

# *Understanding* **Wine Varieties**




WINE

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Like many of you, I enjoy my wine, and I drink a fair amount of it. But I'm tired of the standard wine reviews where every wine gets a good or positive rating to avoid offence. There's nothing worse than buying a recommended bottle and then hating it when you open it. The truth is that not all wine is good, and your enjoyment of it can be influenced dramatically by the food and people with whom you share it.

The reality is you don't need to know a lot about wine to enjoy it – and you don't need to have a huge bank balance either. Many of Australia's best wines (and I mean quality, not the price tag) never make it to the large retail outlets or chain stores. For many years now I've been scouring the country's wine regions to find Australia's hidden gems. I've been hanging out with vignerons and winemakers from the Barossa to the Tamar and Yarra Valleys, and beyond. I even got so passionate about wine that I went to learn more about it – and received London's International Wine Spirit Education Trust Level 3 qualifications. In fact, I have also almost completed my two-year Diploma in Wine and Spirit (WSET4).


I'm sure you'll agree that one of the best things about drinking wine is sharing it with friends over some good food. The matching of wine to people is actually quite a difficult skill, but it's something I just kind of 'fell' into and have become pretty good at. So much so that my friends regularly ask me for wine suggestions – from everyday drinking wine to special occasions; and from drink nows to exploring the benefits of cellaring.

Matching food to your wine can also be a challenge, and something many people get a little nervous about. The old adage that white wine can only be matched to chicken, fish or seafood no longer applies. For years I've been designing food matches from simple 3-course meals to extravagant 14-course degustation dinners with my wife, Mrs Matchmaker, who creates the recipes. Together we enjoy exploring the flavours of wine and how each could be amplified and complemented with various dishes, and it's something we've become petty good at together.

So, in a nutshell, that's what Wine Matchmaker is all about: no holds barred reviews of everyday wines I taste, as well as some of my favourite 'hidden gems' for you to explore; how each wine could be best matched to food, and what kind of person would enjoy each wine. This, coupled with a few recipes you can cook at home means you can create your own perfect dinners that are sure to impress and delight. We also run exclusive wine dinners and education sessions, and commencing in October 2020, they'll be run through our very own back vintage wine bar – Life's Too Short Bar in East Melbourne – so you can learn even more, should you wish.

So please have a look around, read some of the posts and give me your thoughts and feedback. Whether you agree with me or not please feel free to leave your constructive thoughts.

Enjoy,  
Antony Anderson  
The Wine Matchmaker.





# *What's the difference between Champagne and Sparkling Wine? And where does Prosecco fit in?*

*Champagne is a sparkling wine that has to be made in the Champagne region of France.*

So every Champagne is a sparkling wine but not every sparkling wine is Champagne as there are sparkling wines made outside Champagne.

So what is sparkling wine? Basically, it's any wine that has bubbles in it. But the bubbles can get into the sparkling wine in a number of different ways.

The first method used to create bubbles is *méthode champenoise*, named in honor of the region that developed it. Today we refer to that method as the traditional method (*méthode traditionnelle*) as it is used globally to produce sparkling wine.

The traditional method involves creating a still base (or table) wine in the same way as most of the wine you're used to drinking. The still wine is then put in a bottle with some yeast and sugar before being sealed, usually with a crown seal i.e. metal bottle cap. The yeast and sugar start a secondary fermentation process where the yeast converts the sugar in alcohol and releases carbon dioxide.



As the bottle is sealed, the carbon dioxide produced can not escape and, as the pressure builds, the carbon dioxide dissolves into the wine creating the bubbles. Generally, the longer the wine spends under pressure during carbon dioxide production, the better dissolved and the finer the bubbles become. In Champagne, bottles must be left for at least 15 months, although many producers leave it longer.

In Champagne the grape varieties normally used are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier in various percentages. Most sparkling wine created around the world uses the same grapes, but not necessarily all of them. Because of this, sparkling wine is usually categorised by:

- The region it is made;
- The method used to produce it;
- The grape varieties used.

For example, a French sparkling wine made outside the Champagne region but using the traditional method can use the name Cremant. Cremants are made in the same way as Champagne, often with similar grapes. Although made in France, because they're produced outside the Champagne region they use the name Cremant, and they offer excellent value for money compared to Champagne. For example, Simonnet-Febvre Cremant de Bourgogne from Burgundy is blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir aged in bottle for 24 months for around \$25 a bottle - half the price of an equivalent Champagne

Sparkling wines made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir using the traditional method are very common in the New World. The Yarra Valley's Domain Chandon, owned by the French Company LVMH, produces some good examples..



Another country that makes sparkling wine using the traditional method is Spain with their Cava (not be confused with the drink Kava from the Pacific Islands). Cava is made using the traditional method, but with three local grape varieties: Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel·lo. This gives Cava unique aromas and flavours, sometimes described as herbal and floral and occasionally like rubber (but don't let that put you off!) My current favourite is the 2016 Freixenet Vintage Reserva Brut Cava, which you can buy for around \$17 per bottle (or less on special), which is cheaper than many Australian sparkling wines.

Italy is also famous their sparkling wine Prosecco, which has taken the world by storm in recent years. Prosecco is produced in nine provinces in the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions of North Eastern Italy.

It uses a process called the Charmat method (or Martinotti method in Italy), where the still base wine goes through secondary fermentation in a stainless steel tank, once yeast and sugar are added. The secondary fermentation is much shorter than the traditional method, usually taking only two to three months. Due to its fast pace, this method creates wines with coarser bubbles than the traditional method, with less complexity. But it does produce a fresher, fruitier sparkling wine that's much cheaper than the traditional method, due to its large volumes with less ageing. This has led to the popularity of cheaper Prosecco, and its market share has been able to grow much faster than Champagne over the last decade. Good examples of Prosecco include Maschio Superiore Prosecco Di Conegliano and Rebuli Prosecco Superiore DOCG Valdobbiadene NV..

Finally, the cheapest and quickest way to make sparkling wine is to take a still base wine and simply inject it with carbon dioxide gas. It's called the soda method, and is similar to making soft drinks. But these wines have short lived bubbles that are quite aggressive on the tongue. And when you can get traditional method sparkling wines for as little as \$17, why would you bother.

So the next time someone calls sparkling wine "Champagne", feel free to correct them by telling them "all Champagne is sparkling wine, but not all sparkling wine is Champagne!"

Cheers,  
Antony.



*Simonnet-  
Febvre Cremant de  
Bourgogne from  
Burgundy is blend  
of Chardonnay and  
Pinot Noir aged in  
bottle for 24 months*





*Spanish 2016  
Freixenet Vintage  
e Reserva Brut  
Cava*



*Italian  
Rebuli Prosecco  
Superiore D.O.C.G.  
Valdobbiadene  
NV*



A close-up photograph of two hands holding champagne flutes, clinking them together. The glasses are filled with a bubbly, light-colored liquid. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.

# ***What is Prosecco?***

**Did you know that Prosecco is the main ingredient in Aperol Spritz? But what is Prosecco?**

Prosecco is a type of sparkling wine from Italy made with the Glera grape. It's produced in nine provinces in the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions of northeastern Italy, close to the border with Austria and Slovenia. Most Prosecco is produced using a process called the Charmat method (or Martinotti method in Italy), where the still base wine is placed in a stainless steel tank before yeast and sugar is added to start the secondary fermentation which creates the bubbles. The time spent in the tank also allows the wine to stay in contact with the dead yeast cells (called lees), which adds complexity to the wine. The longer the amount of time the wine spends on lees, the more complexity it gains.

To be called Prosecco, it must be certified to come from the designated area denoted with the words "DOC" or "DOCG" which must also appear on its label. The requirements for DOC and DOCG Prosecco are slightly different, although both wines must contain the Glera grape.

Denominazione di Origine Controllata or DOC can be applied to any wine from the nominated region that conforms to the governing bodies requirements including:

- Minimum 85% Glera grapes;
- Use of the Charmat–Martinotti method that carries out the secondary fermentation in stainless steel tanks;
- Minimum production time of 30 days which normally means a minimum of 30 days in the stainless steel tanks although most producers leave it longer;
- It can be full sparkling (spumante) or semi-sparkling (Frizzante);
- It can come in range of sweetness levels from Brut (less than 12g/L of residual sugar) to Extra Dry (12-17 g/L) to Dry (17/32g/L)

The grapes for DOC Prosecco often come from flat areas of land or in the foothills, where higher yields of grapes and shorter production times make less complex, fruity sparkling wines.





Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita or Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., is divided into two areas within the Prosecco D.O.C.: The larger area is on the hills between the towns of Conegliano, Valdobbiadene and Vittorio Veneto; and the smaller area of Asolo Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., produced on the hills near the town of Asolo. D.O.C.G Prosecco wines have the following additional requirements:

- Can also use the traditional method which carries out the secondary fermentation in the bottle rather than in a stainless steel tank like the Charmat-Martinotti method;
- The wine usually spends longer in contact with the lees to produce a more complex Prosecco with finer, longer lived bubbles.
- Can also make an Extra Brut style with less than 6g/L of residual sugar

The D.O.C.G grapes are usually grown on hillside that have lower yields than D.O.C wines, and incurs a lot of manual labour and hand harvesting, which both increase production costs and price. D.O.C.G Prosecco wines tend to be more concentrated and complex wines than D.O.C wines.

Rosé Prosecco is made using a small amount of red wine added to the Glera base to create a pale pink, or pink orange colour. Rose wines contain the same aromas and flavours of Glera, with additional flavours and aromas from the red grapes. From 2020 onward, some Rose Prosecco can carry the D.O.C designation, but not D.O.C.G.

Below are some examples of DOC, DOCG and Rosé Prosecco from a recent tasting.

### **Rebuli Prosecco DOC Treviso**

- Medium yellow colour.
- Aromas of green fruit (ripe pear, green apple), citrus (lemon and lime), and stone fruit (fresh apricot).
- Mouth filling mousse with course bubbles and cleansing acid that cleans up the residual sugar.
- Flavours of citrus (lemon, lime) green fruit (ripe pear, green apple, and quince).
- Typical example and well-made DOC Prosecco.

### **Rebuli Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG**

- Medium yellow colour.
- Aromas of green fruit (pear, green apple, quince), earth, lees (toast), floral (orange blossom), herbal (thyme, fennel), and mineral notes.
- Fine creamy mousse with persistent bubbles and firm acid that balances the residual sugar
- Flavours of green fruit (ripe pear, quince, green apple), citrus (lemon, lime, orange), and herbs (thyme)
- A well-made example of a high quality DOCG Prosecco

### **Rebuli Rose Vino Spumante Extra Dry**

- Medium pink-orange colour.
- Aromas of red fruit (raspberry, strawberry), dark fruit (blackcurrant), green fruit (pear, green apple, quince), citrus (lemon), floral (rose petal), and slight lees characters (toast).
- Fine bubbles with a short creamy mousse.
- Flavours of citrus (lemon, lime), green fruit (pear, quince, green apple), red fruit (strawberry, raspberry), black fruit (blackcurrant), and hints of balsamic on the finish.
- Very fresh with a surprisingly level of complexity. One of the highlights of the tasting.

The fresh fruity style of Prosecco, along with its lower prices compared with other sparkling wines, has lead to an explosion of the popularity of Prosecco over the last decade. These are good examples of that popularity, which show the range of styles and quality that Prosecco can achieve.

Cheers,  
Antony.





# ***Why is New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc so popular?***

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc like no other wine divides opinion in the wine industry. The professionals in the trade look down on it, even describing it as full of 'cats piss and gooseberry', but there is no doubt about its popularity amongst consumers. So why is New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc so popular?

First, a quick history of the grape. Sauvignon Blanc's historic home is the Loire Valley in France but in particular the regions of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé where it makes a fairly subdued wine with grapefruit and gooseberry aromas. Enter New Zealand but particularly Marlborough on the top of the South Island where a company called Brancott Estate planted Sauvignon Blanc in the 1970's. From the early days it became obvious that Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough was a very different style of wine.

*With pronounced Gooseberry and Passionfruit aromas but also a herbaceous smell often described as a cross between asparagus and green capsicum*

The French were aghast but consumers loved it as was an easy wine to enjoy. The smells were obvious and for many, quite pleasant, and there was an explosion of flavour. This combined with the refreshing nature of the wine, due to the high acid levels, made it a popular drink. It wasn't expensive and could be drunk by itself or went very well with seafood...what's not to like? The New Zealanders also tweaked the formula to give consumers more of what they wanted. The grapes are grown to enhance the the fruit flavours but also the compounds called pyrazines that give the herbaceous green capsicum (bell pepper) aroma. They often have some residual sugar left behind to improve the mouth feel of the wine but this is masked by the high refreshing acid. Although Sauvignon Blanc is normally fermented and stored in stainless steel tanks to preserve the freshness and aromas there is a move towards ageing some Sauvignon Blanc in oak containers to give it more complexity. Another example of adjusting to consumer trends.



So in the 15 years from 2003 to 2018 the plantings of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc increased 5 fold as demand exploded. This was enhanced by some clever marketing by New Zealand Wine which promoted the product in conjunction with New Zealand's clean green image and smart New Zealand inspired packaging. It is also promoted through international sporting events including the America's Cup and partnerships like Air Zealand. When you are a country with only 5 million people you need every marketing angle.

Cheers,  
Antony.





# *Shiraz versus Syrah: same same or different?*



Shiraz is one of the iconic Australian grape varieties. I love Shiraz from the Barossa valley or Heathcote, powerful wines that deliver big bold fruit, tannin and leave you wanting more. Some of the great Australian wines, such as Penfolds Grange and Henschke Hill of Grace (both of which I've visited), are entirely or predominately Shiraz and are considered some of the best wines coming out of Australia. But why is it known as Shiraz not Syrah in Australia, and where did it originally come from?

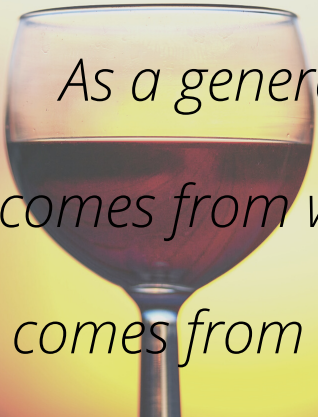
Shiraz probably originated in south east France, in the area we know today as the northern Rhone. There it is known by the name Syrah. The Rhone valley is known for a number of regions that make wines predominately from Syrah including:

- Côte-Rôtie
- St. Joseph
- Crozes-Hermitage.

These regions are generally cooler than both the Barossa Valley and Heathcote in Australia, and so they produce a different style of Syrah (we call Shiraz). These cool-climate wines tend to be medium bodied with lower alcohol, less upfront ripe fruit, and they have more savoury aromas of meat (think a charcuterie plate), black pepper and floral aromas, like violet.



So although Shiraz and Syrah are the same grape variety, how do we differentiate them?



*As a general rule:*

*Shiraz comes from warmer climates*

*Syrah comes from cooler climates*


Now, it is possible to make a Syrah style wine in the Barossa Valley, and a number of producers do. But as a general rule this holds reasonably firm. It should also be noted that with climate change in the Northern Hemisphere, there are a number of French areas making Syrah-based wines because the wines are getting fruitier and higher in alcohol, so the lines are sometimes blurred. In fact, in the Côtes du Rhône in southern France, where Syrah is often the second most predominate grape (after Grenache), alcohol levels can now reach over 15% - something only seen in Shiraz from warmer climates.

There are cooler climate areas in Australia that are making wines they often label as Syrah. These wines are more like the French Syrah wines, with lower alcohol, and meaty and floral aromas. Good examples come from the cooler regions of the Adelaide Hills in South Australia and even Tasmania. Prominent producers include Mr Riggs and S.C. Pannell.

The different styles of Shiraz and Syrah also impact the varieties of food they pair with. Shiraz-style wines are best drunk by themselves, or paired with hard cheese or a big juicy steak. Syrah-style wines go well with charcuterie plates and lighter more savoury dishes, including duck and lamb.

So the next time you are on the search for a bottle of Shiraz, check out the label and see if you are actually getting a Syrah instead. You might be pleasantly surprised.

To get more food and wine pairing tips, head over to our events page. I am also happy to tailor corporate events to your needs and budget - how about Shiraz versus Syrah tasting paired with some meat and cheese platters to mix and match? Feel free to reach out to me here for an initial discussion.



*Sweet wines...not  
just what your  
Grandmother  
drank.*

In one of my previously written articles, I explained that we call wine dry that has no detectable sugar in it. Dry wines are very much in vogue today, but historically it hasn't always been that way. Before crystal (or granulated) sugar was readily available, grape sugars were a source of sweetness and so sweet wines became popular. In fact, sweet wines from the Tokaj region in Hungary were some of the world's most famous wines, enjoyed in royal courts across Europe for centuries.

Some of the worlds most famous sweet wines are:

- Sauternes from France;
- Port from Portugal;
- Sherry from Spain;
- And the aforementioned Tokaj from Hungary.



**Not only do Port and Sweet Sherry have high sugar levels, they also have high alcohol levels from added grape spirit which allowed them to be stable for long ship journeys without the need for refrigeration.**

Contrary to popular opinion most sweet wines are not made with the addition of sugar but rather through the concentration of the natural grape sugars in the grape berry. This is done in a number of ways including:

- Allowing the grapes to stay on the vine (late harvest grapes) until the grapes shrivel concentrating the grape sugars;
- Allowing the grapes to be infected with a fungus called Botrytis, or noble rot, that extracts moisture out of the grape to concentrate the grape sugars;
- Picking the grapes and allowing them to air dry so they shrivel and concentrate the grape sugars;
- Freezing the gapes (Ice wine) and collecting the concentrated juice.

After one or more of these processes the grape juice is then extracted and fermented or added to already fermented wine to create a sweet wine.

Many of us started our wine journey with sweet wines including Crouchen Riesling and Lindermans Porphyry Blanc (or Sauternes as it was known back then), not to mention a nip or two of port or sweet sherry from our parents liquor cupboard.



Since the 1980s, these sweet wines have fallen out of favour with consumers now preferring drier wines. This also means that the sale and production of sweet wine has also fallen. This is a pity as there are some wonderful sweet wine and food pairings to be made, including Thai food where the sweetness balances well with its chilli and spices.

If you want to try some sweet wines I suggest starting with a Botrytis Riesling from Heggies in the Eden Valley or Tim Adams in the Claire Valley. And I'll be interested to hear what you think of them.

If you love these explanations, you will love Wine Matchmaker's events where I share lots of interesting and practical wine education. Head over to our events page for more information. I am also happy to tailor corporate events to your needs and budget - perhaps like an exploration of sweet wines with your clients or team. Feel free to reach out to me here for an initial discussion.

Cheers,  
Antony.



## A man with glasses and a purple shirt is smiling while holding a glass of red wine. He is positioned in the center, with a circular frame around him. To his left is a large bunch of green grapes, and to his right is a large bunch of dark grapes. The background is white.

List them here and send through a photo of your questions to [Facebook.com/winematchmaker](https://www.facebook.com/winematchmaker), for Tony to answer them.

[illegible]

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