

HIP TASTES

wine words 101

wine word	definition
acid	The component in wine originating from tartaric acid, naturally present in wine grapes. Acidity is generally a good thing unless there's too much or too little of it. Wines lacking in acidity are often called "flabby."
appellation	A region recognized by a regulatory body for producing wine. In the US these are called AVAs – American Viticultural Areas. The appellation is usually included on the label of a wine as part of its official name.
balance	A wine in which all of its building blocks, comprised of tannin, acidity, bouquet, flavors and alcohol level are in synch, with no one thing overwhelming the others. The best wines achieve superb balance.
blend	A wine resulting from the mixing together of wines made from different vineyards, vintages, regions or grape varieties e.g. Bordeaux, made of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and some other varieties.
body	The weight of the wine in your mouth. A wine can be said to be "big" in body or "thin", and everything in between. A wine's weight is not necessarily a measure of quality, but rather one aspect of its character.
botrytis	A fungus responsible for producing some of the world's most fabulous dessert wines e.g. Sauternes. When botrytis occurs in ideal conditions, it's called "noble rot." Botrytis-affected wines are said to be botrytised.
bouquet	The collection of aromas apparent in a wine. To get the most of a wine's bouquet, swirl the wine in your glass first to release its complex aromas. The human nose can detect up to 10,000 scents, and wine has tons!
chaptalization	The act of adding sugar to wine during the winemaking process to result in a higher final alcohol content in the finished wine. This often occurs in cooler areas where achieving ripeness is a problem.
corked	Caused by the foul-smelling compound trichloroanisole, or TCA, this is the most common fault found in wine. Corked wines generally smell musty or like damp cardboard and lack fruit on the palate.
crush	One of the first steps in the winemaking process, when the juice in wine grapes is pressed out of their skins. The term is sometimes used to describe the entire wine harvesting season.
deacidification	An elective step during the winemaking process during which the winemaker may simultaneously add water to dilute a wine's acidity and sugar to bring it into balance (wines needing this usually begin with high acid levels and low sugar content).

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filtration	Winemaking procedure during which deposits and other undesirable sediments are removed from wine. Some old world and boutique winemakers forego filtration as they believe it strips wine of character.
fining	Winemaking procedure aimed at clarification and stabilization and during which unwanted materials are precipitated out of wine. Some older methods still in use involve egg whites and fish bladders.
finish	The last impression a wine leaves as it leaves your mouth during tasting. A wine's finish is often measured in terms of length: oftentimes the better the wine the longer its finish will linger in your mouth.
flabby	Wines with low acidity are often described as "flabby." Really it means that they are out of balance: a wine with light body but also light in acid might be in balance, while a red with high tannin but low acid is most decidedly flabby.
fortified	Term used to describe wines to which alcohol spirit has been added. These include Port and Madeira. Fortified wines have alcohol content between 16 and 20 percent, compared to about 12 for most table wines, and are often sweet.
late harvest	Term used to describe wines made from grapes picked after the normal harvest period for table wines. Late harvest wines are almost singularly sweet wines, since they're made from the ripest grapes.
lees	Dead yeast cells and grape solids that settle to the bottom of the cask or vessel during fermentation. The term "sur lees" refers to white wines that have had some contact with lees during winemaking, a process that often results in enhanced character and a yeasty aroma.
legs	A non-official wine term referring to the vertical markings wine makes after being swirled in a glass. Thicker "legs" indicate higher alcohol content, nothing more, nothing less (i.e. not quality!).
length	A synonym for finish, length indicates the impression a wine leaves in your mouth after you've swallowed. Generally speaking, the better the wine the longer its finish will linger in your mouth. However, high alcohol wines can also have long finishes; if the finish burns, that's just booze, not superlative quality. Remember, balance is the best quality indicator!
maceration	A winemaking practice during which red wine is soaked with its skins in order to absorb their color, tannin and other substances.
malolactic fermentation	The conversion of harsh malic acids into softer lactic acids during the winemaking process. This always occurs in red wine making but is often used in white wine making as well, most often for Chardonnays and other whites in which a soft, vanilla quality is desired.
maturation	Relates to both the aging process in a winery after fermentation and

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	before wine is put into bottle and the slow process during which fine wines evolve over time after bottling.
micro-oxygenation	A term coined by the French to describe the act of slowly exposing red wines to oxygen during the winemaking process. The aim of micro-oxygenation is to make high tannin wines like those including Cabernet Sauvignon ready to drink sooner.
négociant	French term for a seller who buys grapes or finished wine and blends it to create his own wine, which he then sells under his or her own label. Négociants are most frequently discussed in connection with France's famed Burgundy region.
nose	A synonym for a wine's bouquet, nose is a term used to describe the composite of a wine's aromas, both primary and secondary.
off-dry	Term used to describe a wine with some residual sugar, perceived as sweetness on the palate. It's a wine that is somewhat sweet, as opposed to fully sweet, like a Sauternes or other dessert wine.
oxidized	Term used to describe a wine that has been either deliberately or non-deliberately exposed to oxygen. Most often this is a bad thing, resulting in a flat and flavorless wine. However, Sherry and Madeira are examples of wines that are deliberately oxidized, and taste better for it.
palate	A term used by wine tasters to describe the mouth or the tasting element of a wine tasting. For example, wine tasting involves three steps: visual appraisal (appearance), smelling the wine (nose), and tasting the wine (palate).
phenolics	A group of chemical compounds that include vegetable tannins, which naturally occur in grape stems, seeds, skins and juice. Phenolics are more prevalent in dark skinned grapes and are believed to contribute to health benefits such as heart disease prevention.
phylloxera	The parasite louse that feeds on the roots of <i>Vitis vinifera</i> , wine grape vines, and caused the decimation of much of the world's wine grape crop in the early twentieth century.
reduced	A negative term used to describe wines made from very ripe grapes such as those grown in California's Central Valley and the South of France. Can also be used to describe oxidized wines.
residual sugar	Sugar that remains in wine following fermentation; is often abbreviated to "RS" in tasting circles. Because most sugar is completely fermented into alcohol during winemaking, any noticeable remaining sweetness in wine can be attributed to residual sugar.
sommelier	Sometimes referred to as "wine steward", a sommelier is someone who traditionally has fulfilled the role of selecting, ordering, and managing a restaurant's wine collection as well as consulting guests on ordering.

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tannin	A component of mostly red wines that is found in the skins, stems and seeds of grapes used to make wine. Tannin often leaves a chalky sensation on your teeth after tasting and is principally responsible for wines such as top Bordeaux capable of aging for many years.
tartrates	Harmless crystalline deposits that separate from wines during fermentation and aging. Tartrates are most apparent in white wines, in which they are often mistaken for shards of glass.
terroir	A much debated French term that refers to the combination of a wine's grape variety, the plot in which its grapes were grown, and the climate around that plot. Terroir is also referred to sometimes as "specificity."
varietal	A wine that is comprised principally of grapes of a single grape variety, e.g. Chardonnay. Varietal wines are most often varietally labeled, meaning they are called by the grape variety principally used, e.g. Producer's 2004 "Chardonnay", Napa Valley.
variety	As regards wine, refers to a particular variety of <i>Vitis vinifera</i> , or winemaking grape. For example, Pinot Noir is a grape variety, as are Syrah and Chardonnay. When a wine is labeled under its grape variety, such as Pinot Noir, that wine is called a "varietal" wine.
vinification	The technical name for all processes and procedures associated with winemaking. Is usually referred to along with "viticulture", which refers to activities that occur in the vineyard prior to winemaking.
vintage	The year in which a wine's grapes were harvested. Wines bearing a vintage year must be made from a minimum percentage of grapes harvested in that year, for example 80%. Most Champagne is non-vintage, meaning bottles bear no vintage year on the label (they are blends from several years' grapes).
viticulture	The technical name for all processes and procedures associated with growing grapes. Is usually referred to along with "vinification", which refers to activities that occur in the winery following harvesting of grapes.
vitis vinifera	A scientific term often heard in wine circles and referring to the species to which most of the world's wine grapes belong.
weight	The impression of a wine in your mouth: is closely related to a wine's body and alcohol content. The greater the wine's body and alcohol, the more weight it will have. As mentioned before, this is not necessarily an indicator of quality.