

# CRIB SHEETS FOR WINE BLIND TASTING

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EXTRACTED FROM THE CONCISE GUIDE TO  
WINE AND BLIND TASTING

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## STYLISTIC PROFILES: WHITE WINES

As discussed, the deductive approach to blind tasting rests on three pillars: accurate analysis of the wine, knowledge and experience of the most important grape varieties and wine styles, and the linking of the two to arrive at a best guess.

The most important grape varieties and wine styles are the subject of the second and larger part of this book. What follows is merely a detachable synopsis for easy reference in blind tasting practices.

### RIESLING

#### Germany, Mosel

Mosel Riesling is pale in colour, often with a touch of effervescence. On the nose, it is intensely fragrant, more floral than fruity with notes of stony rainwater and sherbet. On the palate, it is delicate or filigree, with a mineral finish. Alcohol is very low and acidity very high, but balanced by sugar and extract. Sweeter examples may be botrytised. Rieslings from the Saar and Ruwer side valleys are steelier than those from the Middle Mosel. Drier styles are now a lot more common.

## **Germany, Rheingau**

Compared to Riesling from the Middle Mosel, Riesling from the Rheingau is a lot sturdier: deeper in colour with a firmer structure and texture, riper fruit, and higher alcohol. It is commonly made in an austere, completely dry style.

## **France, Alsace**

Alsatian Riesling tends to be drier, richer in extract, and higher in alcohol than Riesling from across the Rhine. It is often tight, steely, and inexpressive in its youth, with aromas of mineral, apple, citrus fruits, stone fruits, jasmine, and honey. With age, it opens out and develops a complex bouquet dominated by pure fruit flavours and appealing petrol or kerosene notes, typically with a long, dry finish carried on the tail of a backbone of high acidity.

## **Austria, Wachau or Kremstal or Kamptal**

Like Alsatian Riesling, which it most resembles, Austrian Riesling is dry with high acidity, medium-to-high alcohol, and, especially in finer examples, pronounced minerality. However, it is typically less austere and dominated by riper stone fruit. ‘Hints of lime’ is another common tasting note. Riesling from Kremstal and Kamptal is often broader than that from Wachau.

## **Australia, South Australia, Clare Valley or Eden Valley**

Clare Valley or Eden Valley Riesling is pale lemon and lime green in colour. Spritz in the glass speaks of fermentation in stainless steel, which is common in Australia. The wines are characterized by searing acidity and mineral austerity. Unlike, say, Rheingau Riesling, their fruit profile leans very strongly towards lime, whether this be, depending on ripeness, lime zest, fresh lime juice, or lime cordial. The best examples are complex enough to overlie this ‘limy-ness’

with floral, appley, and waxy notes, and are further distinguished by a chalky or talcum texture and a long, dry, and mineral finish. They may sometimes exhibit a mineral pungency derided by critics as ‘fly spray’. Eden Valley Riesling is generally leaner, more delicate, and more austere than Clare Valley Riesling, although the two styles are difficult to distinguish.

## **New Zealand, e.g. South Island, Nelson**

When it comes to Riesling, New Zealand looks more to Europe than to Australia, with generally lighter, more delicate styles. The wines are typically crisp and clean with a fresh lime character, as opposed to the pungent lime cordial note of many Australian Rieslings. There are, however, a range of styles, including delicate, Mosel-like styles and late harvest dessert styles. The climate preserves Riesling’s searing acidity. With age, the best examples develop appealing petrol notes. Note that Riesling, from wherever it is, is never oaked.

## **GEWURZTRAMINER**

### **France, Alsace**

Gewurztraminer (or Gewürztraminer in Alsace, with a trema) is gold in colour, sometimes with a pinkish tinge. The nose is intense and often reminiscent of Turkish delight, or an oriental bazaar or perfume shop, with notes of rose water, spice, lychee, grapefruit, peach kernel, and smoky bacon. On the palate, it is opulent with high alcohol, but can, especially in hotter vintages, seem flabby and lacking in acidity. It ranges in sweetness from dry to very sweet, but, owing to its aromatic profile, can be sweeter than it is. It is never oaked. Gewurztraminer is readily confused with Viognier, but has a more exotic profile and a slightly bitter finish.

## **PINOT GRIS/PINOT GRIGIO**

### **France, Alsace**

Alsatian Pinot Gris is deep lemon in colour, often with a pinkish tinge. The nose is fairly aromatic, with notes of spice and pear or stone fruit, hints of honey and smoke, and a certain earthy minerality. The palate combines the spiciness and alcohol of Gewurztraminer with some of the structure and acidity of Riesling. The wines often have a distinct oily texture. They range in sweetness from dry to sweet and are never oaked.

### **Italy, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia**

Compared to Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio is lighter in colour with less ripe fruit on the nose. On the palate, it is leaner and tighter with a higher acidity. It is invariably dry and unoaked, with faint notes of apple, pear, lemon, white peach, white flowers, and bitter almond, and, often, a clean and mineral finish.

## **CHARDONNAY**

### **France, Burgundy, Chablis**

Chablis is pale lemon in colour, sometimes with a greenish tinge, with notes of citrus fruits, green apple, honeysuckle, cream, and, often, a characteristic stony or smoky minerality ('wet stone'). The palate is lean, dry, and austere with marked acidity, which is a key distinguishing feature. New oak is usually absent. Top examples are weightier and, especially with increasing age, can be difficult to distinguish from their counterparts in Beaune.

## **France, Burgundy, Beaune**

Beaune is lemon in colour with primary notes of ripe apple and citrus fruits. French oak is common, contributing notes of vanilla, toast, and, along with *bâtonnage*, butter. The wine is full-bodied, with crisp acidity and medium-to-high alcohol. It can be intense, complex, and lengthy, developing notes such as minerals, spice, tropical fruits, lemon tart, and toffee. Puligny-Montrachet is tight and structured and mineral. Chassagne-Montrachet is perhaps slightly richer, fruitier, and nuttier. Meursault, in contrast, is broad and buttery and rather extravagant, although some producers favour leaner styles.

## **France, Burgundy, Mâcon**

As with Chablis, much Mâcon is unoaked. However, Mâcon is much less acidic than Chablis. Compared to Beaune and especially to Chablis, it is deeper in colour, with riper aromas (pineapple, melon, honeysuckle...) and a fuller, softer body. The Pouilly wines (Fuissé, Vinzelles, and Loché), which are often oaked, tend to be richer and riper on the one hand, and finer and more complex on the other.

## **USA, California, Napa Valley**

Napa is hotter and sunnier than Burgundy, leading to wines with a darker colour, fuller body, higher alcohol, and lower acidity. Until recently, the fashion was for highly concentrated, heavily oaked wines. Napa Chardonnay typically exhibits notes of baked apple and tropical fruits with vanilla, toast, butter, or coconut from oak ageing. Cool climate Chardonnay reminiscent of Chablis is made in certain sites in Sonoma, Mendocino, and Monterey. Coastal Chardonnays are more precise and 'sun-kissed' than their Chablis counterparts, and often accompanied by a touch of salinity from the salty air.

### **Australia e.g. New South Wales, Hunter Valley**

Australian Chardonnay is often made in an ultra-clean style. Oak, when used, can seem almost clinical in its application. Wines from warmer regions tend to be dominated by fig, melon, and tropical fruits, while those from cooler regions tend more towards fresh apple, citrus fruits, and flowers, often with ripe stone fruit on the palate. Australian Chardonnay tends to lack the yoghurt or 'dairy' note often found in New Zealand expressions. Modest examples may betray added tartaric acid or the crude use of oak staves or chips. Overall, the best sites for Chardonnay are in the Hunter Valley, the regions around Port Phillip Bay, Tasmania, Adelaide Hills, and Margaret River.

### **New Zealand, e.g. South Island, Marlborough**

New Zealand Chardonnay exhibits ripe (although not tropical) fruit and high acidity. Typical notes are ripe apple and stone fruit, sometimes with a distinct yoghurt note from malolactic fermentation. Top examples evince Burgundian winemaking techniques, especially oak ageing, with American oak less common than it used to be. Chardonnay from the North Island (Hawke's Bay) is often riper, but it is hard to generalise.

### **Chile, e.g. Coquimbo, Limarí**

The cool climate expression of Chardonnay from Limarí, Casablanca, and San Antonio (especially Leyda) has become Chile's signature style of Chardonnay. The wines are lean, restrained, and elegant with notes of both citrus and tropical fruits. Leading producers favour Burgundian techniques, with the current fashion being for more subtle oaking. The best examples can be difficult to distinguish from well-made Mâcon. Chardonnay from warmer sites in the Central Valley are lower in acidity and higher in alcohol, with more overt tropical fruits.

## **MELON DE BOURGOGNE**

### **France, Loire, Muscadet**

Muscadet is pale, sometimes almost watery, in colour, with a slight effervescence that can prickle on the tongue. On the nose, it is distinctly unaromatic. On the palate, it is dry and light-bodied with high acidity and a touch of minerality or saltiness, especially on the finish. Lees ageing contributes yeasty aromas and a rounder, creamier texture, and top examples can also exhibit notes such as smoke, honey, and dried fruits. Alcohol hovers at around 12%. Muscadet is often confused with Chablis, which is however more mineral, with higher acidity and alcohol. I think of Muscadet as a wine with a lot of negative space, in a good way.

## **VIOGNIER**

### **France, Northern Rhône, Condrieu or Château-Grillet**

Condrieu is gold to deep gold in colour. High alcohol and a full, almost oily body are balanced by an intense perfume of candied peach, apricot, orange blossom, anise, acacia, and violets. Although technically dry, the aromatic richness and high alcohol can produce an impression of sweetness. Acidity is not as high as in Chardonnay and can be distinctly low, producing an impression of smoothness or, sometimes, flabbiness. The trend is towards less new oak, and many examples are unoaked to preserve the delicate aromatic purity of Viognier. The Condrieu enclave of Château-Grillet, though still 100% Viognier, is more 'Burgundian' than Condrieu: drier, lighter, more delicate, less perfumed, and oaked.

## **MARSANNE AND ROUSSANNE**

### **France, Northern Rhône, e.g. Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage, Saint-Joseph**

Marsanne and Roussanne are found in a number of regions other than their native Rhône Valley, including Savoie, the Languedoc, California, Washington, Victoria, and Swartland. They are often blended with each other, as in Hermitage and the Northern Rhône, or with other varieties such as Grenache Blanc, Viognier, or Chardonnay. Marsanne is full-bodied, 'oily', or 'waxy', with high alcohol and low-to-medium acidity, evolving notes of marzipan, hazelnut, honey, and beeswax, and a slightly bitter finish. Roussanne is much higher in acidity and more aromatic or 'perfumed', with notes of herbal or floral tea, pear, apricot, and honeysuckle. White Hermitage, which is mostly Marsanne, is rich yet textural and mineral, and with age develops complex notes of honey, beeswax, and hazelnuts.

## **CHENIN BLANC**

### **France, Loire, Vouvray or Coteaux du Layon**

Vouvray is made in a range of styles. In the sweeter styles, the high acidity may be masked by residual sugar. With increasing age, aromas of green apple, quince, and acacia blossom surrender to complex tertiary aromas such as honeysuckle, fig, and lanolin. Botrytis is less common than in Coteaux du Layon, which also tends to be fuller in body, sweeter, and lower in acidity. Compared to Sauternes, which is typically associated with peach and honey, the sweet wines of the Loire are more often associated with apple, quince, and apricot, together with much higher acidity and rather less sugar and alcohol.

## **France, Loire, Savennières**

Savennières is gold with dense notes of apple, pear, chamomile, warm straw, cooked fruits, beeswax, grilled almonds, and, with age, old cognac (musty lanolin, 'wet dog') and petrol. On the palate, it is dry and unoaked (or lightly oaked) with high acidity and alcohol and a long mineral finish with a slightly bitter afternote. Compared to dry Vouvray, it is more austere with a fuller body and higher alcohol.

## **South Africa, Western Cape, e.g. Stellenbosch**

Much South African Chenin is rather generic, but some producers focus on quality expressions similar to those from the Loire, including rich, bone dry wines reminiscent of Savennières and sweet, botrytised wines reminiscent of Coteaux du Layon. Owing to the warmer and sunnier climate, the emphasis is more on tropical fruits than on apples. Classic notes of honey and nuts can come through in the best examples, but the musty character typical of the Loire is mostly absent. In general, acidity, although still high, is lower, and alcohol is higher. Some premium examples may be lightly oaked.

## **SAUVIGNON BLANC**

### **France, Loire, Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé**

Sancerre is pale lemon in colour, possibly with a green tinge. Notes of gooseberry and grapefruit are accompanied by hints of blackcurrant leaf, nettles, cut grass, and smoke. The nose is sometimes short-handed as 'cat's pee on a gooseberry bush'. On the palate, Sancerre is dry and light-bodied with high acidity, medium alcohol, and a mineral finish. Oak is usually absent. In practice, it is very difficult to distinguish Sancerre from Pouilly-Fumé across the river, although the latter does tend to be smokier. Compared to Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé are more smoky and mineral with less overt fruit and a cooler fruit profile.

## **France, Bordeaux, Graves**

White Graves combines the opulence of Semillon with the verve of Sauvignon Blanc, and is substantial and refreshing both at the same time. The wine can be complex with intense aromas of citrus fruits, peach, acacia, beeswax, and hazelnut. On the palate, it is medium in body, acidity, and alcohol, often with discernible oak influence and lees character. Top examples are often fuller in body with heavier oak. Compared to Loire Sauvignon Blanc, Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc is more expressive of tropical fruits.

## **New Zealand, South Island, Marlborough**

Compared to Loire Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is typically riper, higher in alcohol, and less chalky or mineral. It has a clean, pungent aroma with notes of gooseberry, passion fruit, asparagus, fresh grass, and blackcurrant leaf. Acidity is high but somewhat disguised by a smooth texture and, often, a touch of residual sugar that contributes roundness rather than sweetness. Body is medium and alcohol medium-to-high. The finest examples can boast a more 'serious' austerity, and, as in Bordeaux, may be fermented and matured in oak. Sauvignon Blanc from the North Island (such as Hawke's Bay) is often riper and less herbaceous.

## **South Africa, Western Cape, e.g. Walker Bay**

If Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc is ripe and expressive and Loire Sauvignon Blanc is lean and mineral, then South African Sauvignon Blanc often falls somewhere in between. While the gooseberry and nettle is unmissable, the wine is less overt than Marlborough yet fuller in body than Loire. Quality examples with complexity and minerality hail from cooler regions, in particular Walker Bay, Cape Agulhas, and the Cape Peninsula. Oaked Sauvignon Blanc, so-called Fumé Blanc or Blanc Fumé, is produced throughout South Africa.

## **Chile, Aconcagua**

Most Chilean Sauvignon Blanc is vinified in stainless steel. It neither matches New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc for punchiness nor Sancerre for restraint, but is instead distinguished by grapefruit and a nettle or smoky herbal note. Wines from warmer sites are often dominated by tropical fruit aromas and can be rather flabby.

## **USA, California**

Compared to Marlborough, Californian Sauvignon Blanc is often higher in alcohol with a softer acidity. Tropical fruits such as guava, mango, and pineapple overlie the nettle and gooseberry character of the grape variety. The oaked 'Fumé Blanc' style remains popular.

## **SEMILLON**

### **France, Bordeaux, Graves**

See above, under Sauvignon Blanc.

### **France, Bordeaux, Sauternes or Barsac**

Sauternes is intense, complex, and long, with notes of apricot, peach, passion fruit, orange marmalade, honey, honeysuckle, acacia, vanilla, and hazelnut. In time, the colour transmutes from gold to amber and copper, and notes such as old books, caramel, and crème brûlée are not uncommon. On the palate, crisp acidity balances the intense sweetness, rich creaminess, and high alcohol. Barsac is difficult to distinguish from Sauternes but is often lighter, fresher, and less sweet. Note that Sauternes and Barsac are varying blends of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc, and, in some cases, Muscadelle.

## **Australia, New South Wales, Hunter Valley**

The Hunter Valley produces a unique style of Semillon that is very pale in colour with notes of flowers, citrus fruits, fennel, and fresh grass, high acidity, and low alcohol. The wines are dry and often quite textural on the palate. The best examples are extraordinarily lengthy. Although austere and flinty in their youth, with age they develop a complex bouquet of toast, nuts, beeswax, and tarragon. Owing to this toast, aged Hunter Valley Semillon can seem to have been oaked, but this is almost never the case.

## **Australia, Western Australia, Margaret River**

In Margaret River as in Bordeaux, Semillon is often blended with Sauvignon Blanc and aged in new or old French oak. The wines are medium-bodied with medium alcohol, crisp acidity, and intense notes of peach and honey from the Semillon and gooseberry and herbs from the Sauvignon Blanc. Compared to Graves, they are made in a 'cleaner' style with more intense, finely etched flavours. This 'cleaner' style is typical of Australia as a whole.

## **PETIT MANSENG**

### **France, South-West France, Jurançon**

Jurançon is golden, often with a greenish tinge. The nose delivers a medley of tropical fruits such as mango, pineapple, and guava along with flowers and sweet spice, and perhaps even beeswax, banana, and coconut. Acidity is very high but sweetness varies considerably according to vintage conditions and time of harvest. Sweet Jurançon is more akin to Vouvray than to nearby Sauternes, both in terms of acid structure and aroma profile. Dry Jurançon is often mistaken for New World Sauvignon Blanc, but is less herbaceous.

## **ALBARIÑO**

### **Spain, Galicia, Rías Baixas**

Albariño is pale to medium in colour with hints of gold and green. On the nose, it is aromatic, with notes of lime, apple, white peach, almonds, honeysuckle, and jasmine. On the palate, it is medium in body with high citrusy acidity, medium alcohol, and a pithy salty or mineral finish. Oak is usually absent. In blind tasting, Albariño is often arrived at by exclusion. Compared to Riesling, it is fuller in body and lacks the tartness and petrol notes; compared to Pinot Gris, it is drier and higher in acidity; compared to Viognier, it is lighter in body and much higher in acidity; compared to Grüner, it is less acidic and austere and lacks the white pepper note.

## **GARGANEGA**

### **Italy, Veneto, Soave Classico**

Soave is straw in colour, with notes of citrus fruits and almonds and hints of flowers and spice, a body ranging from light to fairly full, crisp acidity, medium alcohol, no or little residual sugar, and a mineral or creamy finish with a slightly bitter edge. Top examples are rich, long, and complex. Oak is usually absent. Soave is often confused with Pinot Grigio, but is higher in acidity.

## **GRÜNER VELTLINER**

### **Austria, Wachau or Kremstal or Kamptal**

Grüner Veltliner from Wachau is pale gold with hints of green. It is usually dry with notes of celery, white pepper, spice, and minerals. Depending on ripeness, fruit can range from apple and grapefruit to distinctly tropical fruits. Body is medium to full, with high acidity and medium-high alcohol. Oak is usually absent. Top examples can

develop honeyed and toasty aromas with age. Grüner Veltliner from Kremstal and Kamptal is often broader than that from Wachau.

## **FURMINT**

### **Hungary, Tokaj**

Dry furmint is lemony in colour, with notes of smoke, pear, and lime, and hints of mandarin, apricot, honey, and spice. On the palate, it is structured, with racy acidity, a medium body, medium-high or high alcohol, and a mineral backbone. The finish can be very long. Top examples may feature Hungarian oak. Sweet Tokaj, or Tokaji Aszú, which is a Furmint-led blend, is often compared to and confused with Sauternes. It is a darker, copper colour with much higher acidity and notes of apricot, orange zest, barley sugar, spice, and tea.

## **TORRONTÉS**

### **Argentina, e.g. Salta**

Torrontés is often pale gold in colour. On the nose, it presents a floral Muscat-like bouquet with notes of rose, jasmine, peach, and citrus fruits. On the palate, it is medium-bodied and dry to off-dry depending on the style. The best examples are fresher and higher in acidity. Torrontés is often confused with Muscat or Gewurztraminer, but is less grapey than Muscat and lacks the distinctive lychee note of Gewurztraminer.

## STYLISTIC PROFILES: RED WINES

### GAMAY

#### France, Burgundy, Beaujolais

Beaujolais is often pale in colour with a blue tinge. It is light in body, medium-to-high in acidity, medium-to-low in alcohol, and low in tannins. Most Beaujolais is made by semi-carbonic maceration, which contributes estery notes of banana and bubblegum to the red fruits of the Gamay grape. However, cru wines tend to be made by traditional vinification and can be oaked, making them more tannic and difficult to recognize as Beaujolais. Beaujolais is often confused with regular Valpolicella and other red wines that can be made by semi-carbonic maceration. Compared to Beaujolais, Valpolicella is higher in acidity and dominated by a sour cherry note.

## **PINOT NOIR**

### **France, Burgundy, Côte de Nuits**

Pinot Noir is aromatic with a light-to-medium body, high acidity, and silky tannins. Côte de Nuits is reputed for its savoury fleshiness and mushroom and farmyard aromas. The character varies from commune to commune although there is much overlap. For instance, Gevrey-Chambertin is noted for its deep colour, power, and structure: full, rich, but also silky and delicately perfumed. Chambolle-Musigny is lighter, brighter, more delicate, more elegant, and more seductive. Nuits-Saint-George is full, firm, and dominated by black rather than red fruits.

### **France, Burgundy, Côte de Beaune**

Compared to Côte de Nuits, Côte de Beaune is lighter, suppler, more fruit-driven, and quicker to mature. That said, red Corton and Pommard tend to be more muscular and tannic, and more akin to Côte de Nuits. While the soils of Pommard are rich in marl, those of nearby Volnay are rich in limestone. As a result, Volnay is especially soft and fragrant, similar to (but lighter than) Chambolle-Musigny in the Côte de Nuits.

### **Australia, e.g. Victoria, Port-Phillip zone**

Australian Pinot Noir is clean and fruit-driven with good acidity. However, it can be marred by high alcohol—or, at least, alcohol that is too high in relation to its light body. The best examples avoid jammy fruit and tend to more earthy notes, often accompanied by eucalyptus or herbal mint. Much quality Australian Pinot Noir hails from the cooler regions of Victoria's Port Phillip zone (Mornington Peninsula, Yarra Valley, Geelong...). Cooler climate Tasmania is rising into a premier region for Pinot Noir.

## **New Zealand, Martinborough or Marlborough or Central Otago**

Ultra-clean fruit and high acidity are the hallmarks of New Zealand Pinot Noir. More ambitious examples can develop notes of earth and game. Pinot Noir from Central Otago is deep violet in colour with notes of black fruits and cherry and maybe a hint of greenness. On the palate, it is full-bodied for Pinot Noir, often with high alcohol and firm, round tannins. Marlborough Pinot Noir is lighter in colour and weight, and dominated by red fruits, with finely etched, peppery tannins. Martinborough Pinot Noir is often from older vines and most akin to Burgundy. It is weightier than Marlborough and more complete and complex than Central Otago, with notes of cherry, plum, game, spice, and chocolate.

## **USA, California, e.g. Sonoma**

Sonoma Pinot Noir is California's benchmark style. In particular, Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is often medium ruby with notes of ripe red cherry, berry fruits, earth, and mushroom. Compared to Burgundy, it is fuller in body, richer in fruit, and lower in acidity.

## **USA, Oregon, e.g. Willamette Valley**

Oregon Pinot Noir is characterized by brightness or purity of fruit, florality, and, often, an herbaceous pine needle or forest floor note. Maturation in new French oak remains somewhat more common than in Burgundy. As with Burgundy, acidity is very high but tannins are generally riper and softer—making the wines more approachable at a younger age. After several years, very fine examples can develop *sousbois* and other appealing tertiary notes.

## **CABERNET SAUVIGNON**

### **France, Bordeaux, Left Bank, e.g. Pauillac**

Pauillac is bluish purple in its youth and brickens with age. On the nose, it is complex, dominated by notes of cassis (blackcurrant), green pepper (bell pepper), cedar, chocolate, cigar-box, and vanilla from new French oak. On the palate, it is powerful but elegant, with a medium body, fairly high acidity, medium alcohol, chiselled and structured tannins, and a long, astringent finish. Other Left Bank villages overlap in style and are difficult to distinguish from Pauillac. Archetypal Margaux is floral, exuding a perfume of acacia and violets. Saint-Julien offers a compromise between the power of Pauillac and the magic of Margaux, with, classically, a silkier texture and drier finish. Saint-Estèphe, which is often richer in Merlot, is likely to be deeper in colour and fuller or coarser in texture, with more rustic tannins, a touch more acidity, and a touch less perfume. Moulis is soft and fleshy, with more power but less finesse than Margaux, and maturing more quickly. Listrac is firmer and more tannic, similar to Saint-Estèphe but less ripe and more rustic, and also maturing more quickly. Compared to those of the Médoc, the wines of the Graves tend to be lighter in colour, body, and tannins, with more fragrance, more Merlot character, and hints of smoke, minerals, and red brick or terracotta.

### **USA, California, Napa Valley**

Napa is comparatively hot and sunny, leading to darker wines with a fuller body, higher alcohol, and lower acidity than their Bordeaux counterparts. The tendency is for highly concentrated, full-bodied wines with significant French or American oak. Inspired by Left Bank Bordeaux, Napa Cabernet Sauvignon aims at structure and elegance, with a flavour profile of concentrated ripe or jammy dark berries overlain by a freshness or coolness often manifest as menthol. Merlot can contribute plum and milk chocolate notes,

Cabernet Franc flint and herbal notes, and Petit Verdot floral and spicy notes. Alcohol can be very high, but, in finer examples, remains in balance.

### **Australia, South Australia, Coonawarra**

Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon leans towards fairly high levels of alcohol although the variety's characteristic acidity is retained. The fruit profile is ripe, with notes of concentrated blackcurrant (cassis) and plum, verging on prune in hot vintages, coupled with a classic cedar note and mint or eucalyptus rather than green pepper. Tannins are structured and fine-grained but less austere or chalky than in Bordeaux. Shiraz is sometimes used to round out the mid-palate in the same way that Merlot is used in Bordeaux.

### **Australia, Western Australia, Margaret River**

Compared to Coonawarra, Margaret River is more akin to Left Bank Bordeaux and more likely to have been blended with Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Alcohol levels can still be high but the fruit is less likely to be stewed. Eucalyptus is replaced by more herbal notes, tannins are firmer, and the use of French oak is more common and pronounced. Of all the Australian styles, Margaret River, is closest to Left Bank Bordeaux. Though warmer than Bordeaux, it has similar maritime influences and gravelly soils.

### **Chile, Central Valley or Aconcagua**

Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon is an intense deep purple with aromas of fresh cassis and, often, a signature smoky, herbaceous note. Top examples from the Maipo Valley and elsewhere are aged in French oak, contributing notes of cedar, vanilla, and toast. Cool Andean nights lead to crisp acidity; but warm, sunny days lead to higher alcohol and riper, softer tannins than Bordeaux—which is also less fruit-forward and more earthy.

## **South Africa, Western Cape, e.g. Stellenbosch**

South African Cabernet Sauvignon can be made as a varietal wine or blended with other varieties. Compared to Bordeaux, it is deeper in colour, fuller in body, and lower in acidity, with riper or jammier fruit flavours. The nose and palate are characterized by an intense note of blackcurrant with some of the green pepper character of Bordeaux along with an earthy or smoky (fynbos) signature that is particular to South Africa. The use of French oak is common.

## **MERLOT**

### **France, Bordeaux, Right Bank, e.g. Pomerol**

This classic Merlot blend is deep ruby in colour with notes of fresh plum and other black and red fruits, spice, truffles, and vanilla from new French oak. On the palate, it is rich, often opulent, with lower acidity and softer tannins than Left Bank Bordeaux. Alcohol can be high in hotter vintages. Compared to Pomerol, which is sometimes compared to fruitcake, Saint-Emilion is drier and more tannic and structured. It also tends to contain less Merlot and more Cabernet Franc. The Saint-Emilion satellites such as Montagne Saint-Emilion and Lussac Saint-Emilion are similar to Saint-Emilion, if more rustic.

### **Chile, Central Valley**

Compared to Merlot-dominated Right Bank Bordeaux, Chilean Merlot is deeper in colour with notes of ripe plum, cherry, currants, chocolate, and mint. The minty note is analogous to the herbaceous quality typical of Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon and Carménère, and may be passed on from nearby garrigue and eucalyptus. On the palate, the wine is full-bodied with high alcohol, balanced acidity (though often adjusted), and soft and silky tannins that are not, however, without grip. Some of the finer examples of Chilean Merlot come from Maipo and Colchagua.

## CABERNET FRANC

### France, Loire, Chinon or Bourgueil or Saumur

Loire Cabernet Franc is light purple to purple in colour with a nose of raspberries and pencil shavings. With age, it develops earthy, spicy, and animally notes. Unripe examples may be marred by a bitter greenness or herbaceousness. On the palate, the wine is light or medium in body with high acidity, medium alcohol, and fine and powdery tannins. Chinon and Bourgueil tend to be more structured than Saumur, but in practice the three appellations are hard to tell apart. All three appellations are noted for their limestone soils, but, especially in Chinon and Bourgueil, include lower vineyards on clay, gravel, or sand. So rather than by appellation, the wines vary more by soil type, and, of course, by producer. Outside the Loire, Cabernet Franc is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot. Cabernet Franc is most readily confused with Cabernet Sauvignon, which is less aromatic, with darker fruit and greater structure and tannins.

## MALBEC

### France, South-West France, Cahors

Cahors is easily mistaken for Bordeaux, but is darker in colour with more plum, chocolate, and mineral notes, and heavier tannins that can make it austere in its youth. With age, it develops aromas of earth and *sousbois* with meaty, animally undertones. Other commonly cited descriptors include violet, gentian, ink, and liquorice. On the palate, acidity is high but body and alcohol are only medium. Top examples are aged in varying proportions of new oak. Note that many producers are now making a more approachable, early-drinking fruit-driven style alongside their more classic cuvées.

## **Argentina, Mendoza, e.g. Uco Valley**

Argentine Malbec is deep in colour, perhaps even inky black. All Malbec is characterized by a plummy fruit profile, but whereas Cahors tends to earthy mineral notes of ink and iron, Argentine Malbec is riper, almost jammy, with spicy notes of cinnamon and nutmeg. On the palate, it is full-bodied with soft and velvety tannins, high alcohol, and, in many cases, medium-low acidity. The use of new French oak is common. Higher altitude production, for example, in Salta, can result in lighter, fresher expressions.

## **CARMENÈRE**

### **Chile, Rapel Valley, Colchagua**

The best examples of Chilean Carmenère are deep ruby in colour with notes of cherry, blueberry, spice, black pepper, green pepper, and tobacco. Acidity is medium, alcohol is high, and tannins are soft and silky. Cabernet Sauvignon is often co-opted for extra acidity and tannin structure, and field blends with Merlot are common.

## **ZINFANDEL**

### **USA, California, e.g. Sonoma**

Zinfandel is deep ruby or purple in colour with notes of strawberry or brambly fruit, fresh cream, black tea, thyme or other herbs, and, often, coconut from American oak. On the palate, it is full-bodied with high alcohol, medium acidity, and medium-high tannins. Top examples are lengthy with a mineral core and savoury finish. Early-harvested or cool-climate examples are paler and tend to herbal green notes and angular tannins. Zinfandel is a clonal variation of Primitivo from Puglia, Italy. Compared to Zinfandel, Primitivo exhibits a more savoury, dried-fruit profile with, on the palate, a drier entry and more substantial tannins.

## **PINOTAGE**

### **South Africa, Western Cape, e.g. Paarl**

Pinotage is deep ruby or purple in colour, sometimes with a bluish tinge, with notes such as plum, prune, fruitcake, bacon, rooibos tea, and smoke. On the palate, it is medium-to-full-bodied with medium acidity and high alcohol and tannins. The use of French or American oak is common. The best examples bring out the variety's character and complexity, with remarkable notes of coffee bean, mocha, and clove emerging with increasing bottle age. Pinotage has a tendency to retain volatile esters during vinification, which can result in unpleasant paint-like aromas. Critics often deride it as pungent and alcoholic with coarse tannins, but this need not be the case.

## **SYRAH OR SHIRAZ**

### **France, Northern Rhône, e.g. Hermitage**

Hermitage is dark, full-bodied, and tannic, with intense notes of black and red fruits accompanied by smoke, black pepper and other spices, leather, cocoa, and coffee. With age, it develops a sweetness of fruit and gamey complexity. Heavy oak is unusual. Crozes-Hermitage is typically softer and fruitier than Hermitage. Saint-Joseph from the area of Mauves can approach Hermitage, but most Saint-Joseph is lighter and dominated by black fruits and pepper. Traditional Cornas is fuller and richer than Crozes-Hermitage or Saint-Joseph, but more rustic and robust than Hermitage. Côte-Rôtie marries power and finesse, with a complex nose of raspberry, blueberry, blackberry, plum, bacon, green olives, violets, and leather. Northern Rhône reds are often confused with Bordeaux, which tends to be higher in acidity with drier and grippier tannins and leafy Cabernet notes.

## **Australia, South Australia, Barossa or McLaren Vale**

Barossa Shiraz is very dark in colour. On the nose, it exudes jammy or stewed black fruits, milk chocolate, sweet spice, black pepper, and eucalyptus or menthol. On the palate, it is rich and opulent, with high alcohol, soft acidity, and chunky, velvety tannins. The use of new American oak is traditional, but there is a trend towards new French oak and old oak. Compared to Barossa Shiraz, McLaren Vale Shiraz is less enormous, with a flavour profile of chocolate, mocha, earth, and spice that is more savoury than sweet.

## **South Africa, Western Cape**

South African Syrah is often rich and ripe. Compared to Australian counterparts, it is often smokier, with savoury notes of game, leather, and tar: not unlike Northern Rhône, but ‘supercharged’. Both French and American oak are commonly used. Rhône blends with Grenache and Mourvèdre are increasingly common, as are cooler climate expressions from areas such as Walker Bay.

## **GRENACHE**

### **France, Southern Rhône, e.g. Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Gigondas or Vacqueyras**

Red Châteauneuf-du-Pape typically consists of Grenache in a blend, most commonly with Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Cinsault. It is medium-to-deep ruby, with notes of red and black fruits, game, tar, leather, and garrigue. On the palate, it is rich and spicy, with powdery or dusty tannins and a higher alcohol and lower acidity than Bordeaux or Hermitage. Significant new oak ageing is unusual. The wine is tight in its youth but softens and opens up after about seven years, and can improve for several more years, sometimes decades. Gigondas is a rich and powerful Grenache blend that is more rustic and animally than Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Some people, unfairly,

think of Gigondas as junior Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and of adjacent Vacqueyras as junior Gigondas. Vacqueyras often contains less Grenache than Gigondas.

### **Spain, Catalonia, Priorat**

Priorat is very dark in colour with an intense aroma of ripe but savoury black and red fruits, liquorice, chocolate, minerals, earth, spice, and, in some cases, vanilla from new French oak. On the palate, it is full-bodied with high alcohol; crisp acidity; big and chewy tannins; and a long, dry, and structured finish.

### **Australia, South Australia, Barossa or McLaren Vale**

Grenache thrives in the heat of South Australia, yielding varietal wines with notes of strawberry jam and ginger or white pepper, very high alcohol, and powdery, mouth-coating tannins. However, in most cases it is blended with Shiraz and Mourvèdre (Mataro) to produce full-bodied wines not unlike their inspirations in the Southern Rhône, with notes of ripe strawberry and plum fruit, game, pepper, cloves, liquorice, and herbs.

## **MOURVÈDRE**

### **France, Provence, Bandol**

Red Bandol consists of at least 50% Mourvèdre, usually completed by Grenache and Cinsault. The wine is dark with savoury notes of black fruits, spice (cumin), liquorice, game, leather, and garrigue. On the palate, it is full-bodied, intense, and structured, with a high alcohol in the order of 13.5–15% and an earthy, savoury finish. It is aged in old oak foudres for at least 18 months prior to release.

## NEBBIOLO

### Italy, Piedmont, Barolo or Barbaresco

Although full-bodied, Barolo is light in colour, typically with a brick- or rust-red tinge that can make it seem older, sometimes much older, than it truly is. The nose can be very complex and is often short-handed as ‘tar and roses’. Other notes include damson, mulberry, dried fruit, violets, herbs, dark chocolate, liquorice, and, with increasing age, leather, camphor, tobacco, *sousbois*, mushroom, and truffle. The palate is defined by medium-to-high alcohol, high acidity, and, above all, very high tannins, which, in the best of cases, translate into a silky or velvety texture. Barbaresco is similar to Barolo, if often more aromatic and refined, with softer fruit and suppler, riper tannins. It requires less cellaring than Barolo.

## DOLCETTO

Dolcetto is deep ruby to purple. It is soft and fruity, with notes of black cherry, soft spice, and liquorice; low acidity; moderate to high alcohol; and a characteristic dry, bittersweet almond finish. It is often thought of as Italy’s best answer to Beaujolais, but is generally darker, drier, and more tannic than Beaujolais, with a more ‘Italian’ aroma profile of cherries and bitter almonds.

## BARBERA

Barbera ranges from light and delicate to heavy and powerful. It is more often deep ruby in colour with an intense and mouth-filling fruitiness. Notes of red and black cherries are complemented by cocoa, earth, leather, and soft spice. On the palate, it is very high in acidity with medium alcohol, low or medium tannins, and a dry finish. Some modern examples are aged in oak.

Both Dolcetto and Barbera are fruit-forward Piedmontese red wines intended for early drinking. However, Dolcetto is more dominated by black fruits, whereas Barbera is more dominated by red fruits. Whereas Dolcetto has low acidity and moderate-to-high tannins, Barbera has high acidity and low tannins. Moreover, Dolcetto tannins can be quite grippy, whereas Barbera tannins are soft.

## CORVINA

### Italy, Veneto, Amarone della Valpolicella

Amarone is deep ruby in colour. The wine is rich, full-bodied, and concentrated with high alcohol (often 15 or 16%, or even more), crisp acidity, velvety tannins, and a long and bitter finish (hence, ‘Amarone’, from *amaro*, ‘bitter’). Its complex flavour profile is often compared to that of port, with notes of stewed cherries, raisins, dark chocolate, and liquorice. But, of course, unlike port, Amarone is not fortified: the high alcohol derives from the drying, or *apassimento*, process. A more modern, or ‘international’, style of Amarone is also made, which is softer and purer in fruit, with detectable new oak influence. Other styles of Valpolicella, discussed in the chapter on North-West Italy, include Classico, Ripasso, and Recioto.

## SANGIOVESE

### Italy, Tuscany, e.g. Chianti or Brunello di Montalcino

Chianti is typically medium ruby with notes of cherry and other red fruits, plum, clove, and herbs—and, with increasing age, tealeaves, tobacco, and leather. Top examples may display additional accents derived from maturation in new French oak. On the palate, body is medium, acidity high, alcohol medium-to-high, and tannins firm. The finish is agreeably dry with a note of bitter almonds. Compared to Chianti, Brunello is darker and richer, more full-bodied, tannic, and alcoholic, and, in many cases, more complex. Chianti is often

confused with Châteauneuf-du-Pape, but has higher acidity and higher and firmer tannins, and lower alcohol.

## **TEMPRANILLO**

### **Spain, Rioja**

Rioja is often pale in colour, brick-red or garnet with a bronzing rim. On the nose, it is dusty with cooked strawberries and raspberries, tobacco leaf, game, nuts, leather, soft spice, and vanilla and coconut from American oak (although some producers are now using French oak). On the palate, it is medium in body with medium acidity, medium alcohol, ripe and silky tannins, and a spicy or savoury finish. Compared to traditional Rioja, international style Rioja generally spends less time in oak and is denser in colour and fruit, with more plum and blackberry.

### **Spain, Ribera del Duero or Toro**

The Tempranillo of Ribera del Duero has thicker, darker skins than that of Rioja, and is also higher in acidity. Compared to most Rioja, the wines are dark and brooding: more full-bodied, concentrated, alcoholic, and tannic, and dominated by dark berries and plums rather than red fruits. Toro is similar in style to Ribera del Duero, but more exuberant and (often) more rustic, with a signature spicy note.

### **Spain, Navarra**

Navarra Tempranillo is often similar to Rioja, if generally more international in style, with a deeper colour and darker blackberry fruit, in part, sometimes, from blending with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. French oak is favoured over American oak.

## **BLAUFRÄNKISCH**

### **Austria, e.g. Burgenland, Mittelburgenland**

Blaufränkisch is usually deep purple with notes of sour cherries or redcurrants, blackberry, black pepper, spice, and liquorice. On the palate, body is medium to high with vibrant acidity and medium alcohol. Tannins are firm and gripping. Top examples may be aged in new French oak.

## **ZWEIGELT**

### **Austria, e.g. Burgenland, Neusiedlersee**

Zweigelt is fresh and fruit-driven. It is often deep ruby, with notes of red cherries and soft spice such as cinnamon and nutmeg. On the palate, it is light-to-medium bodied with a supple acidity, medium alcohol, and soft and subtle tannins. Oak is usually absent.

Blaufränkisch and Zweigelt (St. Laurent × Blaufränkisch) are Austria's signature black varieties, and are to Austria as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot—or Syrah and Gamay—are to France.

