found to be good and with no defect, the neck of the bottle and its opening will be cleaned again with a napkin, make sure to eliminate any possible cork's debris. Now it is the time to check the wine and to make sure it is drinkable, therefore it will be poured into glasses.

Sparkling Wines

Before opening a bottle of sparkling wine, in case it was chilled by submerging it in a bucket filled with water and ice, it will be wiped with a napkin. The procedure of opening a bottle of sparkling wine starts by removing its foil. This can be done by using the blade of the corkscrew and the foil will be cut under the rim of the neck, just under the wire cage, and then it will be removed by hand. (See figure 8.A) After this, hold the neck of the bottle with the hand while keeping the thumb on the cork in order to prevent the cork to be suddenly expelled out because of the high pressure in the bottle. Using the other hand start removing the wire cage, as illustrated in figure 8.A. In case the wire cage should break during this operation, you can use sparkling wine pliers (see figure 5) and by using its cutting nippers, cut the wire in order to allow cage removal.

After having removed the wire cage, the bottle will be held as shown in figure 8.B and the operation of the extraction of cork will start. Firmly hold the cork with a hand, whereas the other hand will start rotating the base of the bottle in order to loose the cork and to start its extraction. (see figure 8.B) During this operation particular attention must be paid in order to oppose to internal pressure's force that would suddenly expel the cork and could cause the "bang", this must be avoided. Because of the internal high pressure found in bottles of sparkling wines, the piston effect, which we discussed already, is more accentuated and its effect would suck up a even higher quantity of volatile substances. At every rotation of the bottle the cork will be extracted more and more and after a while it will be completely extracted. When the cork is almost extracted, internal pressure will start to come out from the bottle and a hiss will be heard: when this happens, stop any rotating movement and wait for the internal pressure to completely get out from the bottle while keeping the hand on the cork in order to oppose to internal pressure. The pressure must be released from the bottle slowly and gently. (figure 8.C) At the end of this phase the cork will have completely come out from the neck and it will be in the hand's palm. It is essential to keep the bottle oblique during the entire operation in order to prevent any possible spillage of wine because of the internal pressure. However this may happen in case the bottle is being opened when it is kept in vertical position or when its temperature is too warm or in case the bottle was energetically shaken.

After this operation is done, the cork will be examined in order to make sure it is in good conditions and it will also be smelt in order

to detect any possible "smell of cork". The neck of the bottle will be wiped and cleaned with a napkin as well as the opening. After having rapidly evaluated the sparkling wine in order to make sure it has no defect, the wine can be poured into glasses.

Decanting

Decanting is that enchanting operation having two specific purposes: the first one is to separate wine from any possible deposit in the bottle in consequence of a very long time of aging, the second one is to promote the aeration of a wine. Decanting is always needed in case the wine is to be separated from its possible deposit, it is optional when the wine has to be simply aerated. Decanting is also useful in case a wine, including young wines, has some light smell defects, such as an excessive quantity of sulfur dioxide (SO₂). Such defects can easily disappear with a proper aeration, therefore decanting such wines may be useful.

The practice of decanting is less and less used in case a wine has to be simply aerated, as the huge variety of glasses available on the market allow a good aeration of the wine with the same efficiency. Decanting is also a subject that may be cause of arguments among wine lovers. For some it is absolutely needed for any aged wine, others avoid decanting any wine because they believe this operation can destroy all the complex aromas developed during the aging process. The sure thing is that decanting may destroy very old wines because they would not tolerate such a sudden oxygenation. However, a wine must not be decanted with many hours in advance: what may be seen as a simple aeration may turn into a disgraceful oxidation, something which is not liked in any wine. The best thing is to decant a wine soon before it is being served and decanting must be done only when it is really needed.

The operation of decanting is accomplished by using a "decanter" and a candle. Before starting to decant a wine, it will be good to rinse the decanter with a small quantity of wine, the same wine to be decanted, and make sure the wine will completely rinse the inside of the decanter. At end of this operation, this wine will be poured off and discarded. With one hand hold the decanter while keeping it oblique, whereas the other hand will be used to hold the bottle while making sure bottle's neck is over the candle. Pay attention to the distance of the bottle from the candle in order to prevent the neck to heat up as this would damage the wine. Start pouring the wine into the decanter, it will be poured slowly, and make sure the wine goes along the decanter's side. As soon as turbid wines is seen through the bottle's neck, stop the operation in order not to pour the deposit into the decanted wine.

Keeping leftover wine

It may happen that after having served a bottle of wine there is still some unfinished wine and in this case one may need to keep it and to save it in order not to ruin wine's flavor. The main factor that compromise the quality of wine is oxygen, for this reason any method used for saving leftover wine will aim to prevent or, at least, diminish the contact of wine with air in order to limit the effects of oxidation. The best way will aim to have the least possible airspace inside of a bottle in order to limit the contact of the surface of wine with air and therefore having a very low oxygen to wine ratio. The best way to save leftover wine is to transfer it to a smaller bottle: it will be completely filled and then sealed with a cap or a cork. This way will ensure a very small airspace and will prevent oxidation. For this purpose, it is good to save empty half bottles; they will be very useful and handy for saving leftover wine.

Moreover, there are many commercial and alternative solutions that allow leftover wine to be kept and saved for some days before it gets ruined. The most famous one is surely the pump used to suck air from

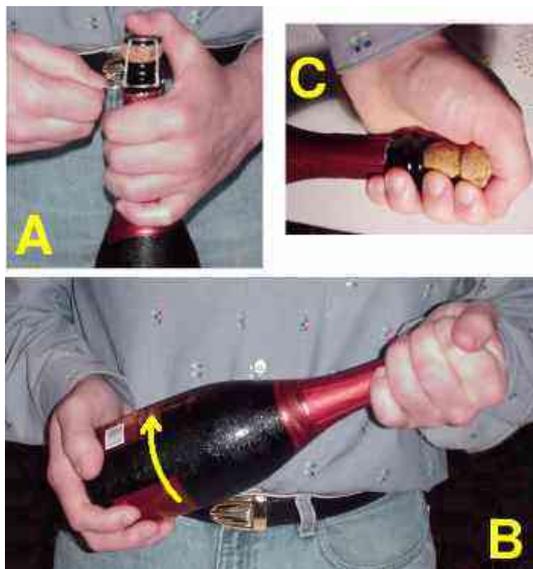


Fig. 8: Opening of a bottle of sparkling wine

the bottle and this procedure can save a wine for not more than 2-3 days. The system is made of a pump and reusable rubber stoppers used to seal the bottle. The pump is placed on the stopper and then by pumping up and down, the air will be sucked from the bottle until most of the oxygen will be extracted. Another way is to make use of special canned harmless gas, usually made of nitrogen (N₂) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) which can be sprayed inside of a bottle. The gas will blanket the surface of the wine and this will prevent any contact with the oxygen and therefore oxidation. No matter what method is being used to save leftover wine, it must be consumed within two or three days.

Saving leftover sparkling wine is done by sealing the bottle with a special stopper, known as "sparkling wine stopper" expressly made for this purpose and they can be bought in any wine shop. These stoppers hermetically seal the bottle and prevent the oxygen to get in as well as the carbon dioxide to get out. The famous "trick" of leaving a teaspoon on the neck of the bottle has no effect on the sparkling wine and therefore is useless.

NOT JUST WINE

Bread

Despite its apparent simplicity, bread is certainly one of the most important heritage of the entire humanity

Bread is probably the most important food for the entire humanity, there is no doubt about it being a real and true richness and an extraordinary resource. Unfortunately we do not know the name of that real genius, or the name of those geniuses, who invented bread and baked it for the first time. What is certain is that bread had an amazing development during the course of its history, however its ingredients did not change that much and they are almost the same nowadays. We who live in such a frenetic society and afar from the times when the bread was "invented", take the presence of this food in our lives as granted, we do not probably realize its real value and importance. Although we do not know who was the first man, or woman, to bake bread, he or she was surely someone who had a vivid and amazing imagination: thinking about milling wheat in order to get a powder, flour, and then thinking of making a dough from it by using water and then to bake it with fire, it may seem as something evident and expected, anyway we have to admit it is one of the most ingenious inventions of the entire history of humanity.

Talking about bread, about a particular kind of bread, would make much not sense, because this food is such an integral part of almost every culture of the world and every country has its own traditions and bread styles: simple bread, leavened bread, unleavened bread, special bread, seasoned bread and so on, without even considering the many shapes bread can have. If we consider the many variations and local breads we found in every country of the world, the list is practically endless. No matter the variety of breads produced in the world there is one thing which is common to every one of them: goodness. Bread, compared to other foods, is pretty simple, however, no other food is capable of evoking such emotions and charm as the fragrance and the smell of baked bread. This surely makes bread special as well as unique, and it is indeed. If we also consider the real power of bread which is capable of satisfying so much people's hunger all over the world, for its simplicity and goodness it is usually considered as a "first-aid" food for all those people who, unfortunately, are living in conditions of hunger and desperate need. This is not something unimportant, for this reason only, bread deserves the highest consideration and the highest praise: bread is certainly a noble and precious food, maybe the most noble food of them all.

Short History of Bread

The first historical facts about bread we got to know are concerned to production of unleavened bread and they are dated back to about 10 000 years ago. However it was in Mesopotamia, about 7 000 BC, where man started using stones as tools in order to mill wheat and obtain flour, it was subsequently kneaded with water and the dough was baked in a fireplace. There are some archaeological discoveries, dated back about 4 000 years ago, where they found some bread pieces in a village of Switzerland. Other archaeological discoveries were made in some tombs in Thebes, Egypt, dated back about 3 500 years ago. It was in Egypt, around 2 600 BC, that the most important discovery about bread production was made: yeast and, therefore, leavening. Before man learnt how to cultivate yeasts, he was used to keep a small part of the bread's dough, which was left in contact with air, and this allowed yeasts naturally present in air, to ferment this dough and this also had the consequence to sour it. This dough was added to the the dough used to make bread and this started the leavening process. Ancient Egyptians were probably the first ones to consider baking as an art, they consumed lots of bread and it was mainly the food of lower social classes. For this reason Greeks were used to call Egyptians "*artophagoi*", that is "bread eaters".

Baking traditions were very common in Egypt and they were a common practices since 2 500 BC, where the refined and elegant foods of noble and higher social class were opposed to the foods consumed by poor people, mainly bread which was seasoned with poppy seeds or sesame seeds. In ancient Rome, bakers were considered as very prestigious persons and bakery was considered very important as well as ritual and they even built ovens in temples. Romans improved wheat's milling techniques and they were the first ones to produce a special kind of flour that allowed, for the very first time in the history of humanity, to bake the so called "*white bread*". It is believed that around 100 BC there were more than 200 commercial shops in Rome that baked and sold bread and, around 100 AD, they established a school of baking.

During the course of its long history, bread has become more and more important for people's life and still today it plays an important and fundamental role in celebrations and religious rites in many cultures and traditions of many countries of the world. For example, bread is often cited in the Bible and it is considered as a food having a very high importance in rites and celebrations; the very same meaning is still used today and it is still fundamental for all the religions which have Bible as their Holy Book. Nowadays bread is spread everywhere in the world and every country, every culture and every tradition has its own bread styles as well as their typical ingredients. The process of the evolution of bread can be defined as in perennial development; thanks to its high popularity in the countries of the world, bakers are always creating and inventing new types every day: the history of bread is not over yet.

Classification and Production

Bread is a product obtained by baking a leavened dough prepared with wheat flour, or other grains, water and yeast, sometimes salt may be added as well. Classification of bread varies according to every country where it is produced and each of them, more or less, has specific laws which regulate bread production and definition. The first category is about yeast usage, in this case we will have leavened bread, the most common type, and unleavened bread, usually shaped as buns and having little thickness. Other characteristics used to classify bread are color, crust type, friability and volume to weight ratio. Flour used to produce bread determines both the color and classification, the most common one used to make bread is wheat flour that gives "*white bread*" or bran flour, more rich in fibers, used to make a darker bread.

Another important and vast category of bread depends on other ingredients used to make it, usually fats, flavors, spices and aromatic ingredients, which give the so called “*special bread*” or “*flavored bread*”. Typical fatty ingredients used to make flavored bread are lard, butter and oil, usually olive oil. Other ingredients used for the preparation of the dough are milk, beer, wine and yogurt. The availability of special breads is really impressive and vast and in the dough are usually added aromatic seeds, sometimes simply spread on the surface, such as anise, sesame, poppy and fennel. Other ingredients used to prepare bread dough are sugar, raisins, hazelnuts, walnuts, many kind of dried fruits, such as apple, olives and sometimes vegetables such as onion. The list of ingredients used to make special bread is virtually endless, we can certainly say that the only limit for special bread is the fantasy and the creativity of bakers.

Another classification of bread is represented by the type of flour used to make the dough. The most common flour used to make bread is wheat flour, however it can be mixed with meals and flours produced by other grains, such as rye, barley, rice, oat, spelt, corn as well as millet and soybean. In this case the bread has the same name as the flour used to make it, such as “*rye bread*” or “*soybean bread*”. These grain flours or meals are usually mixed with wheat flour in variable proportions, however it may also happen to have breads exclusively made with a grain flour without using wheat flour at all. Another ingredient used sometimes for making bread dough is potato, which is usually boiled, and it usually allows bread to be saved for a longer time before it gets dried. Lastly, the production of bread can also be made by using durum-wheat flour, the same kind of flour used to make pasta, such as spaghetti, as well as extracts of malt.

Preparation and production of bread is a relatively simple process where a dough made of flour, water and yeast is baked. This “simple” recipe requires a particular skill and mastery in every phase of the production, from making the dough to leavening and finally to baking. The most used flour for the production of bread is wheat flour which has, besides a good and pleasant smell and taste, a good amount of gluten, an elastic protein, which allows the making of a homogeneous, compact and elastic dough, a condition which is indispensable to obtain a good leavening and a good bake. The production of bread starts with kneading flour with water and then some yeast is added, therefore portions of dough are shaped according to the kind of bread to be made, and then are allowed to stay in order to leavening to take place. Leavening is a fundamental process because it gives the dough volume. Yeast in dough has the purpose to transform, or to be precise, to ferment sugar contained in flour into alcohol and carbon dioxide. This gas, being trapped in the dough, forms internal bubbles and therefore volume. The most used type of yeast used to make bread is the so called “*beer yeast*”, whose exact name is “*Saccharomyces Cerevisiae*”, the same used for making beer. This process is followed by baking which also has the purpose of interrupting the leavening process, to fix bread’s shape and to form the crust, which is, according to the traditions of each country, more or less friable and crunchy. Moreover, the baking process has the purpose of improving the flavor of the dough. The time needed for leavening and of baking largely depends on the ingredients used to make the dough, quantity of yeast and of the kind of bread to be made.

Bread and Cooking

Bread is probably the food that more than any other else, has been source of a multitude of other products: “children of bread” make a long and vast list of products renowned and appreciated everywhere. Among the most famous “children of bread” we have the huge multitude of buns, cakes, as well as the renowned and colored pizza. Bread is also an essential element of a certain kind of modern nutrition, because of lack of time, or worse, because of those frenetic social impositions, which force people to have frugal and quick meals; the vast availability of sandwiches filled with many ingredients, practically

represent the most common choice. Bread is also used in many recipes, either sliced or, when it is dried, ground and added to many mixtures and fillings as well as for breading meat and cheese. Bread is also used to make excellent soups: bread is not just an important ingredient of many recipes, it can also be consumed alone, with nothing else, bread is really a fundamental ingredient of cooking of all times. Bread despite it can be considered as a modest and simple food, is always capable of adding a genuine and good touch everywhere it is being used: just consider the simple toasted slice of bread seasoned with excellent olive oil, a simple and genuine gourmet food very popular in central Italy. Bread is really the most worthy and deserving food which represents that philosophy based on the most supreme goodness of the genuine and simple things. Even today, despite many millennia have passed since it was “invented”, bread is still a firm and indispensable element of the nutrition of the people all over the world; there are few human inventions that proved to resist the course of time and to remain an important element of daily life: bread is surely one of them.

Perhaps the success of bread was determined, and continues to be determined, by its very important content of nutritive elements and because of being an important source of calories. 100 grams of bread (about 3½ ounces) gives about 260 Kilo calories, in case it is flavored or “seasoned”, the quantity of calories can also be as twice as that. Bread is mainly composed by the 8% of proteins, a good amount of starch, about 56%, it is an important source of carbohydrates and therefore of energy. Contents of fat is pretty low, about 0.5%, this figure is of course referred to simple bread, that is the bread made without using any fat. Bread belongs to the food category of carbohydrates and, according to nutrition research, carbohydrates should represent about 60% of total calories consumed during the day. This is another good reason that makes bread a noble food because of its capacity of allowing humanity to survive and to live in good health. Lastly, bread has the most genuine and efficient simplicity along with the most fragrant goodness: the joy of smelling the aroma of just baked bread, to eat it alone, while it is still warm, with no other ingredient, evokes in anyone pleasing sensations and allows us to understand the reason why when we talk about simple and tasty foods, we inevitably end up saying “it is as good as bread!”.



Wine Parade

The best 15 wines according to DiWineTaste's readers. To express your best three wines send us an E-mail at WineParade@DiWineTaste.com or fill in the form available at our WEB site www.DiWineTaste.com.

Rank		Wine, Producer
1	☆	Château Pontet-Canet Pauillac 2000
2	☆	Muffato della Sala 1999, Castello della Sala
3	☆	Masseto 1998, Tenuta dell'Ornellaia
4	☆	Gevrey Chambertin DB Boillot 1998
5	☆	Cape Mentelle Semillon Sauvignon 2001
6	☆	Rioja Reserva "Pagos Viejos" 1997, Bodega Artadi - Cosecheros Alavares
7	☆	Chardonnay 2000, Planeta
8	☆	Champagne Ayala Brut
9	☆	Château Lynch-Bages Pauillac 2000
10	☆	Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 1995, Fattoria dei Barbi
11	☆	Meursault 1er cru 1999, Perrieres Louis Latour
12	☆	Monbazillac Cuvée Prestige 1996, Château Theulet
13	☆	Terre Alte 1999, Livio Felluga
14	☆	Crozes Hermitage Rouge Meysonniers 1998, Chapoutier
15	☆	Hamilton Russel Pinot Noir 2000

Legend: ↗ up ↘ down ↔ stable ☆ new entry

Classified

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