

Glossary of Wine Terms

[A](#)[B](#)[C](#)[D](#)[E](#)[F](#)[G](#)[H](#)[I](#)[J](#)[K](#)[L](#)[M](#)[N](#)[O](#)[P](#)[Q](#)[R](#)[S](#)[T](#)[U](#)[V](#)[W](#)[X](#)[Y](#)[Z](#)

(For descriptions of and information about varietal types, see [Varietal Profiles](#).)

ACETIC ACID: All wines contain acetic acid, or vinegar, but usually the amount is quite small--from 0.03 percent to 0.06 percent--and not perceptible to smell or taste. Once table wines reach 0.07 percent or above, a sweet-sour vinegary smell and taste becomes evident. At low levels, acetic acid can enhance the character of a wine, but at higher levels (over 0.1 percent), it can become the dominant flavor and is considered a major flaw. A related substance, [ethyl acetate](#), contributes a nail polish-like smell.

ACID: A compound present in all grapes and an essential component of wine that preserves it, enlivens and shapes its flavors and helps prolong its aftertaste. There are four major kinds of acids--tartaric, malic, lactic and citric--found in wine. Acid is identifiable by the crisp, sharp character it imparts to a wine.

ACIDIC: Used to describe wines whose total acid is so high that they taste tart or sour and have a sharp edge on the palate.

ACIDITY: The acidity of a balanced dry table wine is in the range of 0.6 percent to 0.75 percent of the wine's volume. It is legal in some areas--such as Bordeaux and Burgundy, Australia, California--to correct deficient acidity by adding acid. When overdone, it leads to unusually sharp, acidic wines. However, it is illegal in Bordeaux and Burgundy to both chaptalize and acidify a wine. See also [chaptalization](#).

ACRID: Describes a harsh or bitter taste or pungent smell that is due to excess sulfur.

AERATION: The process of letting a wine "breathe" in the open air, or swirling wine in a glass. It's debatable whether aerating bottled wines (mostly reds) improves their quality. Aeration can soften young, tannic wines; it can also fatigue older ones.

AFTERTASTE: The taste or flavors that linger in the mouth after the wine is tasted, spit or swallowed. The aftertaste or "finish" is the most important factor in judging a wine's character and quality. Great wines have rich, long, complex aftertastes.

AGGRESSIVE: Unpleasantly harsh in taste or texture, usually due to a high level of [tannin](#) or [acid](#).

ALCOHOL: Ethyl alcohol, a chemical compound formed by the action of natural or added yeast on the sugar content of grapes during fermentation.

ALCOHOL BY VOLUME: As required by law, wineries must state the alcohol level of a wine on its label. This is usually expressed as a numerical percentage of the volume. For table wines the law allows a 1.5 percent variation above or below the stated percentage as long as the alcohol does not exceed 14 percent. Thus, wineries may legally avoid revealing the actual alcohol content of their wines by labeling them as "table wine."

ALCOHOLIC: Used to describe a wine that has too much alcohol for its body and weight, making it unbalanced. A wine with too much alcohol will taste uncharacteristically heavy or hot as a result. This quality is noticeable in aroma and aftertaste.

AMERICAN OAK: Increasingly popular as an alternative to French oak for making barrels in which to age wine as quality improves and vintners learn how to treat the wood to meet their needs. Marked by strong vanilla, dill and cedar notes, it is used primarily for aging Cabernet, Merlot and Zinfandel, for which it is the preferred oak. It's less desirable, although used occasionally, for Chardonnay or Pinot Noir. Many California and Australia wineries use American oak, yet claim to use French oak because of its more prestigious image. American oak barrels sell in the \$250 range, compared to more than \$500 for the French ones. See also [French oak](#).

AMERICAN VITICULTURAL AREA (AVA): A delimited, geographical grape-growing area that has officially been given appellation status by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Two examples are Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley. See also [viticultural area](#).

AMPELOGRAPHY: The study of grape varieties.

APPEARANCE: Refers to a wine's clarity, not color.

APPELLATION: Defines the area where a wine's grapes were grown, such as Bordeaux, Gevrey-Chambertin, Alexander Valley or Russian River Valley. Regulations vary widely from country to country. In order to use an appellation on a California wine label, for example, 85 percent of the grapes used to make the wine must be grown in the specified district. See also [appellation d'origine contrôlée](#).

APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTROLEE (AOC): The French system of appellations, begun in the 1930s and considered the wine world's prototype. To carry an appellation in this system, a wine must follow rules

describing the area the grapes are grown in, the varieties used, the ripeness, the alcoholic strength, the vineyard yields and the methods used in growing the grapes and making the wine.

AROMA: Traditionally defined as the smell that wine acquires from the grapes and from fermentation. Now it more commonly means the wine's total smell, including changes that resulted from oak aging or that occurred in the bottle--good or bad. "Bouquet" has a similar meaning.

ASTRINGENT: Describes a rough, harsh, puckery feel in the mouth, usually from tannin or high acidity, that red wines (and a few whites) have. When the harshness stands out, the wine is astringent.

AUSTERE: Used to describe relatively hard, high-acid wines that lack depth and roundness. Usually said of young wines that need time to soften, or wines that lack richness and body.

AWKWARD: Describes a wine that has poor structure, is clumsy or is out of balance.

[Top](#)

BACKBONE: Used to denote those wines that are full-bodied, well-structured and balanced by a desirable level of acidity.

BACKWARD: Used to describe a young wine that is less developed than others of its type and class from the same vintage.

BALANCE: A wine has balance when its elements are harmonious and no single element dominates.

BALTHAZAR: An oversized bottle which holds the equivalent of 12 to 16 standard bottles.

BARREL FERMENTED: Denotes wine that has been fermented in small casks (usually 55-gallon oak barrels) instead of larger tanks. Advocates believe that barrel fermentation contributes greater harmony between the oak and the wine, increases body and adds complexity, texture and flavor to certain wine types. Its liabilities are that more labor is required and greater risks are involved. It is mainly used for whites.

BIN NUMBER: See also [cask number](#).

BITE: A marked degree of acidity or tannin. An acid grip in the finish should be more like a zestful tang and is tolerable only in a rich, full-bodied wine.

BITTER: Describes one of the four basic tastes (along with sour, salty and sweet). Some grapes--notably Gewürztraminer and Muscat--often have a noticeable bitter edge to their flavors. Another source of bitterness is tannin or stems. If the bitter quality dominates the wine's flavor or aftertaste, it is considered a fault. In sweet wines a trace of bitterness may complement the flavors. In young red wines it can be a warning signal, as bitterness doesn't always dissipate with age. Normally, a fine, mature wine should not be bitter on the palate.

BLANC DE BLANCS: "White of whites," meaning a white wine made of white grapes, such as Champagne made of Chardonnay.

BLANC DE NOIRS: "White of blacks," white wine made of red or black grapes, where the juice is squeezed from the grapes and fermented without skin contact. The wines can have a pale pink hue. E.G., Champagne that is made from Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier.

BLUNT: Strong in flavor and often alcoholic, but lacking in aromatic interest and development on the palate.

BODY: The impression of weight or fullness on the palate; usually the result of a combination of glycerin, alcohol and sugar. Commonly expressed as full-bodied, medium-bodied or medium-weight, or light-bodied.

BOTRYTIS CINEREA: Called the "Noble Rot." A beneficial mold or fungus that attacks grapes under certain climatic conditions and causes them to shrivel, deeply concentrating the flavors, sugar and acid. Some of the most famous examples come from Sauternes (Château d'Yquem), Germany and Tokay.

BOTTLE SICKNESS: A temporary condition characterized by muted or disjointed fruit flavors. It often occurs immediately after bottling or when wines (usually fragile wines) are shaken in travel. Also called bottle shock. A few days of rest is the cure.

BOTTLED BY: Means the wine could have been purchased ready-made and simply bottled by the brand owner, or made under contract by another winery. When the label reads "produced and bottled by" or "made and bottled by" it means the winery produced the wine from start to finish.

BOUQUET: The smell that a wine develops after it has been bottled and aged. Most appropriate for mature wines that have developed complex flavors beyond basic young fruit and oak aromas.

BRAWNY: Used to describe wines that are hard, intense, tannic and that have raw, woody flavors. The opposite of elegant.

BRIARY: Describes young wines with an earthy or stemmy wild berry character.

BRIGHT: Used for fresh, ripe, zesty, lively young wines with vivid, focused flavors.

BRILLIANT: Describes the appearance of very clear wines with absolutely no visible suspended or particulate matter. Not always a plus, as it can indicate a highly filtered wine.

BRIX: A measurement of the sugar content of grapes, must and wine, indicating the degree of the grapes' ripeness (meaning sugar level) at harvest. Most table-wine grapes are harvested at between 21 and 25 Brix. To get an alcohol conversion level, multiply the stated Brix by .55.

BROWNING: Describes a wine's color, and is a sign that a wine is mature and may be faded. A bad sign in young red (or white) wines, but less significant in older wines. Wines 20 to 30 years old may have a brownish edge yet still be enjoyable.

BRUT: A general term used to designate a relatively dry-finished Champagne or sparkling wine, often the driest wine made by the producer.

BURNT: Describes wines that have an overdone, smoky, toasty or singed edge. Also used to describe overripe grapes.

BUTTERY: Indicates the smell of melted butter or toasty oak. Also a reference to texture, as in "a rich, buttery Chardonnay."

[Top](#)

CARBONIC MACERATION: Fermentation of whole, uncrushed grapes in a carbon dioxide atmosphere. In practice, the weight of the upper layers of grapes in a vat will break the skins of the lowest layer; the resultant wine is partly a product of carbonic maceration and partly of traditional fermentation of juice.

CASK NUMBER: A meaningless term sometimes used for special wines, as in Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cask 23, but often applied to ordinary wines.

CEDARY: Denotes the smell of cedar wood associated with mature Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet blends aged in French or American oak.

CELLARED BY: Means the wine was not produced at the winery where it was bottled. It usually indicates that the wine was purchased from another source.

CHAPTALIZATION: The addition of sugar to juice before and/or during fermentation, used to boost sugar levels in underripe grapes and alcohol levels in the subsequent wines. Common in northern European countries, where the cold climates may keep grapes from ripening, but forbidden in southern Europe (including southern France and all of Italy) and California.

CHARMAT: Mass production method for sparkling wine. Indicates the wines are fermented in large stainless steel tanks and later drawn off into the bottle under pressure. Also known as the "bulk process." See also [méthode champenoise](#).

CHEWY: Describes rich, heavy, tannic wines that are full-bodied.

CIGAR BOX: Another descriptor for a cedary aroma.

CLEAN: Fresh on the palate and free of any off-taste. Does not necessarily imply good quality.

CLONE: A group of vines originating from a single, individual plant propagated asexually from a single source. Clones are selected for the unique qualities of the grapes and wines they yield, such as flavor, productivity and adaptability to growing conditions.

CLOSED: Describes wines that are concentrated and have character, yet are shy in aroma or flavor.

CLOUDINESS: Lack of clarity to the eye. Fine for old wines with sediment, but it can be a warning signal of protein instability, yeast spoilage or re-fermentation in the bottle in younger wines.

CLOYING: Describes ultra-sweet or sugary wines that lack the balance provided by acid, alcohol, bitterness or intense flavor.

COARSE: Usually refers to texture, and in particular, excessive tannin or oak. Also used to describe harsh bubbles in sparkling wines.

COLD STABILIZATION: A clarification technique in which a wine's temperature is lowered to 32° F, causing the [tartrates](#) and other insoluble solids to precipitate.

COMPLEXITY: An element in all great wines and many very good ones; a combination of richness, depth, flavor intensity, focus, balance, harmony and finesse.

CORKED: Describes a wine having the off-putting, musty, moldy-newspaper flavor and aroma and dry aftertaste caused by a tainted cork.

CRUSH: Harvest season when the grapes are picked and crushed.

CUVEE: A blend or special lot of wine.

[Top](#)

DECANTING: A process for separating the sediment from a wine before drinking. Accomplished by slowly and carefully pouring the wine from its bottle into another container.

DELICATE: Used to describe light- to medium-weight wines with good flavors. A desirable quality in wines such as Pinot Noir or Riesling.

DEMI-SEC: In the language of Champagne, a term relating to sweetness. It can be misleading; although demi-sec means half-dry, demi-sec sparkling wines are usually slightly sweet to medium sweet.

DENSE: Describes a wine that has concentrated aromas on the nose and palate. A good sign in young wines.

DEPTH: Describes the complexity and concentration of flavors in a wine, as in a wine with excellent or uncommon depth. Opposite of shallow.

DIRTY: Covers any and all foul, rank, off-putting smells that can occur in a wine, including those caused by bad barrels or corks. A sign of poor winemaking.

DISGORGEMENT: A step in the traditional process of sparkling wine production wherein frozen sediment is removed from the neck of the bottle.

DOSAGE: In bottle-fermented sparkling wines, a small amount of wine (usually sweet) that is added back to the bottle once the yeast sediment that collects in the neck of the bottle is removed.

DRY: Having no perceptible taste of sugar. Most wine tasters begin to perceive sugar at levels of 0.5 percent to 0.7 percent.

DRYING OUT: Losing fruit (or sweetness in sweet wines) to the extent that acid, alcohol or tannin dominate the taste. At this stage the wine will not improve.

DUMB: Describes a phase young wines undergo when their flavors and aromas are undeveloped. A synonym of [closed](#).

[Top](#)

EARLY HARVEST: Denotes a wine made from early-harvested grapes, usually lower than average in alcoholic content or sweetness.

EARTHY: Used to describe both positive and negative attributes in wine. At its best, a pleasant, clean quality that adds complexity to aroma and flavors. The flip side is a funky, barnyardy character that borders on or crosses into dirtiness.

ELEGANT: Used to describe wines of grace, balance and beauty.

EMPTY: Similar to hollow; devoid of flavor and interest.

ENOLOGY: The science and study of winemaking. Also spelled oenology.

ESTATE-BOTTLED: A term once used by producers for those wines made from vineyards that they owned and that were contiguous to the winery "estate." Today it indicates the winery either owns the vineyard or has a long-term lease to purchase the grapes.

ETHYL ACETATE: A sweet, vinegary smell that often accompanies acetic acid. It exists to some extent in all wines and in small doses can be a plus. When it is strong and smells like nail polish, it's a defect.

EXTRA-DRY: A common Champagne term not to be taken literally. Most Champagnes so labeled are sweet.

EXTRACT: Richness and depth of concentration of fruit in a wine. Usually a positive quality, although high extract wine can also be highly tannic.

[Top](#)

FADING: Describes a wine that is losing color, fruit or flavor, usually as a result of age.

FAT: Full-bodied, high alcohol wines low in acidity give a "fat" impression on the palate. Can be a plus with bold, ripe, rich flavors; can also suggest the wine's structure is suspect.

FERMENTATION: The process by which yeast converts sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide; turns grape juice into wine.

FIELD BLEND: When a vineyard is planted to several different varieties and the grapes are harvested together to produce a single wine, the wine is called a field blend.

FILTERING: The process of removing particles from wine after fermentation. Most wines unless otherwise labeled are filtered for both clarity and stability.

FINING: A technique for clarifying wine using agents such as bentonite (powdered clay), gelatin or egg whites, which combine with sediment particles and cause them to settle to the bottom, where they can be easily removed.

FINISH: The key to judging a wine's quality is finish, also called aftertaste--a measure of the taste or flavors that linger in the mouth after the wine is tasted. Great wines have rich, long, complex finishes.

FLABBY: Soft, feeble, lacking acidity on the palate.

FLAT: Having low acidity; the next stage after flabby. Can also refer to a sparkling wine that has lost its bubbles.

FLESHY: Soft and smooth in texture, with very little tannin.

FLINTY: A descriptor for extremely dry white wines such as Sauvignon Blanc, whose bouquet is reminiscent of flint struck against steel.

FLORAL (also FLOWERY): Literally, having the characteristic aromas of flowers. Mostly associated with white wines.

FORTIFIED: Denotes a wine whose alcohol content has been increased by the addition of brandy or neutral spirits.

FOXY: A term used to describe the unique musky and grapey character of many native American labrusca varieties.

FREE-RUN JUICE: The juice that escapes after the grape skins are crushed or squeezed prior to fermentation.

FRENCH OAK: The traditional wood for wine barrels, which supplies vanilla, cedar and sometimes butterscotch flavors. Used for red and white wines. Much more expensive than [American oak](#), it can cost more than \$500 per barrel, as opposed to \$250 for American.

FRESH: Having a lively, clean and fruity character. An essential for young wines.

FRUITY: Having the aroma and taste of fruit or fruits.

[Top](#)

GRACEFUL: Describes a wine that is harmonious and pleasing in a subtle way.

GRAPEY: Characterized by simple flavors and aromas associated with fresh table grapes; distinct from the more complex fruit flavors (currant, black cherry, fig or apricot) found in fine wines.

GRASSY: A signature descriptor for Sauvignon Blanc and a pleasant one unless overbearing and pungent.

GREEN: Tasting of unripe fruit. Wines made from unripe grapes will often possess this quality. Pleasant in Riesling and Gewürztraminer.

GREEN HARVEST: The trimming of unripe grapes to decrease crop yields, thereby improving the concentration of the remaining bunches.

GRIP: A welcome firmness of texture, usually from tannin, which helps give definition to wines such as Cabernet and Port.

GROWN, PRODUCED AND BOTTLED: Means the winery handled each aspect of wine growing.

[Top](#)

HALF-BOTTLE: Holds 375 milliliters or 3/8 liter.

HARD: Firm; a quality that usually results from high acidity or tannins. Often a descriptor for young red wines.

HARMONIOUS: Well balanced, with no component obtrusive or lacking.

HARSH: Used to describe astringent wines that are tannic or high in alcohol.

HAZY: Used to describe a wine that has small amounts of visible matter. A good quality if a wine is unfiltered and unfiltered.

HEARTY: Used to describe the full, warm, sometimes rustic qualities found in red wines with high alcohol.

HEADY: Used to describe high-alcohol wines.

HERBACEOUS: Denotes the taste and smell of herbs in a wine. A plus in many wines such as Sauvignon Blanc, and to a lesser extent Merlot and Cabernet. Herbal is a synonym.

HOLLOW: Lacking in flavor. Describes a wine that has a first taste and a short finish, and lacks depth at mid-palate.

HOT: High alcohol, unbalanced wines that tend to burn with "heat" on the finish are called hot. Acceptable in Port-style wines.

[Top](#)

IMPERIAL: An oversized bottle holding 4 to 6 liters; the equivalent of eight standard bottles.

JEROBOAM: An oversized bottle holding the equivalent of six bottles. In Champagne, a jeroboam holds four bottles.

LATE HARVEST: On labels, indicates that a wine was made from grapes picked later than normal and at a higher sugar (Brix) level than normal. Usually associated with [botrytized](#) and dessert-style wines.

LEAFY: Describes the slightly herbaceous, vegetal quality reminiscent of leaves. Can be a positive or a negative, depending on whether it adds to or detracts from a wine's flavor.

LEAN: A not necessarily critical term used to describe wines made in an austere style. When used as a term of criticism, it indicates a wine is lacking in fruit.

LEES: Sediment remaining in a barrel or tank during and after fermentation. Often used as in sur lie aging, which indicates a wine is aged "on its lees." See also [sur lie](#).

LEGS: The viscous droplets that form and ease down the sides of the glass when the wine is swirled.

LENGTH: The amount of time the sensations of taste and aroma persist after swallowing. The longer the better.

LIMOUSIN: A type of oak cask from Limoges, France. See also French oak.

LINGERING: Used to describe the flavor and persistence of flavor in a wine after tasting. When the aftertaste remains on the palate for several seconds, it is said to be lingering.

LIVELY: Describes wines that are fresh and fruity, bright and vivacious.

LUSH: Wines that are high in residual sugar and taste soft or viscous are called lush.

[Top](#)

MACERATION: During fermentation, the steeping of the grape skins and solids in the wine, where alcohol acts as a solvent to extract color, tannin and aroma from the skins.

MADE AND BOTTLED BY: Indicates only that the winery crushed, fermented and bottled a minimum of 10 percent of the wine in the bottle. Very misleading.

MADERIZED: Describes the brownish color and slightly sweet, somewhat caramelized and often nutty character found in mature dessert-style wines.

MAGNUM: An oversized bottle that holds 1.5 liters.

MALIC: Describes the green apple-like flavor found in young grapes which diminishes as they ripen and mature.

MALOLACTIC FERMENTATION: A secondary fermentation occurring in most wines, this natural process converts malic acid into softer lactic acid and carbon dioxide, thus reducing the wine's total acidity. Adds complexity to whites such as Chardonnay and softens reds such as Cabernet and Merlot.

MATURE: Ready to drink.

MEATY: Describes red wines that show plenty of concentration and a chewy quality. They may even have an aroma of cooked meat.

MERCAPTANS: An unpleasant, rubbery smell of old sulfur; encountered mainly in very old white wines.

MERITAGE: An invented term, used by California wineries, for Bordeaux-style red and white blended wines. Combines "merit" with "heritage." The term arose out of the need to name wines that didn't meet minimal labeling requirements for varietals (i.e., 75 percent of the named grape variety). For reds, the grapes allowed are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petite Verdot and Malbec; for whites, Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon. Joseph Phelps Insignia and Flora Springs Trilogy are examples of wines whose blends vary each year, with no one grape dominating.

METHODE CHAMPENOISE: The labor-intensive and costly process whereby wine undergoes a secondary fermentation inside the bottle, creating bubbles. All Champagne and most high-quality sparkling wine is made by this process. See also [charmat](#).

METHUSELAH: An extra-large bottle holding 6 liters; the equivalent of eight standard bottles.

MURKY: More than deeply colored; lacking brightness, turbid and sometimes a bit swampy. Mainly a fault of red wines.

MUST: The unfermented juice of grapes extracted by crushing or pressing; grape juice in the cask or vat before it is converted into wine.

MUSTY: Having an off-putting moldy or mildewy smell. The result of a wine being made from moldy grapes, stored in improperly cleaned tanks and barrels, or contaminated by a poor cork.

[Top](#)

NEBUCHADNEZZAR: A giant wine bottle holding 15 liters; the equivalent of 20 standard bottles.

NEGOCIANT (NEGOCIANT-ELEVEUR): A French wine merchant who buys grapes and vinifies them, or buys wines and combines them, bottles the result under his own label and ships them. Particularly found in Burgundy.

Two well-known examples are Joseph Drouhin and Louis Jadot.

NOBLE ROT: See [Botrytis cinerea](#).

NONVINTAGE: Blended from more than one vintage. This allows the vintner to keep a house style from year to year. Many Champagnes and sparkling wines are nonvintage. Also, Sherry and the nonvintage Ports, the tawnies and the rubies.

NOSE: The character of a wine as determined by the olfactory sense. Also called aroma; includes bouquet.

NOUVEAU: A style of light, fruity, youthful red wine bottled and sold as soon as possible. Applies mostly to Beaujolais.

NUTTY: Used to describe oxidized wines. Often a flaw, but when it's close to an oaky flavor it can be a plus.

[Top](#)

OAKY: Describes the aroma or taste quality imparted to a wine by the oak barrels or casks in which it was aged. Can be either positive or negative. The terms toasty, vanilla, dill, cedary and smoky indicate the desirable qualities

of oak; charred, burnt, green cedar, lumber and plywood describe its unpleasant side. See also [American oak](#), [French oak](#).

OFF-DRY: Indicates a slightly sweet wine in which the residual sugar is barely perceptible: 0.6 percent to 1.4 percent.

OXIDIZED: Describes wine that has been exposed too long to air and taken on a brownish color, losing its freshness and perhaps beginning to smell and taste like Sherry or old apples. Oxidized wines are also called maderized or sherrified.

[Top](#)

PEAK: The time when a wine tastes its best--very subjective.

PERFUMED: Describes the strong, usually sweet and floral aromas of some white wines.

PH: A chemical measurement of acidity or alkalinity; the higher the pH the weaker the acid. Used by some wineries as a measurement of ripeness in relation to acidity. Low pH wines taste tart and crisp; higher pH wines are more susceptible to bacterial growth. A range of 3.0 to 3.4 is desirable for white wines, while 3.3 to 3.6 is best for reds.

PHYLLOXERA: Tiny aphids or root lice that attack *Vitis vinifera* roots. The disease was widespread in both Europe and California during the late 19th century, and returned to California in the 1980s.

POTENT: Intense and powerful.

PRESS WINE (or PRESSING): The juice extracted under pressure after pressing for white wines and after fermentation for reds. Press wine has more flavor and aroma, deeper color and often more tannins than free-run juice. Wineries often blend a portion of press wine back into the main cuvée for added backbone.

PRIVATE RESERVE: This description, along with Reserve, once stood for the best wines a winery produced, but lacking a legal definition many wineries use it or a spin-off (such as Proprietor's Reserve) for rather ordinary wines. Depending upon the producer, it may still signify excellent quality.

PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY: Indicates that the winery crushed, fermented and bottled at least 75 percent of the wine in the bottle.

PRUNY: Having the flavor of overripe, dried-out grapes. Can add complexity in the right dose.

PUCKERY: Describes highly tannic and very dry wines.

PUNGENT: Having a powerful, assertive smell linked to a high level of volatile acidity.

[Top](#)

RACKING: The practice of moving wine by hose from one container to another, leaving sediment behind. For aeration or clarification.

RAISINY: Having the taste of raisins from ultra-ripe or overripe grapes. Can be pleasant in small doses in some wines.

RAW: Young and undeveloped. A good descriptor of barrel samples of red wine. Raw wines are often tannic and high in alcohol or acidity.

REDUCED: Commonly used to describe a wine that has not been exposed to air.

REHOBAM: Oversized bottle equivalent to 4.5 liters or six regular bottles.

RESIDUAL SUGAR: Unfermented grape sugar in a finished wine.

RICH: Wines with generous, full, pleasant flavors, usually sweet and round in nature, are described as rich. In dry wines, richness may be supplied by high alcohol and glycerin, by complex flavors and by an oaky vanilla character. Decidedly sweet wines are also described as rich when the sweetness is backed up by fruity, ripe flavors.

ROBUST: Means full-bodied, intense and vigorous, perhaps a bit overblown.

ROUND: Describes a texture that is smooth, not coarse or tannic.

RUSTIC: Describes wines made by old-fashioned methods or tasting like wines made in an earlier era. Can be a positive quality in distinctive wines that require aging. Can also be a negative quality when used to describe a young, earthy wine that should be fresh and fruity.

[Top](#)

SALMANAZAR: An oversized bottle holding 9 liters, the equivalent of 12 regular bottles.

SMOKY: Usually an oak barrel byproduct, a smoky quality can add flavor and aromatic complexity to wines.

SOFT: Describes wines low in acid or tannin (sometimes both), making for easy drinking. Opposite of hard.

SPICY: A descriptor for many wines, indicating the presence of spice flavors such as anise, cinnamon, cloves, mint and pepper which are often present in complex wines.

STALE: Wines that have lost their fresh, youthful qualities are called stale. Opposite of fresh.

STALKY: Smells and tastes of grape stems or has leaf- or hay-like aromas.

STEMMY: Wines fermented too long with the grape stems may develop this quality: an unpleasant and often dominant stemmy aroma and green astringency.

STRUCTURE: The interaction of elements such as acid, tannin, glycerin, alcohol and body as it relates to a wine's texture and mouthfeel. Usually preceded by a modifier, as in "firm structure" or "lacking in structure."

SUBTLE: Describes delicate wines with finesse, or flavors that are understated rather than full-blown and overt. A positive characteristic.

SUPPLE: Describes texture, mostly with reds, as it relates to tannin, body and oak. A positive characteristic.

SUR LIE: Wines aged sur lie (French for "[on the lees](#)") are kept in contact with the dead yeast cells and are not racked or otherwise filtered. This is mainly done for whites, to enrich them (it is a normal part of fermenting red wine, and so is not noted). Originated in Burgundy, with Chardonnay. Popular in Muscadet, Alsace, Germany (Riesling and Pinot Gris) and California. Adds complexity to Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc; can occasionally be overdone and lead to a leesy flavor that is off-putting.

[Top](#)

TANKY: Describes dull, dank qualities that show up in wines aged too long in tanks.

TANNIN: The mouth-puckering substance--found mostly in red wines--that is derived primarily from grape skins, seeds and stems, but also from oak barrels. Tannin acts as a natural preservative that helps wine age and develop.

TART: Sharp-tasting because of acidity. Occasionally used as a synonym for acidic.

TARTARIC ACID: The principal [acid](#) in wine.

TARTRATES: Harmless crystals of potassium bitartrate that may form in cask or bottle (often on the cork) from the tartaric acid naturally present in wine.

TERROIR: The over all environment within which a given varietal grows. Derived from the French word for Earth, "Terre."

THIN: Lacking body and depth.

TIGHT: Describes a wine's structure, concentration and body, as in a "tightly wound" wine. Closed or compact are similar terms.

TINNY: Metallic tasting.

TIRED: Limp, feeble, lackluster.

TOASTY: Describes a flavor derived from the oak barrels in which wines are aged. Also, a character that sometimes develops in sparkling wines.

[Top](#)

VEGETAL: Some wines contain elements in their smell and taste which are reminiscent of plants and vegetables. In Cabernet Sauvignon a small amount of this vegetal quality is said to be part of varietal character. But when the vegetal element takes over, or when it shows up in wines in which it does not belong, those wines are considered flawed. Wine scientists have been able to identify the chemical constituent that makes wines smell like asparagus and bell peppers.

VELVETY: Having rich flavor and a silky, sumptuous texture.

VINICULTURE: The science or study of grape production for wine and the making of wine.

VINOUS: Literally means "winelike" and is usually applied to dull wines lacking in distinct varietal character.

VINTAGE DATE: Indicates the year that a wine was made. In order to carry a vintage date in the United States, for instance, a wine must come from grapes that are at least 95 percent from the stated calendar year. See also [nonvintage](#).

VINTED BY: Largely meaningless phrase that means the winery purchased the wine in bulk from another winery and bottled it.

VINTNER: Translates as wine merchant, but generally indicates a wine producer/or winery proprietor.

VINTNER-GROWN: Means wine from a winery-owned vineyard situated outside the winery's delimited viticultural area.

VITICULTURAL AREA: Defines a legal grape-growing area distinguished by geographical features, climate, soil, elevation, history and other definable boundaries. Rules vary widely from region to region, and change often. Just for one example, in the United States, a wine must be 85 percent from grapes grown within the viticultural area to carry the appellation name. For varietal bottling, a minimum of 75 percent of that wine must be made from the designated grape variety. See also [appellation d'origine contrôlée](#).

VITICULTURE: The cultivation, science and study of grapes.

VITIS VINIFERA: Classic European wine-making species of grape. Examples include Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. Compare *Vitis labrusca*, North American grape species used mainly for New York state wines. For example, Concord.

VOLATILE (or Volatile Acidity): Describes an excessive and undesirable amount of acidity, which gives a wine a slightly sour, vinegary edge. At very low levels (0.1 percent), it is largely undetectable; at higher levels it is considered a major defect.

[Top](#)

YEAST: Micro-organisms that produce the enzymes which convert sugar to alcohol. Necessary for the fermentation of grape juice into wine.

[Top](#)

--Excerpted from James Laube's book, California Wine.