



Aldiploma

Module Three

White Wine

The Main White Grape Varieties

Whether you're partial to a Chardonnay or a Sauvignon Blanc, this module will teach you everything you need to know about white wine and how it's made. You may even find a new favourite!

1. Grape Varieties

The main reason that a wine tastes the way that it does, is because of the grape variety.

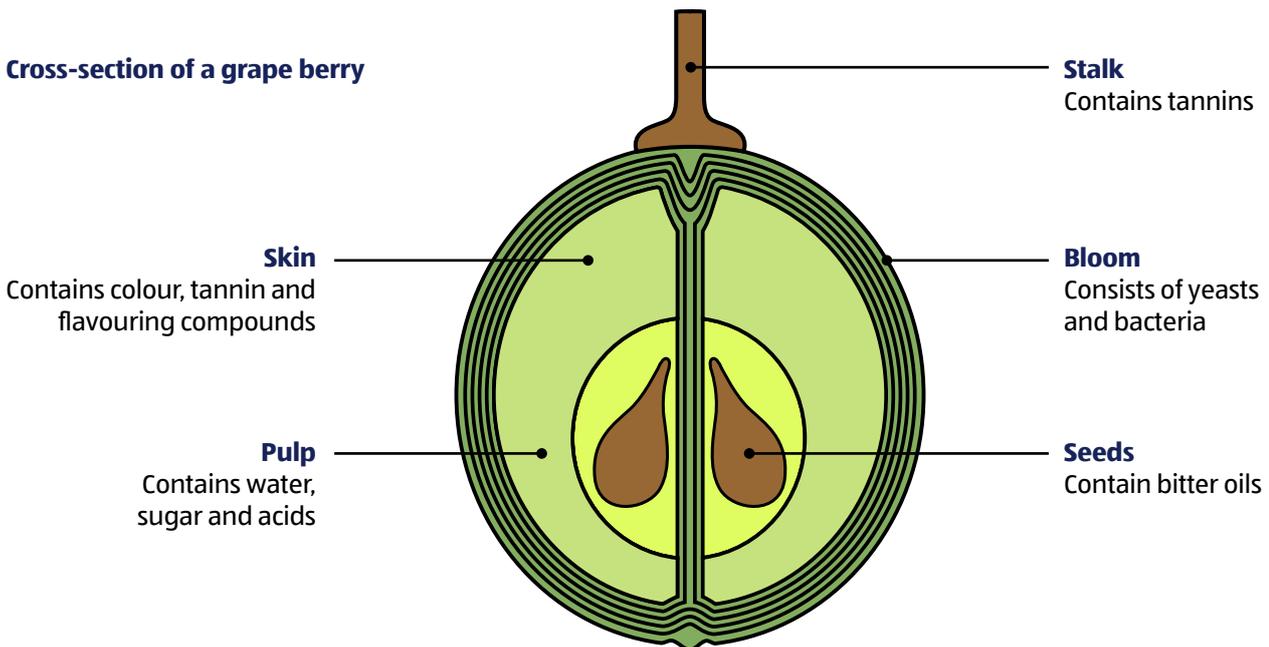
All grape varieties can largely be expected to taste of certain things, in varying degrees of intensity. The easiest way to learn what to expect from a wine is to learn what the main grape varieties are likely to taste like, what their weight and body is like usually and how this changes based on where in the world they are grown and how they are made.

But how do wines get their flavour and how are they made?

What other factors aside from the grape variety can affect the taste of the wine?

2. Grapes And Grape Growing

The most important thing to know is that a wine grape gets its all-important flavour from the skin! This is also where the colour and tannins are found. Whereas the flesh of a grape contains water, sugar and acids.



In order for sufficient flavour to be extracted from the skins, the grape needs to have ripened before the harvest and this involves a lot of hard work in the vineyard to ensure the wine is balanced (and delicious).

The climate (weather) of the area has a big impact on this:

Warmer climates

Vineyards in these climates have more sunshine and tend to produce riper grapes that have more flavour, structure and alcohol.

Cooler climates

Wines produced here tend to be more elegant with higher acidity and more delicate aromas, because the grapes produced were not as ripe.

This is why grape varieties taste subtly different according to where they are grown.

3. Making White Wine

After the harvest (when the grapes are picked) the wine is ready to be made and for white winemaking, that usually involves the following process:

Crush the grapes – press the grapes – ferment the wine – mature the wine (if applicable) – bottle

1. The grapes are crushed and pressed to extract the juice from the berries
2. The skins are removed and then the wine is fermented (fermentation is the chemical breakdown of a substance by bacteria/yeasts)
3. The yeast (which is either added or natural wild yeasts are used) then turns the sugar in the juice to alcohol/wine, with the by-product of the fermentation being carbon dioxide
4. The wines are either fermented in a stainless steel tank, oak or concrete. Whites are generally fermented at low temperatures (around 12-22c for around 2-4 weeks)
5. Some wines might even be matured or aged in oak

The main thing to note is the crucial difference between red and white wines is that whites are fermented **without** their skins.

Stainless steel and concrete don't impart any flavour to the wine, but oak imparts a spicy (French oak) or vanilla (American oak) character – wines that are matured in oak after fermentation take on even more of these flavours.



4. The Main White Grape Varieties

There are around 10,000 different grape varieties in the world, but thankfully there are a few core ones we can focus on (which you'll probably already be familiar with) – these are known as the 'noble' grape varieties.

We're now going to taste some of the key varieties – make sure you pour yourself a small sample of each of the wines listed below and remember to take a sip of water in between each one to cleanse the palate.

Chardonnay

Flavour Overview:

Arguably the best-known white grape variety in the world, Chardonnay is capable of making a wide range of different styles of wine that reflect the region/climate, winemaking or both. Unlike some other grape varieties, it doesn't have a hugely distinctive flavour.

Cooler climate region flavour

- Produce lighter styles of Chardonnay that can be quite delicate
- They tend to have notes of apples and nuts

Moderate climate region flavour

- Wines produced in these areas have more stone fruit flavours, such as peaches and apricots

Warmer climate region flavour

- Can be quite high in alcohol and have stronger flavours
- They tend to have more tropical favours, such as pineapple and mango

Winemaking Flavour

Winemaking as a huge role to play in influencing the taste of Chardonnay with different oak for example adding certain notes, such as nutmeg or clove (French oak) to the wine.

Texture

Many Chardonnays also have a buttery, silky texture and this is from something called the malolactic fermentation (MLF) which occurs after the alcoholic fermentation.

This is when harsh malic acid (like the acidity in apples) is converted to soft, lactic acid (think milk) and it really contributes to the texture of the wine, making it softer.

Key Regions - France

Burgundy

Chardonnay originates from Burgundy in France and this is where the most famous and expensive wines come from.

Within Burgundy there are a number of famous villages that you will find on a wine label instead of the actual grape variety itself (as many European wines are labelled by region rather than by grape variety). Below are a list of the key ones to help you identify them in store:

- Generic white Burgundy is called Bourgogne
- Chablis
- Côte d'Or
- Côte de Beaune
- Meursault
- Puligny-Montrachet
- Corton-Charlemagne
- Pouilly-Fuissé
- Mâcon



France – elsewhere

Chardonnay is found elsewhere in France, mainly in Champagne (where it is one of the key grape varieties), some are found in Crémant (French sparkling) wines and they're also found in warmer French regions like the Languedoc.

(Note: If sparkling wines are made from white grapes only, such as Chardonnay, they are called Blanc de Blancs).

The Rest Of The World

You'll also find Chardonnays from Argentina, Australia, California, Chile, New Zealand and South Africa.

Food & Wine

Chardonnay is incredibly versatile because it can be found in such a wide range of styles. Cooler climate, fresher styles with crisp acidity (such as Chablis) are great with seafood and sushi, whereas richer styles are superb with chicken, meaty fish and fish and chips.



Sauvignon Blanc

Flavour Overview:

One of the great things about Sauvignon Blanc is how distinctive it is. It is quite an aromatic variety which means that it has aromas that are easier to identify than some others.

Wherever in the world it is grown it tends to be crisp and fresh, with zesty notes of grass, herbs, gooseberry, green pepper, elderflower, blackcurrant leaf and passion fruit.

As Sauvignon is frequently unoaked, there are usually no oaky or spicy notes to mask the fruit.

Key Regions - France

Like Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc is a French grape variety and consequently the wines tend to be labelled by region as opposed to variety.

You'll find them in places such as:

- The Loire (in villages such as Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé, Touraine and Bordeaux)

The Rest Of The World

You'll find Sauvignon Blancs from New Zealand (especially Marlborough), South Africa and Chile.

In California it is sometimes known as Fumé Blanc.

Food & Wine

Sauvignon is sensational with seafood, salads, goats cheese, tomato, asparagus and delicate white fish.

Riesling

Flavour Overview:

Riesling is an aromatic grape variety famed for its high acidity and ability to age, which also helps it to produce some sensational sweet wines.

Most Rieslings have floral notes to them - such as violets, honey-suckle and orange blossom, along with crisper notes of apple and citrus (lime and lemon sherbet in particular).

In Australia there can be a distinct aroma of petrol whereas Austria tends to produce wines with peachier flavours.

Riesling is hardly ever oaked.

Key Regions - Germany

The birthplace of Riesling is Germany and it is found in many different regions such as the Mosel, Rheingau and Pfalz.

The more entry-level wines are labelled Qualitätswein but after that, there is the Prädikatswein category, which is quite a complicated system for labelling wines according to the sugar levels in the grapes – these include:

- Kabinett
- Spätlese
- Auslese
- Beerenauslese
- Trockenbeerenauslese
- Eiswein

The Rest Of The World

Outside of Germany, Riesling is also found in Austria and France, in the picturesque Alsace region where it is labelled either as Alsace or Alsace Grand Cru.

You'll also find them in Australia, in both the Clare and Eden Valley.

Food & Wine

Riesling makes a great accompaniment to spicy dishes such as Thai or Indian curries, Asian food, dim sum, sushi and fish cakes.



5. Other White Grape Varieties

Aside from the 'noble' varieties, there are a number of other white grapes worth knowing a little bit about:

- **Albariño**
Fresh with peach & mineral/predominantly found in the Rias Baixas area of northern Spain and known as Alvarinho in Portugal where it is also found in the north west
- **Bacchus**
Crisp with elderflower & grass/found in English white wines
- **Chenin Blanc**
Crisp with pear & apple moving to guava and melon in warmer climates/at home in the Loire and South Africa especially
- **Fiano**
Fresh with peach & plum/an Italian variety with roots in the South; Campania and Sicily
- **Gavi**
Fresh with citrus & fennel/an Italian grape from the north; Piedmont
- **Gewürztraminer**
Ripe with roses & lychees/from Alsace originally but found in Italy and the NW too
- **Grüner Veltliner**
Fresh with pepper & grapefruit/ found primarily in Austria
- **Melon de Bourgogne (Muscadet)**
crisp with mineral & citrus/found in France around Nantes in the Loire
- **Picpoul de Pinet**
Crisp with apples & pears nuts & spice/found mainly in France in the Languedoc and around the southern Rhône
- **Pinot Grigio/Gris**
Fresh with nuts & spice/an Italian variety (Grigio) or from Alsace in France but also grown around the world. Stylistically as Grigio it is lighter and fresher and as Gris it is richer and can be spicier with a bit more sweetness
- **Viognier**
Ripe with peach & apricot/grown in the Rhône in France but also in California, Australia, New Zealand and South America

Tasting

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