

LEARNING MADE EASY



7th Edition

Wine

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Understand grape varieties and wine styles

Match food with wines that will bring out the best in both

Select, store, open, pour, and enjoy wine

Ed McCarthy

Certified Wine Educator

Mary Ewing-Mulligan

Master of Wine

Wine

for
dummies[®]
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7th Edition

by Ed McCarthy

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and

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Introduction

We love the amazing variety of wines in the world, and we love the way wine brings people together at the table. We want you and everyone else to enjoy wine too — regardless of your experience or your budget.

We will be the first to admit that the trappings of wine — the ceremony, the fancy language, the paraphernalia — don't make it easy for regular people to enjoy wine. You have to know strange names of grape varieties and foreign wine regions. You have to figure out whether to buy a \$20 wine or an \$8 wine that seem to be pretty much the same thing. You usually even need a special tool to open the bottle when you get it home — although screwcaps are being used more and more for many wines.

All the complications surrounding wine will not go away easily because wine is a very rich and complex field. But you don't have to let the complications stand in your way. With the right attitude and a little understanding of what wine is, you can begin to buy and enjoy wine. And if, like us, you decide that wine is fascinating, you can find out more and turn it into a rewarding hobby.

We hate to think that wine, which has brought so much pleasure into our lives, could be the source of anxiety for anyone. We want to help you feel more comfortable around wine. Some knowledge of wine, gleaned from the pages of this book and from our shared experiences, will go a long way toward increasing your comfort level around wine.

Ironically, what will *really* make you feel comfortable about wine is accepting the fact that you'll never know it all — and that you've got plenty of company. You see, after you really get a handle on wine, you discover that *no one* knows everything there is to know about wine. There's just too much information, and it's always changing. And when you know that, you can just relax and enjoy the stuff.

About This Book

Because wine is always changing, we have written a seventh edition of *Wine For Dummies*. We have added some new countries and regions, have updated prices, and updated information on the latest vintage years. If you already have a

previous edition, you might be wondering whether you need this book. We believe that you do. We wrote the first edition of *Wine For Dummies* in 1995, and the world of wine has changed tremendously since then. It has even changed a lot since our sixth edition in 2016:

- »» The wine world has an exciting new face thanks to the communities of wine lovers who share opinions, chat, and blog on Internet sites, and these voices are shaping new trends. New styles of popular wine are emerging, and a whole new approach to food and wine pairing has taken root.
- »» The wines of South America have come on strong, and they offer some of the best values around. We've ramped up our coverage of Chile and Argentina to give you the inside track on these explosive wine regions.
- »» Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia have recently become a more important part of the wine world. We have added them to the 7th Edition.
- »» English sparkling wines have become an important part of the sparkling wine world, even challenging Champagne. They are now in our 7th Edition.
- »» Dozens of California wineries have opened, a few have gone out of business, many have improved, and a few have slipped. Our recommendations reflect all these changes.
- »» Remember those prices we listed for wines worth trying in our earlier editions? Well, big surprise: Just about all those prices have increased. But we point out some bargains, especially in Parts 3, 4, and 5.
- »» Several new vintages have occurred; we give you the lowdown on them throughout the book, and especially in our vintage chart in Appendix C.

We wrote this book to be an easy-to-use reference. You don't have to read it from cover to cover for it to make sense and be useful to you. Simply turn to the section that interests you and dig in. Note that sidebars, which are shaded boxes of text, consist of information that's interesting but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the topic.

Also, when this book was printed, some web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that we haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending that the line break doesn't exist.

Foolish Assumptions

We assume that you picked up this book for one of several reasons:

- » You know very little about wine but have a strong desire to find out more.
- » You do know something about wine, more than most people, but you want to understand it better, from the ground up.
- » You're already very knowledgeable but realize that you can always discover more.

We also assume that you don't have a lot of ego invested in wine — or maybe you do, and you're buying this book “for a friend.” And we assume (correctly, we hope) that you are someone who doesn't appreciate a lot of mumbo jumbo and jargonistic language about wine — that you're someone who wants straight talk instead.

Icons Used in This Book

The pictures in the margins of this book are called *icons*, and they point out different types of information.



REAL DEAL

A bargain's not a bargain unless you really like the outfit, as they say. To our tastes, the wines we mark with this icon are bargains because we like them, we believe them to be of good quality, and their price is low compared to other wines of similar type, style, or quality. You can also interpret this logo as a badge of genuineness, as in “This Chablis is the real deal.”



REMEMBER

Some issues in wine are so fundamental that they bear repeating. Just so you don't think that we repeated ourselves without realizing it, we mark the repetitions with this symbol.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This odd little guy is a bit like the 2-year-old who constantly insists on knowing “Why, Mommy, why?” But he knows that you may not have the same level of curiosity that he has. Where you see him, feel free to skip over the technical information that follows. Wine will still taste just as delicious.



TIP

Advice and information that will make you a wiser wine drinker or buyer is marked by this bull's-eye so that you won't miss it.



WARNING

There's very little you can do in the course of moderate wine consumption that can land you in jail — but you could spoil an expensive bottle and sink into a deep depression over your loss. This symbol warns you about common pitfalls.



WORTH THE SEARCH

Unfortunately, some of the finest, most intriguing, most delicious wines are made in very small quantities. Usually, those wines cost more than wines made in large quantities — but that's not the only problem; the real frustration is that those wines have very limited distribution, and you can't always get your hands on a bottle even if you're willing to pay the price. We mark such wines with this icon, and hope that your search proves fruitful.

Beyond the Book

As if all the great information in this book weren't enough, you can go beyond the book for even more! Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet for a quick guide to wine pronunciation, tips on how to buy wine with confidence, and more. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for this book's title.

Where to Go from Here

We recommend that you go to Chapter 1 and start reading there. But if you don't have time because you're about to head out to a fancy restaurant, then begin at Chapter 7. If you already have bottle in hand, wine in glass, and want to know more about what you're about to sip, turn to Chapter 4 to decode the words on the label, and then consult the index to find the regional section that corresponds to your wine, to read about the wines of that area. Or — because so many wines today are named after grape varieties — start with Chapter 3, which explains the major grape varieties for wine.

In other words, start wherever you wish, closer to the beginning if you're a novice and closer to the middle if you know something about wine already. On the journey of wine appreciation, *you* get to decide how far to go and how quickly — and you get to choose the route to get there. The final destination is pleasure.

1

Getting Started with Wine

IN THIS PART . . .

Gain some basic wine knowledge to get you started on your wine-loving journey.

Find out the techniques involved in tasting wine.

Become familiar with the different varieties of grapes and the wines they make.

Understand how to read wine names and labels.

Take a sneak peek at the process of winemaking.

- » What wine is
- » Why color matters
- » Differences among table wine, dessert wine, and sparkling wine

Chapter **1**

Wine 101

We know plenty of people who enjoy drinking wine but don't know much about it. (Been there, done that ourselves.) Knowing a lot of information about wine definitely isn't a prerequisite to enjoying it. But familiarity with certain aspects of wine can make choosing wines a lot easier, enhance your enjoyment of wine, and increase your comfort level. You can master as much or as little as you like. The journey begins here.

How Wine Happens

Wine is essentially just fermented fruit juice. The recipe for turning fruit into wine goes something like this:

1. Pick a large quantity of ripe grapes from grapevines.

You could substitute raspberries or any other fruit, but 99.9 percent of all the wine in the world is made from grapes, because grapes make the best wines.

2. Put the grapes into a clean container that doesn't leak.

3. Crush the grapes somehow to release their juice.

Once upon a time, feet performed this step.

4. Wait.

In its most basic form, winemaking is that simple. After the grapes are crushed, *yeasts* (tiny one-celled organisms that exist naturally in the vineyard and, therefore, on the grapes) come into contact with the sugar in the grapes' juice and gradually convert that sugar into alcohol. Yeasts also produce carbon dioxide, which evaporates into the air. When the yeasts are done working, your grape juice is wine. The sugar that was in the juice is no longer there — alcohol is present instead. (The riper and sweeter the grapes, the more alcohol the wine will have.) This process is called *fermentation*.

Fermentation is a totally natural process that doesn't require man's participation at all, except to put the grapes into a container and release the juice from the grapes. Fermentation occurs in fresh apple cider left too long in your refrigerator, without any help from you. We read that even milk, which contains a different sort of sugar than grapes do, develops a small amount of alcohol if left on the kitchen table all day long.

Speaking of milk, Louis Pasteur is the man credited with discovering fermentation in the 19th century. That's discovering, not inventing. Some of those apples in the Garden of Eden probably fermented long before Pasteur came along. (Well, we don't think it could have been much of an Eden without wine!)

Now if every winemaker actually made wine in as crude a manner as we just described, we'd be drinking some pretty rough stuff that would hardly inspire us to write a book about wine. But today's winemakers have a bag of tricks as big as a sumo wrestler's appetite, which is one reason no two wines ever taste exactly the same.

- »» The men and women who make wine can control the type of container they use for the fermentation process (stainless steel and oak are the two main materials) as well as the size of the container and the temperature of the juice during fermentation — and every one of these choices can make a real difference in the taste of the wine.
- »» After fermentation, winemakers can choose how long to let the wine *mature* (a stage when the wine sort of gets its act together) and in what kind of container. Fermentation can last three days or three months, and the wine can then mature for a couple of weeks or a couple of years or anything in between. (If you have trouble making decisions, don't ever become a winemaker.)



REMEMBER

Obviously, one of the biggest factors in making one wine different from the next is the nature of the raw material, the grape juice. Besides the fact that riper, sweeter grapes make a more alcoholic wine, different *varieties* of grapes (Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, or Merlot, for example) make different wines. Grapes are the main ingredient in wine, and everything the winemaker does, he does to the particular grape juice he has. Chapter 3 covers specific grapes and the kinds of wine they make.

THE 411 ON SULFITES

Sulfur dioxide, a compound formed from sulfur and oxygen, occurs naturally during fermentation in very small quantities. Winemakers add it, too. Sulfur dioxide is to wine what aspirin and vitamin E are to humans — a wonder drug that cures all sorts of afflictions and prevents others. Sulfur dioxide is antibacterial, preventing the wine from turning to vinegar. It inhibits yeasts, preventing sugar that has remained in a wine (if any) from fermenting in the bottle. It's an antioxidant, keeping the wine fresh and untainted by the demon oxygen. Despite these magical properties, winemakers try to use as little sulfur dioxide as possible because many of them share a belief that the less you add to wine, the better (just as many people prefer to ingest as little medication as possible).

Most wine labels in the United States carry the phrase *Contains Sulfites* (meaning sulfur dioxide) because of a law enacted to protect the extremely tiny percentage of the population who are very sensitive to sulfites. That law requires that any wine containing more than 10 parts per million of sulfites carry the *Contains Sulfites* phrase on its label. Considering that about 10 to 20 parts per million of sulfites occur naturally in wine, that covers just about every wine.

Ironically, winemakers today need to rely on sulfur dioxide less than ever before because winery hygiene is so advanced, and sulfur dioxide use is probably at an all-time low.

Actual sulfite levels in wine range from about 30 to 150 parts per million (about the same as in dried apricots); the legal max in the United States is 350. White dessert wines have the most sulfur — followed by medium-sweet white wines and sweet rosé (pink) wines — because those types of wine need the most protection. Dry white wines generally have less, and dry reds have the least.

Of course, grapes don't grow in a void. Where they grow — the soil and climate of each wine region, as well as the traditions and goals of the people who grow the grapes and make the wine — affects the nature of the ripe grapes and the taste of the wine made from those grapes. That's why so much of the information about wine revolves around the countries and regions where wine is made. In Parts 3 and 4, we cover all the world's major wine regions and their wines.

What Color Is Your Appetite?

Your inner child will be happy to know that when it comes to wine, it's okay to like some colors more than others. You can't get away with saying "I don't like green food!" much beyond your sixth birthday, but you can express a general preference for white, red, or pink wine for all your adult years.

(Not exactly) white wine

Whoever coined the term *white wine* must have been colorblind. All you have to do is look at it to see that it's not white; it's yellow (sometimes barely yellow, sometimes a deeper yellow). But we've all gotten used to the expression by now, so *white wine* it is.

White wine is wine without any red color (or pink color, which is in the red family). Yellow wines, golden wines, and wines that are as pale as water are all white wines.

Wine becomes white wine in one of two ways: First, white wine can be made from white grapes — which, by the way, aren't white. (Did you see that one coming?) *White* grapes are greenish, greenish yellow, golden yellow, or sometimes even pinkish yellow. Basically, white grapes include all the grape types that aren't dark red or dark bluish. If you make a wine from white grapes, it's a white wine.

The second way a wine can become white is a little more complicated. The process involves using red grapes — but only the *juice* of red grapes, not the grape skins. The juice of almost all red grapes has no red pigmentation — only the skins do — therefore, a wine made with only the juice of red grapes can be a white wine. In practice, though, very few white wines come from red grapes. (Champagne is one exception; Chapter 15 addresses the use of red grapes to make Champagne.)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In case you're wondering, the skins are removed from the grapes either by pressing large quantities of grapes so that the skins break and the pulpy juice flows out — sort of like squeezing the pulp out of grapes, the way kids do — or by crushing the grapes in a machine that has rollers to break the skins so that the juice can drain away.

You can drink white wine anytime you like, but typically, people drink white wine in certain situations:

- » Most people drink white wines without food or with *lighter foods*, such as fish, poultry, or vegetables. Chapter 9 covers the dynamics of pairing wines with food and has suggestions of foods to eat with white wine.
- » White wines are often considered *apéritif* wines, meaning that people consume them before dinner, in place of cocktails, or at parties. (If you ask the officials who busy themselves defining such things, an *apéritif* wine is a wine that has flavors added to it, as vermouth does. But unless you're in the business of writing wine labels for a living, don't worry about that. In common parlance, an *apéritif* wine is just what we said.)
- » A lot of people like to drink white wines when the weather is hot because they're more refreshing than red wines, and they're usually drunk chilled (the wines, not the people).

WHITE WINE STYLES: THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS PLAIN WHITE WINE

White wines fall into four general taste categories, not counting sparkling wine or the really sweet white wine that you drink with dessert (see Chapters 15 and 16 for more on each of those). If the words we use to describe these taste categories sound weird, take heart — they're all explained in Chapter 2. We also explain the styles in plentiful detail in our book *Wine Style: Using Your Senses to Explore and Enjoy Wine* (Wiley). Here are our four broad categories:

- **Fresh, unoaked whites:** These wines are crisp and light, with no sweetness and no oaky character. (Turn to Chapter 3 for the lowdown on oak.) Most Italian white wines, like Soave and Pinot Grigio, and some French whites, like Sancerre and some Chablis, fall into this category.
- **Earthy whites:** These wines are dry, fuller-bodied, unoaked or lightly oaked, with a lot of earthy character. Some French wines, such as Mâcon or whites from the Côtes du Rhône region (covered in Chapter 10), have this taste profile.
- **Aromatic whites:** These wines are characterized by intense aromas and flavors that come from their particular grape variety, whether they're *off-dry* (that is, not bone-dry) or dry. Examples include a lot of German wines and wines from flavorful grape varieties, such as Riesling or Viognier and, in some cases, Sauvignon Blanc.
- **Rich, oaky whites:** These wines are dry or fairly dry and full-bodied with pronounced oaky character. Most Chardonnays and some French wines — like many of those from the Burgundy region of France — fall into this group.



TIP

We serve white wines cool, but not ice cold. Sometimes, restaurants serve white wines too cold, and we actually have to wait a while for the wine to warm up before we drink it. If you like your wine cold, fine; but try drinking your favorite white wine a little less cold sometime, and we bet you'll discover it has more flavor that way. In Chapter 8, we recommend specific serving temperatures for various types of wine.

Red, red wine

In this case, the name is correct. Red wines really are red. They can be purple red, ruby red, or garnet, but they're red.

Red wines are made from grapes that are red or bluish in color. So guess what wine people call these grapes? Black grapes! We suppose that's because black is the opposite of white.

POPULAR WHITE WINES

These types of white wine are available almost everywhere in the United States. We describe these wines in Parts 3 and 4.

- **Chardonnay:** Can come from California, Australia, France, or almost any other place
- **Pinot Grigio** or **Pinot Gris:** Can come from Italy, France, Oregon, California, and other places
- **Prosecco:** Comes from Italy (and it's a bubbly wine)
- **Riesling:** Can come from Germany, California, New York, Washington, France, Austria, Australia, and other places
- **Sauvignon Blanc:** Can come from California, France, New Zealand, South Africa, Italy, and other places
- **Soave:** Comes from Italy

The most obvious difference between red wine and white wine is color. The red color occurs when the colorless juice of red grapes stays in contact with the dark grape skins during fermentation and absorbs the skins' color. Along with color, the grape skins give the wine *tannin*, a substance that's an important part of the way a red wine tastes. (See Chapter 2 for more about tannin.) The presence of tannin in red wines is actually the key taste difference between red wines and white wines.

Red wines vary quite a lot in style — partly because winemakers have so many ways of adjusting their red winemaking to achieve the kind of wine they want. For example, if winemakers leave the grape juice in contact with the skins for a long time, the wine becomes more *tannic* (firmer in the mouth, like strong tea; tannic wines can make you pucker). If winemakers drain the juice off the skins sooner, the wine is softer and less tannic. And heating the crushed grapes can extract color without much tannin.



TIP

Traditionally, people have consumed red wine as part of a meal or with accompanying food rather than as a drink on its own, but plenty of red wines today are made to taste delicious even without food.

Thanks to the wide range of red wine styles, you can find red wines to go with just about every type of food and every occasion when you want to drink wine. The one exception is times when you want to drink a wine with bubbles: Although bubbly red wines do exist, most bubbly wines are white or pink. In Chapter 9, we give you some tips on matching red wine with food.