



## **Wine Words**

### **ACETIC**

All wines contain acetic acid – (ie: vinegar). Normally the amount is insignificant and may even enhance flavor. At a little less than 0.10% content, the flavor becomes noticeable and the wine is termed acetic. Above 0.10% content is considered a strong fault. A related substance, ethyl acetate, contributes the smell associated with acetic acid content.

### **ACID/ACIDITY**

Acid ... term used to describe a tart or sour taste in the mouth when total acidity of the wine is high.

Acidity ... term used on labels to express the total acid content of the wine. The acids referred to are citric, lactic, malic and tartaric. Desirable acid content on dry wines falls between 0.6% and 0.75% of the wines volume. For sweet wines it should not be less than 0.70% of the volume.

### **AFTERTASTE**

Term used to describe the taste left in the mouth after swallowing the wine. Both character and length of the aftertaste are part of the total evaluation. May be harsh, hot, soft and lingering, short, smooth, tannic, or nonexistent.

### **AGE/AGED**

White wines tend to turn from a greenish hue in young wines to a yellowish cast/ tone to a gold/amber color as they age. Reds usually possess a purple tone when young, turning to a deep red – (Bordeaux wines) – or a brick red color – (Burgundy wines) – detectable at the surface edge in a wineglass as they age. Rose"s should be pink with no tinge of yellow or orange. Cellar aged red wines at their peak will show a deep golden–orange color as it thins at the surface edge. If the wine color has deepened into a distinctly brown–orange tint at the edge it usually indicates a wine past its peak and declining.

### **ANGULAR**

The total effect of dominant, tart–edged flavors and taste impressions in many young dry wines. Has opposite meaning to round, soft or supple.

### **APPELLATION**

The specific area a wine comes from. It can refer to a region, such as Bordeaux or Burgundy in France, for example. It can refer to an even more tightly defined sub–region within, say, Bordeaux, such as The Médoc.

### **APPLEY**

Refers to smell or aroma of a wine, usually carrying additional modifiers. "Ripe apples" describes a full, fruity, clean smell associated with some styles of Chardonnay wine. "Fresh apples" does the same for some types of Riesling. "Green apple", however, is almost always reserved for wines made from barely ripe or underripe grapes. "Stale apples" applies almost exclusively to flawed wine exhibiting first stage oxidation.

### **APPROACHABLE**

Drinkable, easy to enjoy.

### **AROMA**

The intensity and character of the aroma can be assessed with nearly any descriptive adjective. (eg: from "appley" to "raisiny", "fresh" to "tired", etc.). Usually refers to the particular smell of the grape variety. The word "bouquet" is usually restricted to describing the aroma of a cellar–aged bottled wine.

**AROMATIC**

Descriptive term for wines of markedly flowery, spicy or grapy character

**ASCESCENCE**

"Ascescence" is the term used to mark the presence of acetic acid and ethyl acetate. Detected by sweet and sour, sometimes vinegary smell and taste along with a sharp feeling in the mouth.

**ASTRINGENT**

Descriptive of wines that have a rough, puckery taste. Usually can be attributed to high tannin content. Tannic astringency will normally decrease with age. However, sometimes the wine fails to outlive the tannin.

**ATTACK**

The initial impact of a wine. If not strong or flavorful, the wine is considered "feeble". "Feeble" wines are sometimes encountered among those vinified in a year where late rain just before harvest diluted desirable grape content.

**ATTRACTIVE**

The winetaster liked it anyway. A veiled criticism of expensive wines, a compliment for others.

**AUSTERE**

Usually used in description of dry, relatively hard and acidic wines that seem to lack depth and roundness. Such wines may soften a bit with age. Term often applied to wines made from noble grape varieties grown in cool climates or harvested too early in the season.

**BACKWARD**

Describes a wine that retains youthful characteristics despite considerable aging. This usually indicates that it will take longer to reach maturity and requires even more aging in the bottle or barrel. Opposite of forward.

**BALANCE**

Denotes harmonious balance of wine elements – (ie: no individual part is dominant). Acid balances the sweetness; fruit balances against oak and tannin content; alcohol is balanced against acidity and flavor. Wine not in balance may be acidic, cloying, flat or harsh etc.

**BEEFY**

Term for reds meaning solid or chunky.

**BERRYLIKE**

Equates with the ripe, sweet, fruity quality of blackberries, raspberries, cranberries and cherries. The aroma and taste of red wines, particularly Zinfandel, are often partly described with this adjective.

**BIG**

The overall flavor of a wine, white or red, that has full, rich flavors. "Big" red wines are often tannic. "Big" white wines are generally high in alcohol and glycerin. Sometimes implies clumsiness, the opposite of elegance. Generally positive, but context is essential – (eg: A Bordeaux red wine shouldn't be as "big" as a California Cabernet Sauvignon).

**BITTER**

One of the four basic tastes. A major source of bitterness is the tannin content of a wine. Some grapes – (Gewurztraminer, Muscat) – have a distinct bitter edge to their flavor. If the bitter component dominates in the aroma or taste of a wine it is considered a fault. Sweet dessert wines may have an enhanced bitter component that complements the other flavors making for a successful overall taste balance.

**BODY**

The effect on the taster's palate usually experienced from a combination of alcohol, glycerin and sugar content. Often described as "full", "meaty" or "weighty".

**BORDEAUX**

The most important wine region in France. Wines from this area are called "Bordeaux". Red wines from Bordeaux are primarily blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. White wines from the region are usually blends of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon.

**BOTRYTIS**

"Botrytis Cinerea", a mold or fungus that attacks grapes in humid climate conditions, causing the concentration of sugar and acid content by making grapes at a certain level of maturity shrivel. On the Riesling grape it allows a uniquely aromatic and flavorful wine to be made, resulting in the extraordinary "Beerenauslese" style of wine.

**BOUQUET**

Near synonym for "aroma". Term generally restricted to description of odors from poured bottled wines.

**BRAWNY**

Term used mainly to describe young red wines with high alcohol and tannin levels. Certain red wines from Amador County, California, can be examples. The mild epithet "tooth-stainers" is sometimes applied to this style of wine, denoting respect for strength.

**BREATHE/BREATHING**

Denotes the act of allowing the wine to "breathe"; ie: when wine is poured into another container, such as a wineglass, the admixture of air seems to release pent-up aromas which then become more pronounced, in many cases, as minutes/hours pass.

**BREED**

Term reserved for wines from the best grape varieties, the so-called "noble grapes". Denotes wines judged to have reached classical expectations of aroma, balance, structure and varietal character.

**BRIARY**

Denotes a wine having an aggressive, prickly taste best described as "peppery". Sometimes combined with the adjective "brawny" to characterize a young red wine with high alcohol and tannin content.

**BRILLIANT**

Very clear (and transparent in white wines) appearance with no visible particulates or suspensions. May be sign of flavor deficiency in heavily filtered wines.

**BRIX**

Measurement system used for sugar content of grapes, wine and related products. A reading of 20 to 25 deg. Brix is the optimum degree of grape ripeness at harvest for the majority of table wines. A quick conversion method for users requiring Specific Gravity units of measurement is to take the Brix reading, deg. Brix (as Sucrose, for which most refractometers are calibrated), and multiply by 0.00425 and then add 0.9988 to the resulting number. This will give a close approximation to the equivalent figure for the S.G of Sucrose at 20 deg. C. Ex: A Brix reading of 18 equals S.G. 1.074. Using the conversion technique above gives a figure of 1.075 which is close enough for most users.

**BROWNING**

Denotes aging in a wine. Young wine color tints show no sign of such "browning". If possessed of good character and depth, a wine can still be very enjoyable even with a pronounced "brown" tint. In average wines this tint, seen along the wine surface edge in a tilted glass goblet, normally signals a wine is "past its peak", although still very drinkable.

**BRUT**

Refers to dry Champagne or Sparkling Wine. The authorities in the Champagne region of France use this term to denote added sugar.

**BUTTERY**

Describes taste sensation found in better white wines, particularly Chardonnay.

**CAVA**

The name for Sparkling Wine (similar to Champagne) from Spain.

#### **CEDAR/CEDARWOOD**

Aroma component often found in fine red wines.

#### **CHABLIS**

White wine from the Chablis area of France. Made from Chardonnay grapes.

#### **CHAMPAGNE**

An important region of France, most known for its production of the only sparkling wine that can truly be called Champagne. The méthode champenoise was invented there.

#### **CHARMING**

A comment applied to wines that don't quite fulfil the first expectations. Means detecting a slight flavor lightness. Sometimes used to describe wines made from the Chenin Blanc grape styled after a type of wine originating from the Loire region of France.

#### **CHEWY**

Refers to a high total tannic component of a wine. Figuratively, one cannot swallow this wine without chewing first.

#### **CIGARBOX**

Near synonym for "tobacco" aroma detected in the nose, especially if a "cedarwood" component is present. Spanish cedarwood is the traditional material for making cigar boxes.

#### **CITRUSY**

Describes aroma and flavor reminiscent of citrus fruits. Most common is a perception of "grapefruit" content. Most often detected in white wines made from grapes grown in cooler regions of California or other countries.

#### **CLARET/CLAIRET**

In England, "Claret" refers to English-style Bordeaux or wines from Bordeaux. In France "Clairet" is a particular Bordeaux that is produced like red wine but the must stays in contact with the skins for the first 24 hours during its making.

#### **CLOUDY**

Opposite of clear. Noticeable cloudiness is undesirable except in cellar aged wines that have not been decanted properly. A characteristic of some unfiltered wines showing the result of winemaking mistakes and often possessing an unpleasant taste.

#### **COMPLEX**

Almost a synonym for "breed". Possesses that elusive quality where many layers of flavor separate a great wine from a very good one. Balance combines all flavor and taste components in almost miraculous harmony.

#### **CORKED**

Wine has unpleasant "wet cardboard" taste/smell. Reason is thought to be chemical changes in the wine caused by inadequately sterilized cork stopper inserted at bottling source.

#### **CREAMY**

Refers to "silk-like" taste component of wines subjected to malolactic fermentation as opposed to the "tart/crisp" taste component of the same wine lacking the treatment. Almost a synonym for "buttery". Opposite of "crisp".

#### **CRISP**

Wine has definite but pleasing tartness, acidity. Generally used to describe white wines only, especially those of Muscadet de Sevres et Maine from the Loire region of France.

#### **DECANTING**

A method by which cellar-aged bottled wine is poured slowly and carefully into a second vessel, usually a glass decanter, in order to leave any sediment in the original bottle before serving. Almost always a treatment confined to red wines. The traditional method uses a candle flame as the light for illuminating the neck of the bottle while the wine is passing by. The low intensity of

the light is ideal for viewing since it does not strain the eyes. Care must be taken NOT to allow the flame to heat the wine while performing this ritual.

### **DELICATE**

Any wine demonstrating somewhat mild, but attractive characteristics. Occasionally used to describe well-made wines from the so-called "lesser grape" varieties.

### **DEPTH, DEEP**

Refers to a premium wine that demands more attention, it fills the mouth with a developing flavor, there are subtle layers of flavor that go "deep."

### **DESSERT WINE**

Has two meanings:

Fortified wine – eg: Sherry – where alcohol is added in the form of Brandy or neutral spirits. Sweet or very sweet wines of any alcohol level customarily drunk with dessert or by themselves and usually in small amounts.

### **DIRECT**

Everything present in this wine is immediately obvious.

### **DIRTY**

Describes any of the undesirable odours that can be present in a wine that that was poorly vinified. A characteristic imparted by improperly cleaned barrels or various other processes performed incorrectly. Usually detected first in a wine by the smell of the cork stopper or from a barrel sample. Not to be confused with corked wines where the stopper is thought to be responsible.

### **DRY**

Dry/Off Dry: Little or no sugar = "dry", slightly sweeter = "off dry".

### **EARTHY**

Covers situations where a "mother-earth" component is present. Earth is soil-dirt, but an earthy wine is not dirty as in "DIRTY" above. The term appears to be applicable to wine thought, by some, to be made from certain young varietal grapes obtained from vines planted on land previously used for growing vegetables containing components which "marked" the soil in some way. European tasters use the term in a broader sense to describe "terroir" characteristics.

### **EASY**

Undemanding but pleasant, doesn't require good taste, just tastes good.

### **ELEGANT**

What to say when there is great balance and grace in the wine, but you can't quite find apt words of description. Almost a synonym for "breed".

### **ESSENCE**

Two meanings:

Refers to "odor kits" containing vials of representative flavor essence.

Used occasionally by wineries to describe a late harvest, sweet red wine. Most frequently appears on bottle labels for Zinfandel red wine made from grapes picked at 35 deg. Brix or higher sugar content.

### **EXTRACTED**

Refers to the coloring imparted to wines during the fermentation process by the skins of the grapes used. Can also occur in the further step known as "maceration" where new wine is allowed to steep with the skins again. This second step usually results in a "highly extracted" style of wine, deeply colored with strong flavors and tannin. Rose's, (aka "blush" wines), are normally made by limiting contact with the skins, the opposite of "extraction".

### **FAT**

Fills the mouth in a positive manner. The wine "feels" and tastes a little obvious and often lacks elegance but is prized by connoisseurs of sweet dessert wines. Not quite desirable in a late harvest Moselle Riesling, but appropriate in a classic Sauternes.

Fatness/oiliness is determined by the naturally occurring glycerol – (a.k.a glycerin) – content in the wine.

### **FILTERED**

Wines that have had suspended particulates resulting from the fermentation process removed. Important for future clarity and stability of a wine.

### **FINED**

Use of various materials for clarifying wines. These materials precipitate to the bottom of the fermentation process vessel carrying any suspended particulate matter with them.

### **FINISH**

As in "this wine has a (whatever) finish" or aftertaste

### **FIRM**

Attacks the palate with acid or tannic astringency. Suggests that the wine is young and will age. Nearly always a positive comment and very desirable with highly flavored foods.

### **FLAT**

Opposite of "firm". Usually indicates very low acidity, so tasting insipid and lacking flavor.

### **FLESHY**

Refers to both body and texture. A fleshy wine tastes fatter than a meaty wine, exhibiting some excess oiliness if too pronounced. Often suggests great smoothness and richness.

### **FLINT/FLINTY**

Synonym for "stoney". Derived from French phrase "gout de pierre a fusil", literally a smoky, whiff of gunflint, almost acrid taste. These terms are presumably metaphorical approximations based on the flavor sensations allegedly present in wines made from grapes grown on a limestone/silica rich terroir. "Flinty" describes an initial evaluation indicating a young white wine made from cool region grapes under cold fermentation conditions. Characterized by high acidity, a tactile "mouthfeel" that is filling and yet has a flavor sensation that is cleanly "earthy".

### **FLORAL/FLOWERY**

Suggests the aroma or taste, usually aroma, of flowers in wine. "Floral" usually employed as an adjective without modifier to describe attributes of white wine aromas. Few red wines have floral aromas.

### **FORWARD**

Opposite of "closed-in" or, as used by some, backward. Means presence of "fruitiness" is immediately apparent. Usually employed as a term denoting that the wine is in peak condition and on its plateau of maturity.

### **FOXY**

Common descriptive word used to note the presence of the unique musky and grapey character attached to native American *Vitis labrusca* grapes such as the Concord or Catawba varieties. The term "fox" has traditionally been a pejorative name given by grapegrowers to the fruit of a feral, ie. reverted to the wild species, cultivar grapevine. The earliest known reference to a "fox" grape occurs in the first part of the 17th century, specifically applied to cultivated North American grapes, and seems to refer to the unexpected results obtained from planted seeds, a notoriously unpredictable method of reproduction. The word itself may be an early corruption of the french word "faux", (ie. false). Some also claim the word is derived from the french "gout de renard" meaning, in all senses of the phrase, "taste of fox". The aroma and flavors defy verbal description. The best way to imprint "foxiness" in the memory is to mentally compare the flavor of fresh Concord grapes and any fresh California table grape. Most people find the juice or jelly from the Concord grape quite sprightly and delicious. In dry table wines the fermented flavor result is considered by many to be obtrusive and even quite disagreeable.

### **FRESH**

The wine has a lively fruity acidity, maybe a little bite of acid, as found in youthful light reds, rose"s and most whites. All young whites should be fresh. The opposite is flatness, staleness.

**FRUITY**

A fruity wine has an "appley", "berrylike" or herbaceous character. "Fruitiness" usually incorporates the detection of a little extra sweetness as is found in really fresh grapes or berries.

**FULL-BODIED**

As opposed to "thin" or "thin-bodied". Fills the mouth, has a winery taste, alcohol is present, the wine has "weight on the tongue".

**FUNKY**

Defies precise definition. Appears to be a 1970s cannabis culture derived word sometimes used by N. American west coast winetasting reviewers when describing vegetal/ yeasty/yeastlike aromas so complex that individual identification is difficult. Can have positive or negative connotations depending on context.

**GAMEY/GAMELIKE**

Descriptive term for one of the flavors/aromas considered particular to Burgundian style Pinot Noir red wines. Reminiscent of taste and flavor associated with cooked wild duck and other "gamey" meats. Thought to be caused by contamination with "brett" – (brettanomyces strain of yeast). Sometimes referred to as "animale" by french winemakers or "sweaty saddle" by Australians. Considered a major flaw when flavor is overly-pronounced.

**GLYCERIN/GLYCEROL**

Gives a sweet taste on the tongue tip. Higher concentrations are found in high-alcohol and late-harvest wines, leading to sensations of smooth slipperiness giving a sense of fullness to the wine body. Is a natural by-product of the fermentation process.

**GRAPEFRUITY**

Grapefruit flavours are characteristic of cool-climate Chardonnays. See citrusy above.

**GRAPEY**

Content has simple flavors and aromas reminiscent of a certain type of fresh wine or table grape. Used by some as adjective alternate for "foxy".

**GRASSY**

Slightly vegetal-tasting undertone often part of the overall character of Sauvignon Blanc and certain other grape varieties. European tasters sometimes use the word "gooseberry" to describe this flavor. In minute presence it can enhance flavors. As it becomes more dominant the more it loses appeal leading to unattractiveness.

**GREEN**

Strictly applied refers to the taste of wines made with underripe fruit. More loosely used it refers to some white wines, especially Riesling, possessing the greenish colour tint indicating youth; does not necessarily mean the sour and/or grassy taste of unripe fruit content as well.

**HARD**

High acidity and/or tannin content leading to a sensation of dryness in the mouth, a degree of puckery-ness. Useful for detecting young red wines suitable for aging. Characteristic preferred in dry white wines that will accompany shellfish.

**HARSH**

Very astringent wines, usually with high alcohol component, often have this rough, rustic taste characteristic. May become more tolerable with aging but also may not be worth the wait.

**HAZY**

Refers to wines with slight particulate content when viewed against the light. Occurs most often in unfiltered or unfined wines where there is no need to worry. If the haziness is intense enough to cause loss of clarity however it may indicate a flawed wine.

**HEARTY**

Most often applied in description of full, warm qualities found in red wines with high alcohol component. Examples are found in the sturdier so-called "jug wines", some California Zinfandels, lesser French Rhone or Algerian red wines and in the occasional lesser Australian Shiraz.

**HERBACEOUS**

Adjective used in description of wine with taste and aroma of herbs, (usually undefined). Considered to be a varietal characteristic of Cabernet Sauvignon, and to less extent, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

**HOLLOW**

Missing middle between "attack" and "finish". Caused by too many grapes on insufficiently pruned vines. If very noticeable, called "empty".

**HONEYED**

Applies to ripe wines, which, sweet or dry, have a taste or aroma of honey.

**HOT**

Defines a wine high in alcohol and giving a prickly or burning sensation on the palate. Accepted in fortified wines, but not considered as a particularly desirable attribute in Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay. Positively undesirable in light, fruity wines, (eg: Moselle Rieslings).

**JAMMY**

Word most often encountered in descriptions of California Zinfandel wines made with Amador County grapes. Refers to the natural berrylike taste of this grape.

**LATE HARVEST**

Indicates grapes that are picked as late as possible in the season for maximum sugar content.

**LEAFY**

Somewhat analogous to "vegetal". Desirable in minute detectable amounts, if adding to notes of complexity in the wine.

**LEAN**

More body would be good, sort of thin in the mouth, often too much astringency, sometimes a compliment for certain styles.

**LEES**

Refers to residual yeast and other particles that precipitate, or are carried by the action of "fining", to the bottom of the fermentation vessel. US winemakers use the term "mud". Imparts distinctive flavors to the wine depending on type. Derived from French term "lies" as in "sur lies".

**LEGS**

Term used when referring to the liquid rivulets that form on the inside of a wineglass bowl after the wine is swirled in order to evaluate the alcohol concentration present. Usually the higher the alcohol content, the more impressive the rivulets appear because of reduced surface tension effects. (Some still cling to the erroneous belief that glycerin content causes these rivulets). Valuable technique when used in "blind" tasting competitions.

**LEMONY**

Descriptive of a somewhat acidic white wine. These wines contain flavors reminiscent of that fruit. Apart from that, may be well balanced in all other respects, sometimes with a touch of extra sweetness.

**LENGTH**

How long the total flavor lasts in the back of the throat after swallowing. Counted in time—seconds, known as "caudilie". Ten seconds (caudilie) is good, fifteen is great, twenty is excellent and fifty is superb. Almost a synonym for "finish", as in "this is a wine with an long, extraordinary finish".

**LIGHT**

Low alcohol and/or sugar. Since about 1981 a wine containing fewer calories per comparable serving than a regular glass of wine has been legally designated as such. Used as a tasting term, "light" is usually a polite expression meaning "watery".

**LIVELY**

Almost a synonym for fresh. Implies detection of barely discernible spritzyness. Applies most often to white wines, but some reds



also qualify.

### **LUSH**

Describes impression of wines with high amounts of residual sugar. Adjective almost entirely reserved for sweet dessert wines.

### **MADERIZED**

Distinctive brown color in wine due usually to period of air exposure. Regarded as synonym for "oxidized". Originates from the taste/appearance of fortified Madeira wines.

### **MALOLACTIC**

Secondary fermentation occasionally detected in bottled wines. Its action converts the naturally occurring Malic acid into Lactic acid plus Carbon Dioxide gas. Reduces total acidity by this action. Since the gas is contaminated with undesirable odors, if it remains trapped in the bottle it becomes a minor fault unless allowed to dissipate. Malolactic fermentation is a commonly used technique for reducing the sharpness of cool climate Chardonnays and the Lactic acid component gives an admired "creamy" or "buttery" texture.

### **MATCHSTICK**

Describes the odor of Sulphur Dioxide gas, described by some as similar to the smell of "burnt matches", found in minute amounts very occasionally trapped in bottled white wines. Dissipates with airing or decanting.

### **MEAGER**

Lacks "body" and "depth". Has definite feeling of flavor dilution. Seems to occur in some select varietal wines vinified from grapes subjected to late season rain, although there are other explanations as well.

### **MEATY**

With much body as though you could chew it. The reference is to lean meat, so indicates less body present than "fleshy".

### **MOUTH-FILLING**

Wines possessing intense flavors which seem to affect every sensory nerve in the mouth. Usually slightly high glycerin component, slightly low acid.

### **MUSTY**

A wine that displays unpleasant "mildew" or "moldy" aromas. Results from improperly cleaned storage vessels, moldy grapes or cork.

### **NOSE**

Not the fleshy sense-organ/projection on the human face. Is near synonym word for "aroma" and includes "bouquet". Strictly applied it refers to the totality of the detectable odor, (grape variety, vinous character, fermentation smells), whether desirable or defective, found in a wine. One would speak of a mature wine as having, for example, "varietal aromas, flowery bouquet and hint of vanilla oak combining to give a balanced nose".

The sense organs of the human nose can be educated by the use of purchased odor comparison kits known by such names as "Le Nez du Vin", "Component Collection" or "Winealyser". These can sometimes be obtained at the various Home Wine Makers mail suppliers (etc.) around the country.

### **NOUVEAU**

Indicates young, immediately drinkable wine – (eg: "nouveau Beaujolais").

### **NUTTY**

Table wines that have been exposed to air display this aroma which resembles that of certain sherry wines. Considered a flaw by some in red wines, but a desired flavor component in certain white wines by others, (eg: Chardonnays with extended "lees" contact in the fermentation vessel).

### **OAKY**

The taste or aroma of freshly sawn oak. A wine, especially a red, is considered as correctly "oaked" when the "nose" carries a bare

whiff of vanilla aroma. Sometimes oak flavors overpower other component wine flavors in which case it is considered overoaked. Oak flavor is introduced from contact with storage barrels made from that wood. New oak barrels contribute stronger flavor to a wine than older storage barrels. The "oaky" components encountered include "vanillin", and so-called "toasty", "charred" or "roasted" elements. "Vanillin" comes from the character of the hardwood. The three others derive from the "charring" of the barrel that occurs from heating the broad iron rings which hold the barrel staves in place after contraction and the flaming of the interior.

#### **OILY**

Describes the vaguely fat, slippery sensation on the palate in contact with the combination of high glycerin and slightly low acid content. Mostly encountered in high quality Chardonnays and late harvest sweet wines.

#### **OPEN-UP/OPENING-UP**

Some bottled cellar-aged red wines possess the peculiarity that, when the cork is first pulled and the wine poured, the full flavors do not immediately make an appearance. However, after the passage of several minutes in an open glass goblet, the wine develops unsuspected flavor characteristics that can verge on the sublime. This phenomenon is referred to as "opening-up". Conversely, these flavors can disappear just as fast in just 30 minutes, leaving a subsequent impression of a flat, stale, "over-the-hill" and/or mediocre wine.

#### **OVERIPE**

A grape precondition necessary for making certain styles of Californian Zinfandel wines. Left on the vine to dry in the sun, certain grape varieties will develop the desirable "raisiny" character and concentrated sugar necessary for making specialty wines such as the Hungarian "Tokay".

#### **OXIDIZED**

An oxidized wine will be stale and flat, devoid of richness.

#### **PEPPERY**

Term almost solely applied to "spicy" wines, such as Gewurztraminer among the whites, or the red Rhone Syrah and Australian Shiraz wines. Is a component which can almost be described as pungent in quality, being reminiscent of anise, cinnamon etc.

#### **PERFUMED**

Synonym for "floral". Implies also a degree of extra residual sugar.

#### **PLUMP**

Less than "fat", but otherwise nearly a synonym.

#### **PONDEROUS**

Even less balanced than a "hearty" or "sturdy" wine. The sole impact is one of high alcohol and "body" character. Little or no acid/tannin content. An everyday red wine, similar to a french "vin ordinaire" country wine sold by alcohol content, can be an example.

#### **POWERFUL**

Close to being a synonym for BRAWNY.

#### **PRICKLY**

A wine with slight residual gas in it. Usually attractive in light young whites, but in reds it is often a sign of refermentation in the bottle or bottling of the wine prematurely.

#### **PRUNEY**

Overripe, sun-dried grapes can induce an undesirable pungent quality into table wines; sometimes compared to "the taste of dried prunes".

#### **PUCKERY**

Synonym for ASTRINGENT.

#### **RACKING**

Traditional method of wine clarification. Sequential transfer of wine to several containers, each transfer leaving behind some

particulate matter.

### **RACY**

Sharp acidity usually found in young white wine (i.e. Italian Pinot Grigio, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc)

### **RAISINY**

Mildly rich flavor due to excessive heat in the growing area which dries out grapes still on the vine. Considered a fault in most dry table wines.

### **RANCIO**

Word normally used to describe a flavor perception found in tawny brown, wood-aged and heated fortified wines such as some "Madeira". Refers to the peculiarly blowsy overly-ripe fruit aroma, analogous to overripe bananas, admired in Port-style fortified wines but considered a fault in dry table wines where the detectable presence of oxidized components is frowned on for the most part.

### **REFINED**

Term for well-balanced wines. Mostly refers to reds, such as Zinfandel, that normally turn "powerful" in the barrel. Almost a synonym for "elegant".

### **RESIDUAL SUGAR**

Percentage, by weight or volume, of the unfermented grape sugar in a bottled wine.

### **RICH**

Giving a full, rounded flavor impression without necessarily being sweet. Richness supplied by alcohol, glycerin and oak vanilla nuances in dry wine. The sweeter wines qualify for this adjective if also characterized by ripe, fruity flavors.

### **RIM**

Refers to edge of wine surface as seen through a "ballon" (goblet) style wineglass held at an angle of about 30–40 deg. from the vertical and viewed against white piece of paper or cloth using natural light. Used in evaluation of wine age. In "blind" tasting is about the only way to get an informed perception about the probable life and/or condition of the wine from that date on.

### **RIPE**

Favorable adjective bestowed when the varietal characteristics of the grape are optimally present in a well balanced wine. Ripe-tasting wines tend toward being slightly more fruity and sweet than otherwise normal wines.

### **ROBUST**

Vigorous, full with a lot of heart, a big scaled wine.

### **ROTTEN EGG**

Smell of Hydrogen Sulfide gas in wine. Thought to be a characteristic imparted by certain yeast strains. A decided flaw.

### **ROUGH**

Flavor/texture is coarse. Acidity and/or tannin are predominant and unpleasant.

### **ROUND**

Describes flavors and tactile sensations giving a feeling of completeness with no dominating characteristic. Almost the same as fat, but with more approval. Tannin, acid and glycerin are sufficiently present but appear as nuances rather than distinct flavors.

### **SALTY**

One of the basic taste sensations detected by the receptors in the human tongue.

### **SHARP**

Excess acid predominates, disturbing the otherwise balanced flavors.

### **SIMPLE**

Normal, everyday, well-vinified table wine of straightforward character.

**SMOKE/SMOKY**

Some use the word in the same sense as the smell/flavor that separates smoked (anything) from ordinary (anything). Refers to aroma contributed by the charred oakwood in barrels. It can have a variety of impressions – (eg: such as the remains of a burnt-out fire). Needs a variant, such as "wood-smoke" or "barbecue smoke" or "sooty" to fully convey the meaning.

**SOFT**

Generally has low acid/tannin content. Also describes wines with low alcohol content. Consequently has little impact on the palate.

**SOUR**

Almost a synonym for ACIDIC. Implies presence of acetic acid plus excess acid component. (Is also one of the four basic taste sensations detected by the human tongue).

**SPICY**

Almost a synonym for "peppery". Implies a softer, more rounded flavor nuance however.

**SPRITZY**

Considered a fairly minor fault stemming sometimes from the onset of a brief secondary malolactic fermentation in the bottle. Consists of pinpoint carbonation typically released when the bottle cork is pulled. Frowned on more if occurring in white wines vinified to be dry.

**STALE**

Wine with lifeless, stagnant qualities. Usually found in wines that were kept in large vessel storage for an excessive length of time.

**STEELY**

Mouth-feel and aroma applied to many non-oaked white wines. Dual meaning due to its fermentation in steel and its almost metallic flavor.

**STONEY/STONELIKE**

Describes a \_set\_ of perceptions that seem to indicate a relatively young white wine fermented from ripe, but not overly so, grapes under cold fermentation conditions. Classic examples are made from Chardonnay grapes in the Chablis region of France. Wines from the Carneros region of the Napa Valley in California are sometimes so described as well. High acidity coupled with a tactile, mouth-filling sensation that has a cleanly "earthy" flavor characterize this type of wine.

**STRUCTURE**

Term for overall flavor. Used to suggest complete impression of the wine. Needs a modifier in order to mean something – (eg: "brawny" etc).

**STURDY** (see HEARTY above)

**STYLISH**

The style is distinctive and characteristic of the grape(s) used. Carries a connotation of briskness or jauntiness. Commonly used to describe an Australian or New Zealand wine.

**SUPPLE**

Term often used for young reds which should be more aggressive. More lively than an easy wine with suggestions of good quality. The near synonym "amiable" is also sometimes employed but does not quite emphasize the extra connotation of "leanness" implied.

**SWEET**

Refers to one of the four basic tastes detected by the sensory nerves of the human tongue. In the description of wine taste-flavor the term "sweet" is almost always used as an identifier denoting the presence of residual sugar and/or glycerin. Wine aromas require a descriptive term to identify the source of the perceived sensation – (eg: "ripe", "lush").

**TANNIN**

A naturally occurring substance in grapeskins, seeds and stems. Is primarily responsible for the basic "bitter" component in wines. Acts as a natural preservative, helping the development and, in the right proportion, balance of the wine. It is considered a fault when present in excess.

**TARRY/TARLIKE**

Descriptive term used when comparing odor detected in the "nose" of a wine with similar odor retained in a memory trained by the use of a comparison kit of scent essences. Such kits include tar, apricots, mushrooms and other flavoring essences isolated from wines.

**TART**

Synonym for "acidic".

**TASTE**

Refers to the basic sensations detectable by the human tongue. Current scientific opinion defines these as "sweet", "salty", "sour", "bitter" and "MSG" (Monosodium Glutamate) flavors all registered by the tongue taste receptors. The traditional view of the tongue having four distinct surface zones to register those tastes has recently been revised by a report of new research discoveries (ie. see "Nature" magazine, April 5, 2000).

**TEARS**

Synonym for "legs".

**TERROIR**

French language term for all the characteristics of the vineyard site thought to be imparted to a particular wine. It is a term that includes geographic, geological, climatic and other attributes that can affect an area of growth as small as a few square metres.

**THIN/THIN-BODIED**

Opposite of "full-bodied".

**TOASTY**

Other, similar descriptors are "caramel" and "toffee". Some also add spicy flavours, such as "cinnamon" or "cloves".

**TOBACCO**

Descriptive term, used by some, to describe a flavor component resembling the taste of raw tobacco leaf in the finish of certain red wines. Seems to mainly apply to Cabernet Sauvignons from Bordeaux, France or the Napa region of California. "Cigarbox" is a common term often used as a near synonym especially if a cedar-wood note in the aroma is detected. (Non-smokers may have trouble with this word and its implication).

**TOUGH**

Usually implying too much tannin.

UNDERIPE (see also ACIDIC, GREEN).

Resulting flavor when grapes that failed to reach optimum maturity on the vine are used in the vinification process.

**UNFILTERED**

Opposite of "filtered". However, does not exclude other clarifying processes such as "fining" etc.

**UNFINED**

Opposite of "fined", but does not exclude other clarifying processes such as "filtering" etc.

**VANILLA**

Component detectable in the "nose" of a wine. The novice taster can compare odors with the vials of artificial ones provided in kit form.

**VANILLIN**

Component contributed by oakwood barrel staves. Considered to add a degree of "sweetness" to red wines when present in barely

detectable amounts, so adding to a desirably complex style prized by connoisseurs.

#### **VARIETAL CHARACTER**

The particular flavor characteristics associated with a grape picked at optimum maturity – (eg: distinctive "berrylike" taste of California Zinfandels, "blackcurrants" of Cabernet Sauvignon etc).

#### **VEGETAL**

Considered a flavor flaw when present in distinctive amounts over and above that occurring naturally in the grape. "Grassy" has somewhat the same connotation.

#### **VITIS LABRUSCA**

The grape species believed to be an impure, cross-pollinated version of the wild grape native to North America. Makes tasty juice, jelly but has wine flavor often termed as "foxy".

#### **VITIS VINIFERA**

The premier grape species used for the world's most admired wines. Also referred to as the "European vine".

#### **VOLATILE**

Powerful, attack aroma. Usually denotes high level of acidity, alcohol and/or other flavor faults.

#### **WARM**

Possesses high alcohol flavor offset by counterbalancing flavors and other desirable qualities. Unlike "hot", is a positive attribute.

#### **WATERY**

Synonym for MEAGER or THIN.

#### **WEIGHTY**

Well-structured/balanced wines with an implication of mildly excessive flavor or "heaviness".

#### **WELL-BALANCED**

Contains all of the essential elements – (ie: alcohol, flavors, acid or astringency etc) – in good proportions.

#### **WINE THIEF**

Sampling tube made from clear glass or plastic tube having a narrowed opening at either end. The tube is lowered into the wine container, usually a barrel, allowed to fill to a predetermined level and is then withdrawn, keeping the upper end sealed with a finger, so collecting a sample of wine. The wine sample is then disgorged into a wineglass or shallow "tastevin" cup held ready for use by the taster. (Cooks will recognize the similarity to the kitchen implement known as a "turkey baster").

#### **WOODY**

Almost a synonym for OAKY. However, implies an overstay in a wooden container which resulted in the absorption of other wood flavors besides "oak".

#### **YEASTY/YEASTLIKE**

Term describing odors deriving from varietal yeasts carried on grapeskins, molds etc. Includes both desirable and undesirable characteristics. Examples would be the presence of "brett", (brettanomyces), a strain of yeast that produces "gamey/smokey" odors that are considered to add to the character of the wine when barely detectable. Considered a flaw when presence is pronounced. Another, similar example is the "dekkera" wild yeast strain which gives a "fresh dirt/cement-y" flavor component.