

Make A Fruitful Purchase

There's more to wine than a slurp with your evening meal. Each grape gives off its own distinctive taste and aroma that can enhance a meal. Emma Cant spoke to wine expert Laurianni Greene of French Wine Explorers Wine Tours to find out how to distinguish a Merlot from a Gamay and a Chardonnay from a Chenin Blanc.

Strawberries and oases, bubble and squeak, France and wine. All these go together like, well, like a horse and carriage. France is a huge country. Vineyards cover the vast range of landscapes from Champagne and Alsace in the North, to the warmer climes of Bordeaux, Rhône and Languedoc-Roussillon in the south.

The variations in France's natural terrain lead themselves to bearing a diversity of distinctive grapes. And the result is a tipple to everyone's taste, paying testament to France's pale position in the wine making stakes.

Including Corsica, there are 13 different wine growing regions in France and 14 main varieties of grape. Each variety produces distinctive characteristics. However, taste will also alter depending on the region the grape is grown in. So, the taste of a Gamay grape will differ between Burgundy and Loire. And, while areas such as the Rhône Valley are vast with terrain that suits a number of different grape types, Burgundy only uses Pinot Noir grapes for its red wines.



France and wine are synonymous.

From North to South

Starting in the north and moving roughly in a clockwise direction through some of the main wine growing areas, one of the primary grapes of the Alsace region is the Riesling. This produces a fruity white wine with subtle aromas of lychee and

vegetation. Pinot Noir is also grown here for red wine.

Burgundy is probably one of the best known wine growing regions in France. This area is renowned for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. While Pinot Noir produces a ruby-coloured wine with blackberry flavours and deep, natural



France's main wine-growing regions

acres. Chardonnay offers citrus tastes and aromas.

Moving south, the grape favoured in Burgundy is Gamay. Offering a variety of tantalising aromas from strawberries and raspberries to luscious, the Gamay grape produces a light coloured red wine with a violet tinge to it.

On to the Rhône Valley where some of the most popular grapes are Viognier, Syrah, Grenache and Marsanne. The white Viognier grape produces a medley of fruity offerings, including mango, peach and apricot combined with subtle tastes of honey and soft spices. The aromatic wine is rich in alcohol and not too acidic. Syrah and Grenache are red grapes producing wines that are similar in their peppery tastes. But where Syrah is full-bodied, dark red, with floral and

fruity aromas, ruby red Grenache is lighter-bodied with red fruit aromas. Marsanne produces a light golden-coloured wine that is rich in body and bouquet, with a mixture of aromas from flowers to honey and wax.

Heading West

Across to Bordeaux where a variety of grapes thrive. Here Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc make up some of the white wines, and primarily Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon the red. Semillon has aromatic honey characteristics but has a sweetness that makes it ideal for dessert wines. Sauvignon Blanc offers an extremely aromatic experience. The fruity aromas of passion and citrus fruit combine with the vegetable aromas

At a Glance
There are 14 main varieties of grape in France...
White
Chardonnay; Sauvignon Blanc; Chenin Blanc; Riesling; Semillon; Viognier; and Marsanne
Red
Cabernet Sauvignon; Merlot; Gamay; Pinot Noir; Cabernet Franc; Syrah; and Grenache
...and 13 wine growing regions in France including Corsica. Some of the grape varieties are grown in small quantities all over France, but these are the grapes grown predominantly in the main wine growing regions.
In the North East: Champagne; Alsace (*including Pinot Noir, Burgundy (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Jura*)
In the South East: Burgundy (*Gamay*); Savoie; Rhône (*Viognier, Marsanne, Syrah, Grenache*); and Provence
In the South West: Languedoc (*Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc*)
In the North West: Loire (*Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Gamay, Cabernet Franc*)
Cognac and Armagnac produce wine grapes, but the product is a spirit rather than a wine.
Some wine aficionados will choose their wine before choosing their food.
Most vineyards bought five years ago have now doubled in price.



There is a lot of hard and varied work involved in wine growing

VINEYARDS

of tomato plant leaf and asparagus.

Just to the north of Bordeaux, the Loire region uses primarily Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes for its red wines. Cabernet Franc produces a wine that is fairly tannic with a good acidity and the sweet aroma of raspberries and violets. Cabernet Sauvignon with its deep cardinal hues, is very tannic and has aromas of green pepper and violet.

A Dream Come True?

For any wine lovers, the thought of owning their very own vineyard must seem like a dream come true. So, if the lure of the grape and the aroma of the wine has proved too much, maybe the time has come to think about buying your own little piece of liquid paradise.

Richard Eddis, Managing Director for Leisure & Land says, "The cost of vineyards varies dramatically in the different wine regions in France, with Bordeaux and Burgundy being the most expensive."

But area is not all that needs to be taken into the equation. Probably one of the most important aspects is the condition and quality of the vines. Don't be put off by a crumbling ruin of a house if the vines themselves are top quality. As Richard points out, "In many cases it is worth paying a premium for good vines as it can take years to establish a quality vineyard and only a few months to restore the buildings."

Quality or Quantity?

Taking this further, grapes and soil throughout France are graded according to quality. AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) holds first place, VDP (Vin de Pays) second and VDT (Vin de Table) brings up the rear. Being AOC or non-AOC will also affect the number of hectolitres that can be produced per hectare. AOC vineyards can produce an average of 45 hectolitres per hectare, whereas the average double for non-AOC plots. It really is a question of quality versus quantity.

Be careful not to let such an enticing end product cloud an otherwise crystal clear judgement. There is a lot of work involved in running and maintaining a successful vineyard; the size of the vineyard will affect whether the hard graft is done by in-house staff, contractors or enthusiastic owners. "The work done in a vineyard can be divided into three distinct stages," says Richard. "First there is the farming stage where pruning, treating and harvesting the grapes are done. The busiest times of year at this stage are January, February and September."

Expert Advice

Once the grapes have been harvested, the



next stage is controlling fermentation, the selection and blending of different varieties, storage and bottling. This is certainly not a stage for enthusiastic amateurs. Even the most experienced wine growers will use a qualified oenologist on a freelance basis to advise on the blend of the wines. "Finally," says Richard, "to achieve the maximum profitability from a vineyard, the wine must be sold at the right time and in the right way."

Owning a vineyard can be a truly rewarding occupation. But if the idea of leaving the elements on a cold January morning to prune your vines is perturbing, don't be put off. Simply contact in some experts and sit back to enjoy the fruits of their labour.



For more information on buying a vineyard in France, contact:

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