

THE WINES OF FRANCE

THE WINE LAWS OF FRANCE

- First established in early 1900s – modified a number of times.
- Appellation Contrôlée (controlled naming) laws – the name of a wine reveals quality – helps prevent fraud & gives authenticity.
- In 1935 INAO was established.
- INAO – Institut Nationale des Appellation d’Origine des vins et Eau-de-vis
- INAO created order out of confusion.
- The ground rule for naming a wine is basically geographical
 - area, grape-variety, yield, viticulture, vinification, ageing, alcohol-content and a **taste-test**.

GRADATION OF FRENCH WINES

AOC – Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée

- Highest quality and most prestigious grading for French Wines but produces only 25% of all wines.

VDQS – Vins Délimités de Qualité Supérieure

- Created in 1949 – one notch down from AOC.
- More scopes in choice – grape, yield, etc.
- Taste-test is a must.
- 5% of all wines.

Vin de Pays

- Literally means ‘Country Wines’. Even wider scopes but specific area.
- Not much export.

Vin de Table

- Bottom-ranked but with certain standards.
- No geographical indication.
- Fully blended.

Vin Ordinaire

- Labeled by alcohol-content.
- Sometimes cheaper than even mineral water!

Wine Producing Regions of France

I) **BORDEAUX**

- Probably the most prestigious wine-region.
- Produces only 5% of all French wines but 25% of all AOC wines.
- Quantity – x Quality - ✓
- Climate: mild winters & warm summers – ideal.
- Soil: pebbly & stony, not fertile but rich in minerals – ideal.
- Grapes mostly used:

Green Grapes – Sauvignon blanc / Muscatel / Semillon

Black Grapes – Cabernet Sauvignon / Cabernet Franc / Malbec / Petit Verdot / Merlot

- Red wines – delicate, light-bodied & dry – very good accompaniment with food.
- Bordeaux red wines are referred to as claret (French 'clairet' – clear coloured).
- White wines – more sweet than dry, often golden coloured.
- A few rosé wines also are produced.
- More than 35 districts but the following five are most notable:

Médoc, Pomerol, St. Emilion (mainly reds), Graves (both reds & whites), Sauternes (mainly golden-sweet whites)

- Further Crus Classés (classified growth) grading

i) Médoc

Premier Cru

- Château Lafite-Rothschild – Pauillac
- Château La Tour – Pauillac
- Château Margaux – Margaux
- Château Mouton-Rothschild – Pauillac

Deuxième Cru

- Château Montrose – St. Estéphe
- Château Léoville-Barton – St. Julien
- Château Rauzan-Ségla - Margaux

Troisième Cru

- Château Calon-Ségur – St. Estéphe
- Château Lagrange – St. Julien

Médoc produces some of the best red wines of France.

ii) Pomerol

- Small district.
- Heavy - bodied red wines – known as the Burgundies of Bordeaux.
- No official cru classé.
- Best-known wine: Château Pétrus
- Others: Château Lafleur, Château La Tour-Pomerol, Château Petit-Village

iii) St. Émilion

Prémier Grand Cru

- Château Ausone
- Château Belair
- Château Canon

Grand Cru

- Château Dassault
- Château La Clotte
- Château Corbin

iv) Graves

Prémier Cru

- Château Haut-Brion (red)

Other cru classé wines

- Château Haut-Bailly (red)
- Château Pape-Clément (red)
- Château Olivier (white)
- Château Couhins (white)

v) Sauternes

- Most famous for sweet white wines.
- Frequently attacked by noble rot.

Prémier Grand Cru

- Château d'Yquem (extremely rich & sweet – deep golden)

Prémier Cru

- Château Coutet

- Château Climens

Deuxième Cru

- Château d'Arche
- Château Romer

II) **BURGUNDY**

- Hard climate: severe winters and hot, unpredictable summers.
- Wines susceptible to weather → rare vintage years.
- Early onslaught of winter → early picking → chaptalisation.
- Too much / too little rain.
- Hails destroy vineyards in 15 minutes flat.
- Red wines: robust, full-bodied but smooth.
- White wines: refined, distinguished, mostly dry.
- Grapes: Almost all reds from Pinot Noir (ripens early), Gamay in some areas (e.g. Beaujolais). Almost all whites from Chardonnay.
- The 5 most notable districts are: Côte d'Or, Chalonais, Mâconnais, Beaujolais, Chablis

i) Côte d'Or

- Supreme Burgundies but only about 15% of all.
- Two parts: Côte de Nuit & Côte de Beaune
- Côte de Nuit is famous for reds:

Chambertin, Clos de Tart, Musigny (all Grand Cru)

Les Avelets, Clos St. Jacques, Les Porrets (all Première Cru)

- Côte de Beaune is famous for whites but also produces reds:
- Charlemagne (w), Montrachet (w), Le Corton (r) - all Grand Cru.
Morgeot (w), Les Clos des Mouche (w), Les Grèves (r), Corton Clos du Roi (r) – all Première Cru

ii) **Chalonnais**

- Not much known outside France. Nevertheless, produces good, balanced wines.
- Givry, Mercurey, Rully (both red & white)
- Bouzeron, Montagny (white)

iii) **Mâconnais**

- White, red and some rosé.
- Principal grapes: Gamay & Chardonnay
- Best-known wine: Pouilly-Fuissé (pale golden, excellent accompaniment with fish & poultry)
- Others: Pouilly-Loché (w), St. Véran (w), Mâcon (r), Mâcon-Village (r)

iv) **Beaujolais**

- Vast area, wide varieties.
- Most from Gamay (sandy, granite soil).
- Short vatting→ less tannin→ less robust
- Popularity from Beaujolais Nouveau in November – “Beaujolais Nouveau est arrivé” – light, fresh, delicate & fruity – served slightly chilled.
- 9 grand cru reds are superb and very famous (the nine sisters of Beaujolais):
Brouilly, Chénas, Chiroubles, Côte de Brouilly, Fleurie, Juliéna, Morgon, St. Amour, Moulin-à-Vent

v) **Chablis**

- North-west of Burgundy.

- Very dry white wines – famous throughout the world. Excellent accompaniments with oysters, fish and white meat.

- Examples:

Blanchots, Les Clos, Bougros, Les Crenouilles, Les Preuses, Valmur, Vandésir (all Grand Cru)

Chapelot, Vaucoupin, Vaulorent (all Premier Cru)

III) CÔTES-DU-RHÔNE

- Rhône river valley – southeast of France.
- Climate: hot & steady → consistent quality.
- Rich & hearty wines with higher alcohol.
- 90% red. Rest white and rosé.
- Red grapes: Syrah, Grenache Noir, Cinsault
- White grapes: Viognier, Clairette, Piquepoul

IV) VAL DE LOIRE

- West of Burgundy – name from the majestic Loire river – flows westward to Atlantic.
- Probably the most scenic wine region – with historic castles – wine trade is a tourist attraction.
- Crisp white & golden sweet white wines, fine sparklings, superb rosés (light, fruity & slightly sweet) and a few reds.
- White grapes: Muscadet, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc
- Black grapes: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon
- Best-known wine: Anjou (w & r – sparkling).
- The best Anjou is rosé (never dry).
- Others:

Muscadet (w – dry), Pouilly Fumé (w – dry), Sancerre (w & rosé), Vouvray (w – still & sparkling)

V) ALSACE

- Very northerly wine region – along the edge of the Alsatian plains where Rhine separates France and Germany.
- Great sunshine, a little rain – good for ripening of grapes.
- German occupation for 50 years (freed in 1918). After the phylloxera disaster Germans planted inferior vines. After 1918, the French replanted better vines.
- Alsace wines are similar to Moselle wines of Germany.
- 95% are white and dry.
- Grapes for better wines: Sylvaner, Riesling, Gewürtztraminer
- Others: Muscat, Pinot, Traminer
- Generally fermented until dry (Moselle wines are a bit sweeter).

VI) JURA

- East of Burgundy – between Beaune and Geneva.
- Not very well-known wines.
- A unique wine: Vin Jaune (yellow wine)
- Colour results from storing in pre-used vats – flavour unlike other French wines – e.g. Château Chalon, Etoile, Arbois, Côtes-du-Jura.
- Another speciality: Vin de Pailles (straw wine).
- Previously grapes were dried on straw for 2 months – now they are hung. Sugar gets concentrated – very sweet.

VII) PROVENCE

- South of Rhône river – stretching east along the Mediterranean.
- Most wines are known as: Côtes de Provence
- Best-known: Cassis (full-flavoured white)

VIII) LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

- From Rhone river to the Spanish border.
- More than 1/3rd of France's all vineyards.
- Some wines are:
Corbières, Fitou, St. Chinon

IX) SOUTHWEST

- Southwest corner of France.
- Some notable wines are:
Bergerac, Cahors, Gaillac, Montravel

X) SAVOIE

- Foothills of the Alps overlooking Lac Lemman.
- Best wine: Crépy (w – dry)
- Another notable: Seyssel (w – sparkling)