



BEGINNER

HOW TO READ A WINE LABEL

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Material contained in this document applies to multiple course levels. Reference your syllabus to determine specific areas of study.

There are several elements contained within all wine labels. The following will showcase these items that are similar across all countries of origin, but will also point out differences.

OLD WORLD

Wines of the Old World, are often more challenging than New World (wines produced outside traditional wine growing areas of Europe, which includes Australia, Argentina, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa and the US) labels. With some European wines, the region or place of origin is key. For instance, wines of Chablis, Chianti, Rioja, are more important than the actual varietal. In other countries, such as Germany, the grape appears far more prominently, along with descriptive words regarding the sweetness or maturation level. New World labels are more consistent, though not identical. The emphasis is on the brand or producer and the grape variety or blend, not necessarily the region or appellation.

Regardless of the country of origin, one should always find:

- Country of origin

- Name and address of the producer or importer

- Package size (volume of wine contained within)

- Alcohol By Volume Percentage

- Vintage (year in which the grapes were harvested (Not the year bottled!))

- Grape Varietal or Style

VARIETALS OR STYLE NOTES

There are easily 5,000+ known varieties of grapes. Of these, 150 or so are planted commercially in amounts that are significant or notable. In the New World, wines are often bottled under the name of their primary grape. In the US, Argentina, Australia, Chile, New Zealand, and South Africa, many wines are known by a varietal name and sometimes by grape combinations such as Cabernet-Shiraz.

Proprietary names are often used for blends that do not contain the minimum percentage of a single variety. A relatively new phenomenon, this has developed as some wine producers have begun to create wines with unique names that are owned as a trademark of the brand. The "proprietary name" gives producers greater range and freedoms when blending. A proprietary name is normally found on only one brand. The only exception to this rule is "Meritage", which is owned by an association of wineries that has set rules for the grape variety composition and usage.

There are some notable elements when viewing Regions, Sub-Regions, or Appellations. Wine producing areas, known as regions, are largely distinguished by their geography. Further, these large areas are sub-divided, thus the "sub-region". Occasionally divided due to topography, usually these distinctions are relative to micro-climate or geography.

In the Old World, the finest wines are known first by their geographical growing region, known as an appellation. The world appellation refers to the place where the grapes are grown. Most appellations carry with them a governmental designation or distinction. This official status bestowed by either a governmental body or trade bureau, offers assurance to the consumer of both quality and authenticity. Systems for officially identifying and regulating wine growing regions are evolving in countries of the New World. In the US, American Viticultural Areas (AVA) are used to distinguish the growing region or sub-regions.

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DESIGNATIONS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

In the Old World, there are a number of distinctions that designate a wine's origin and quality. The following chart will assist:

Italy	DOCG	Denominazione di Origine Ctrrollata e Garantita (guaranteed place name)
Italy	DOC	Denominazione di Origine CXotrollata (protected place name)
Italy	ITGT	Indicazion Geografica Tipica (Typical place name)
Italy	Vini di tavola	Table wines
France	AOC	Vins d'Appellation d'Origine Controlee (Appellation of controlled Origin)
France	VDQS	Vin Delimites de Qualite Superieure (Wines of superior quality)
France	Vins de Pays	Country Wines
France	Vins de Table	Table Wines
France	Premier cru Classe	Status refers to a classification of wines primarily from the Bordeaux region
France	Premier cru Superieur	Status refers to a classification of wines primarily from the Bordeaux region
France	Premier Grand Cru Classe	The highest category for French wines classified in the Appellation of Saint Emilion
Spain	dO	Denominacion de Origen (Denomination of Origin)
Spain	DOC	Denominacion de origen Calificada (Denomination of Qualified Origin)
Spain	Gran Reserva	Aged a minimum of 5 years
Spain	Reserva	Aged a minimum of 3 years
Spain	Crianza	Aged a minimum of 2 years
Portugal	DOC	Vinho de Calidad (Quality wine produced in a geographically limited region subject to strict regulations)
Portugal	IPR or VQPRD	Indica'õ de Prveni'ncia Regulamnetada (Wines from newer regions that are candidates for DOC status. Although created in 1990 to designate wines of "intermediate" quality, this classification is not typically used anymore.)
Portugal	VR	Vinho Regional (Regional wines that do not adhere to the same strict regulations as IPR or DOXC classifies wines)
Portugal	CVR	Wines produced in a specific region from at least 85% of locally grown grapes

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Portugal	Vinho de Mesa	Table wines
Portugal	VEQPRD	Sparkling Wine produced in a demarcated region
Germany	QMP	Qualitätswein mit Pradikat (Quality wine with special Attributes)
Germany	Kabinett	The first of the Pradikat wines in Germany, this is typically the lightest and most delicate style that an estate will produce
Germany	Spatlese	German for late harvested, Spatlese has more richness and body than Kabinett because the grapes are allowed to ripen for an extra week or more. Once harvested, the wine can be fermented fruity (Lieblich), half dry (Halbtrocken) or dry (Trocken) depending on the preferences of the winemaker.
Germany	Auslese	Grapes specifically selected during harvest, cluster by cluster. Often made in the fruity style with residual sweetness, considered the finest of achievements by winemakers.
Germany	Beerenauslese	A rare dessert wine made from extremely overripe grapes that are fully affected by botrytis mold. The grapes are selected one berry at a time.
Germany	Eiswein	Literally, ice wine. Made from overripe grapes that have frozen solid on the vine.
Germany	QBA	Qualitätswein Bestimmter Anbaugebiete (Quality Wine from Specific Appellations.)
Germany	Deutscher Landwein	Superior Table Wine
Germany	Deutscher Tafelwein	Superior Table Wine

OTHER TERMS THAT CAN BE FOUND ON A LABEL

Bottling and Winery Information terms can be cumbersome at least, and confusing at best. The following will outline the meanings of some of this additional detail.

Estate Bottled or Chateau Bottled

100% of the grapes used were grown in the winery's own vineyards or came from vineyards controlled by the winery in the same appellation. These wines must be vinified and bottled at the winery as well.

Grown, Produced, and Bottled By

Indicates that the grapes were grown at the winery's vineyards (or vineyards controlled by the winery) and that the wine was vinified and bottled at the winery.

Produced and Bottled By

The winery crushed, fermented and bottled at least 75% of the wine in that particular bottling, but not that the winery grew the grapes.

Made and Bottled By

A minimum 10% of the wine was fermented at the winery. The remaining 90% could be from other sources. This designation does not generally indicate the quality implied by the phrase "Produced and Bottled By".

Bottled By

This alone on a label indicates that the only role the winery most likely played in the wine's production was to purchase and bottle wine made somewhere else.

READING THE LABEL'S CONTENTS

Now that you are aware of the contents of a label created in either Old or New World, the following examples should offer practical application. (See examples 1-4)