Winemaking—The Six Basic Types of Wine

The winemaker has many options once he or she decides what type of wine to produce. The decisions made in the winery will determine how dry or sweet, fruity, aromatic, complex, concentrated, oaky, and high in alcohol and body the finished wine will be.

As you learned in Chapter 2, “How Grapes and Vineyards Determine Taste, Style, Value, and Food Affinities,” the key to a wine’s taste and style will depend on the grape variety or blend of grapes used, where the grapes were grown, and the quality of the harvest each vintage year. However, a wine’s type or category, such as dry red or sparkling wine, is determined by the winemaking techniques used to produce it.

The six basic types of wine are dry red, dry white, rosé or blanc de noir, sparkling, fortified, and dessert wines. In this chapter, you learn how these six basic types of wine are made and, as a result, what to expect in the taste of each. Along the way, I will dispel some of the wine misinformation that may have been handed down to you by well-meaning friends. For example, there may be some truth to the tale that wine may act as an aphrodisiac—but too much of a good thing will certainly defeat that purpose!
Wine is defined as the alcohol beverage obtained from the fermentation of freshly harvested grapes. The basic process of winemaking has remained unchanged—yeasts that grow on all grape skins automatically ferment grape juice into wine when the grapes are crushed. We call this mixture of grape skins immersed in their juice the must, and we call the period they are in contact maceration. Skin contact or maceration is particularly important for the production of red wines, because the juice inside all grapes is clear. The deep color of red wines must be extracted from the black grape skins.

During the alcohol fermentation, natural fruit sugar in the grapes is converted into equal parts of alcohol and carbon dioxide by the yeasts. Heat is released in the process, which is why most delicate white wines are fermented in stainless steel temperature-controlled fermenters—so they don’t “cook.”

The level of alcohol produced during fermentation depends on the ripeness or sugar content of the grapes and when the yeast or winemaker stops fermentation. Table wines (suitable for drinking at the table with meals), by definition, receive their alcohol from fermentation only. They have 7% alcohol by volume (such as some German wines or Italian Lambrusco) to 15% alcohol by volume (such as some California Zinfandels). This is the upper limit for fermentation because the yeasts die when they produce this level of alcohol. Most dry wines average 11% to 12% alcohol, but many full-bodied dry red or white wines, including Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah and Chardonnay, typically have 13% to 14% alcohol content.

Yeasts are what give grapes their dusty look, called the bloom, which consists of the wine yeasts (best for fermenting wine), and wild yeasts (which are hard to control and may produce unpleasant odors and flavors). Commercial yeasts, cultured and freeze-dried from famous wine areas such as Montrachet in Burgundy, France, are added to begin fermentation in modern wineries. In addition, grape skins contain Acetobacter or “vinegar bacteria” (discussed in the following section).
Sulfites in Wine

Unfortunately, the vinegar bacteria on grape skins will immediately spoil the new wine once it is exposed to the air, and wild yeasts must also be eliminated before they can ruin the aroma or taste of the wine. Modern winemakers follow a centuries-old tradition of using sulfur dioxide and other sulfites to kill the wild yeasts and vinegar bacteria and inhibit the growth of other molds or bacteria in the finished wine. Sulfites also stop oxidation (browning) of the wine and preserve the wine’s flavor during aging and distribution. Without some added sulfur dioxide, we’d have a lot more spoiled bottles of wine on the market.

The amount of sulfur dioxide added is very small—usually no more than 60–125 parts per million for fine cork-finished dry red and white wines—and strictly regulated by our federal government. Even if no sulfur dioxide is added to a wine, fermenting yeasts will automatically produce it from the inorganic sulfates in all grape juices; so virtually all wines sold in the U.S. are labeled “Contains Sulfites.”

Free Run Wine, Press Wine, Brandy, and Liqueurs

Making wine begins with the grapes, which are usually planted in areas where other crops wouldn’t grow. Grapes like to struggle in poor soils, which force them to grow deep roots and conserve their energy by producing just a few bunches of high-quality grapes. In fact, it is said that, in Bordeaux, God created grapes and roses because they are the only two things that can grow on such stony, unfertile ground. A rose bush is planted at the end of each row of grapevines in Bordeaux because the same conditions allow both to prosper.

Véraison (“vair-ay-zon”) is the part of the ripening period when grapes change color, especially black or red grapes. All grapes start out as unripe, hard, dark green berries. It isn’t until they ripen in the sun that white varieties will turn golden and red varieties will turn deep purple. Winemakers decide when to pick the grapes based on the ripeness or natural sugar content, which is measured right in the vineyards. What most wine books don’t tell you is that the leaves of the grapevines also change color. At harvest time, the leaves of white grape varieties turn yellow and the leaves of red grape varieties turn red. This is how you can tell what is growing in any vineyard late in the season.

The finest wines are made from the first pressing of juice from the grapes called the free run wine, while less expensive wines are made from second or third pressings called the press wine. Press wine is harsher and accounts for the difference in smoothness between fine and inexpensive wines, although some fine red wines may have a small amount of press wine added for extra color, body, and structure. What is left
over after all the juice has been pressed from the grapes is pomace (a dry mass of skins), pips (grape seeds), and yeast that can be used as a fertilizer for the soil of the vineyards.

Brandy by definition is distilled wine. It can be made anywhere grapes are grown. In Italy, grape brandy is called grappa. The finest examples are made in fine wine areas such as Barolo in the Piedmont or Tuscany. In France, there are three types of brandy, and Cognac is the most prestigious and costly of these. Cognac is made north of Bordeaux from white Ugni Blanc (French Colombard) grapes grown in the chalky soil of the finest vineyards or sandier soils. The dry white base wine made from these grapes is distilled in copper pot stills and then aged in oak barrels for many years, creating “libraries” of old Cognacs. The second type of French brandy is the darker, grapier Armagnac made south of Bordeaux and aged in black oak barrels. The third type of French brandy, called Marc, can be made in other wine areas, such as Bourgogne or Burgundy.

Brandy is also called an eau de vie, meaning “water of life,” and can be the dry distilled spirit of any fruit. Kirschwasser, an eau de vie made from cherries, is used when making fondue. Liqueurs are always sweet, flavored spirits. Many liqueurs are based on brandy, or other spirits, that are then flavored with herbs, fruits such as raspberries, coffee beans, or orange peels—and then sweetened. They are not dry like brandy or eau de vie.

To do list

- Learn how tannins form in red wines
- Understand the benefits of aging red wine in oak barrels
- Look for concentrated fruit quality in bargain red wines

Making Dry Red Wines

Essentially, red wines are made from black grapes, which have been crushed and de-stemmed to get the black skins that contain all of the red color and flavor in contact with the clear juice inside the grapes. All grapes, no matter what color the skins—whether black, green, or pink—contain clear pulp or juice inside. Peel a grape to see for yourself!

Red wines must be fermented with their black grape skins for approximately 10–14 days, and sometimes much longer for the greatest reds. This prolonged maceration and fermentation allows for the maximum extraction of red color and flavor from the skins, and tannin comes along in the bargain. A winemaker is careful not to extract too much tannin from grape skins or stems (if the whole cluster is used and not de-stemmed), or the wine will taste very astringent and bitter from hard tannins. Soft tannins, however, add a desirable tactile dry complexity to the taste of the wine.
and contribute to its longevity, since tannin is a natural preservative.

Micro-oxygenation is the fairly new and controversial winemaking technique of introducing tiny amounts of oxygen into fermenting red wine, or red wine aging in the barrel, through a small tube. Advocated by famous Bordeaux enologist Michel Rolland, who recommends it to hundreds of his consulting clients worldwide, micro-oxygenation softens the tannins in red wines, making them jammy and the darling of wine critics, even when they are young. The wine movie “Mondovino” by Jonathan Nossiter carries a running joke about this technique.

The carbon dioxide that’s produced during fermentation pushes the black skins up to the top of the fermenters, forming what is called the cap of skins on top of the juice. This cap of skins must be continually punched down or circulated back through the juice. There are several ways to do this, including some new techniques. (See the following note.)

Red wines also benefit from some of the heat that is released during fermentation, which is why many wineries not only age or mature their red wines in oak, but also ferment their reds in oak barrels as in the European tradition. Barrel fermentation and oak aging add a great deal of complexity and flavor to the red wine, as well as another dose of tannin from the wood tannin in oak. These two sources of tannin (black grape skins and oak barrels) give red wines greater aging potential than whites.

Many people confuse dryness (no sugar left after fermentation) with high tannin. When they say they don’t like dry red wine, they really mean they don’t like tannic or astringent wines. Acidity doesn’t seem to bother them as much since they like white wines and whites are usually higher in total acidity than red wines.

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**note** Brilliant food chemist Chaim Gur-Arieh, of the C.G. di Arie world-class winery in California’s Shenandoah Valley of the Sierra Foothills, produces fabulous Zinfandel and Syrah because of his new invention: a fermenter with a rubber ring inside that keeps the cap of black skins constantly submerged in the juice so that the cap never hardens. Otherwise, the cap of skins can get as hard as concrete, which defeats the extraction process. As a result, C.G. di Arie red wines have more fruit concentration and softer tannins.

**tip** The best way to get used to the taste of dry red wines is to start with the grapiest (meaning fruitiest) and least tannic varieties, such as red Lambrusco, which is a slightly sweet, semi-sparkling red wine from Italy that is served chilled. The best-selling brand of Lambrusco in the U.S. is Riunite. Another fruity red from Italy is Dolcetto, which is similar to Gamay Beaujolais. Lemberger is another soft red grown in the U.S. that originates from Germany, as does the fruity Dornfelder red variety.

Even the more intense grapes such as Cabernet or Zinfandel can be made in a softer style, so ask your store’s wine consultant for less tannic choices. Don’t forget you can mix any red wine 50/50 with bottled water and get the health benefit without the tannin. This will acclimatize your palate to appreciate drier red wines.
Nouveau and Whole Cluster Reds

For less tannic wines, winemakers have developed other types of winemaking, such as carbonic maceration or whole berry fermentation, the process used to make nouveau or “new” wines, such as Beaujolais Nouveau in France. Though how or why it works is still a mystery, nouveau wines are made from grapes that ferment while they are still whole and attached to their stems. They sit on top of fermenting crushed grapes, releasing carbon dioxide in closed containers. Nouveau wines can be made from any red grape, even Zinfandel in California, but they are always much grapier, more deeply purple and very much yeastier than normally fermented red wines made from the same grape variety.

Nouveau wine is made in just a few days, and then rushed to market. We receive Beaujolais Nouveau before our traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner in November every year, and the nouveau red is a perfect complement to the meal.

Other modern winemaking techniques for making less tannic, fruitier reds include whole cluster fermentation of Pinot Noir, once widely practiced in Burgundy, which is a popular technique today in Oregon. Instead of de-stemming the grapes and fermenting just the grape must of juice and skins, these fruitier Pinot Noirs are made using the entire cluster of grapes and stems during fermentation. Of course, most winemakers agree that using too many stems will make the wine taste too green or bitter and tannic. So a delicate balance is called for, like in any winemaking decision; for example, some of the wine in a batch may be whole cluster fermented, but the majority may not be for this reason.

Aging Red Wine in Oak Barrels

The alcohol that’s produced during red wine fermentation also helps to extract the maximum amount of deep purple color, flavor, and tannin from the black skins. Red wines are then aged in wood, usually oak barrels, to soften their tannins and pick up more complexity. Each kind of oak—such as limousin oak used in Burgundy, France, for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay; or nevers oak used in Bordeaux, France, for Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot; or even American oak barrels made in Missouri—adds its own flavor to the wine. Barrels made from new oak add a lovely vanilla aroma to the wine.

Fining, which clears the wine by removing tiny particles and floating in the wine, is done while red wines age in the barrels. Two of the most-often-used fining agents are egg whites, clay, and a type of earth. Fining also removes some of the tannin and may be done more than once. The final step may be filtering done with biological filters, which remove any yeast or other impurities left in the wine. This prevents the wine from re-fermenting once it’s bottled, and it gives the wine a brilliant, crystal-clear appearance.

The wood tannins that the barrels add to the wine during aging further preserve the wine. Young red wines have the most tannin, but as red wine ages in the bottle, this
tannin will precipitate as sediment. The wine will then taste smoother, but this means older reds will have to be decanted or poured off their sediment, strained through a funnel with built-in filter or coffee filter paper. Since wood barrels are porous, they also allow a very slow process of oxidation. After the wine throws its sediment in the barrel, the wine is racked (transferred) to a set of clean barrels, leaving the sediment behind. Racking is done every 6 months during the period of up to 24 months that the best red wines are aged in oak barrels.

Great oak-aged reds and some exceptional white wines can survive long enough in the bottle to reach a peak of perfection after several years of cellaring. That's why the finest older reds command such high prices and why they taste so much smoother after bottle aging. They have developed secondary characteristics of raisin or cooked fruit aromas, and their tannin has softened. Older reds are more delicate, so they are usually served on their own or after dinner with the cheese course.

Please note that almost all red wines are fermented dry; that is, until there is no residual sugar left after fermentation. Yes, there are some famous sweet red wines—such as Porto from Portugal, Mavrodaphne from Greece, Maury or Banyuls from France, and Black Muscat from California—but the great majority of red wines made in the world today are dry, meaning close to zero residual sugar. This is why I like to call red wines “main course” wines. Nothing is finer with filet mignon, veal chop, pork tenderloin, venison, or crown roast of lamb.

Buying the Best Reds

The finest dry red wines have lots of concentrated fruit character—what I call the divine extract of the grape. Wine magazines call these wines “jammy,” and the fruit concentration in these great reds balances their tannin, alcohol, and acidity. If we are lucky in our choices, we can sometimes find this concentrated fruit quality in bargain reds. But usually, you will have to pay a minimum of $20 to $35 a bottle for a better red that's a wonderful, deeply extracted example of that grape variety. If you spend $50 to $75 on a bottle of red, it had better be one of the very finest of its type. Collectors' items cost even more because demand far outstrips supply and because they have a greater pedigree. By pedigree I mean they usually come from a single vineyard or estate name—what we call terroir. (For more information about terroir, see “Vineyards Determine a Wine's Style and Price,” in Chapter 2.)
Making Dry White Wines—To Oak or Not to Oak

White wines are not fermented with their skins. The clear juice of the grapes (white or black) is pressed away from the skins after they are crushed and de-stemmed, and the juice is fermented on its own. The skins are not needed for color to make a white wine, though there may be some hours of skin contact for full-bodied whites (or blanc de noir wines, to be discussed later). White grape skins have little tannin, and temperature-controlled stainless steel fermenters keep the heat that is produced during fermentation from literally cooking the white wine. For less expensive dry white wines, fermenting the juice and bottling the wine without oak aging takes only a few months; so these wines are bottled as little as six months after harvest. Light, dry white wines age more quickly than any other type of wine and are for early drinking.

Fermenting White Wines

The best white wines—particularly Chardonnay—are barrel fermented in oak to give them added complexity; a toasty, yeasty flavor; and greater longevity. Some of these great Chardonnays will even be aged sur lie—on the “lees” or sediment of yeast that falls to the bottom of the barrels after fermentation, which gives the wine an added richness. Further barrel aging for the best whites is shorter than for red wines, however, taking only 6–18 months after the vintage or harvest. That is why white wines are released to the market much sooner than red wines, and why even the greatest whites do not live as long in the bottle as better reds.

Great white wines, especially Chardonnay (and some red wines too), undergo a second fermentation called malolactic fermentation. Malolactic fermentation is done in another set of barrels. It converts the tart green-apple-flavored malic acid in the wine to softer lactic acid, which has the flavor of butter or cream. This is the only process that can make a Chardonnay buttery. Malolactic fermentation gives a butterscotch complexity to the great white Burgundy wines of France, which were the original malolactic fermented Chardonnays. Finding these buttery Chardonnays is not easy, since many Chardonnays do not tell you on the front or back label...
whether the winemaker put the wine through malolactic fermentation. The price level is a good indication, however, because this second fermentation costs a lot more money and ties up inventory for several more months.

Wine is unique among beverages. Its enormous range of flavors and tastes belie the fact that it is composed of acids, tannins, and alcohol. Besides tartaric and malic acids, white grapes also tend to have a lot of citric acid. Citric acid makes these white wines smell and taste like the citrus fruits: lemons or limes. Now you can understand why buttery malolactic fermented Chardonnays are described as tasting like lemon butter, which makes them the perfect wine partner for lobster, crab, and fish.

No one wants his or her white wine to taste like wood, but oak-fermented creamy or buttery whites are very much appreciated with richer main courses. Oak barrel aging is a financial investment in any case, so winemakers decide on the basis of the variety and the greatness of their grapes in a certain vintage year or from a certain vineyard. Some white wines are not meant to be oak aged at all in order for them to retain their fresh, fruit flavors. So the question “to oak or not to oak” that a winemaker must answer before he begins white wine production is a very important one. Some American winemakers initiated the dubious practice of using heavily “toasted” (charred) oak barrels several years ago, but it made their Chardonnays smell and taste like burnt wood. Hopefully, you won’t encounter them in the marketplace, but if you do, the aroma reveals all.

Chilling the Wine and Removing Tartrate Crystals

Finally, most stainless steel fermented white wines produced in the New World go through cold stabilization. In California wineries you can see the frost on the outside of the stainless steel fermenters as the wine is chilled until the tartrate crystals precipitate and can be removed. Tartaric acid is the main acid in grapes. Chilling white wine after fermentation causes the formation of tartrate crystals, which are like the cream of tartar used in making candy and meringues. Tartrate crystals can be the sign of a hand-crafted wine from a great vintage. I’ve seen tartrate crystals in some of the finest dry reds such as Zinfandel or Chianti from Italy, as well as in very sweet whites, and even inexpensive mass market wines. But when these crystals collect in the bottom of a wine bottle, some people think the crystals are
ground glass and don’t want to drink the wine. Modern wineries preempt any consumer reaction by chilling the wine to remove the crystals, but even then some crystals may still form in extreme cold.

**Adjusting the Wine’s Fruitiness and Sweetness**

This brings me to the definition of fruity. Fruity is often thought to mean sweet, but dry white and red wines also can be fruity. Fruity means the character of fresh fruits: red fruits, such as strawberries, raspberries, or cherries; black fruits, such as blackberries; blue fruits, such as blueberries or deep blue blackcurrants (cassis); tropical fruits, such as pineapple or mango; and citrus fruits, such as lemon or grapefruit. For white wines in particular, this also may mean they have beautiful aromas of fresh flowers as well as the taste of fresh green grapes. So, in addition to deciding whether to age the wine in barrels, a winemaker also chooses how sweet to make the finished wine. Winemakers control sweetness by stopping fermentation before all the natural grape sugar has been turned into alcohol and carbon dioxide by the yeast.

White wines can vary tremendously in sweetness or the residual grape sugar left after fermentation. White wines can be made bone-dry with no residual sugar—the austere style of many French dry white wines from Bordeaux or Burgundy—or medium-dry with just the barest hint of natural sweetness like a German Riesling in the dry Kabinett style—or lusciously sweet like a Sauternes or Ice Wine. Real wine experts love all styles of white wine. They know that certain medium-dry white wines are actually better partners than dry white wines when foods have an orange juice marinade, a dried cherry sauce, or a fig or raisin stuffing. As you practice tasting a wide variety of white wines with different food partners, you can expect to gain an appreciation for the wide range of good white wines in many styles.

**Making Rosé, Blush, and Blanc de Noir Wines**

*Rosé, blush,* and *blanc de noir* wines are varying shades of pink. This pink color tells you that all three are made from black grape varieties that release or “bleed” their red color into the juice when they are pressed.

A *rosé* gets its characteristic deeper rose color from black grapes that have been crushed and fermented with their skins for 24–36 hours—just long enough to turn
the clear juice a dark pink color. Then the juice is quickly pressed away from the skins. If the skins had been in contact with the juice for a few more hours, a red wine would have been produced, which is why some say rosé is halfway to being a red wine.

Rosés are much softer than a red wine and do not contain high levels of alcohol or tannin. And they can be made either dry or medium-dry. Most rosés are still wines, meaning non-sparkling, and have lovely berry aromas and flavors from the black grapes used to make them. Sparkling rosés range from expensive French Rosé Champagne to inexpensive Spanish Brut de Noirs CAVA or Italian Prosecco Rosé.

Blush wines are what the French call blanc de noir—white wines made from black grapes, which is how most French Champagne is made. Blush wines were first introduced to the U.S. by Sutter Home winery in California. Sutter Home grew a lot of black Zinfandel grapes (still do) but realized many Americans preferred white wines. So they made Zinfandel as a white wine by pressing the juice from the skins and fermenting it on its own. But just pressing the black Zinfandel grapes produced a blushing pink color in the juice. That’s how White Zinfandel was born and why it’s a blush (pink) wine instead of white. The French also call these blushing pink wines vin gris or gray wine because it’s between white and black (red wine) as we explained in Chapter 2.

Unlike Rosé, which can be dry, blush wines are always slightly sweet, low alcohol, and fruity with blackberry flavors from the Zinfandel. Brunch is a perfect time to serve Rosé wines, especially Pinot Noir or Grenache Rosé, because they go so well with omelets, quiches, or ham and bacon. They are also best served chilled. Rosés typically are very inexpensive. Sutter Home “Little Pink Box” White Zinfandel sells for $8 retail, which is equivalent to $2 per bottle since the 3 liter box holds as much as four regular-size 750 ml. bottles.

**LET’S DO WINE AND CHOCOLATE**

Chocolate and wine make great partners, and they have a lot in common. Chocolates are influenced and priced by terroir (where the chocolate beans were grown), just like wine. Some chocolates even have names that sound like wines, such as Côte d’Or (meaning hillside of gold), which in the wine world is the greatest district in Burgundy, France; or Weiss Grande Noir (or “great dark”) semi-sweet chocolate. And, like great wine, great chocolate can be quite expensive. In New York City chocolate emporiums, the most elite chocolates cost hundreds of dollars per pound.

Different types of chocolate work best with different wines:

* Milk chocolate has a creamier texture, more dairy, and lower cacao content than other types of chocolate. Cacao is the name of the tree that produces the cocoa beans. The beans true chocolate component possesses the desirable antioxidants and mood lifting theobromine (the theo part of
which means “from God”). Milk chocolate partners best with slightly sweet white or red sparkling wines, such as Asti Spumante or Brachetto (a very unusual sweet red sparkling wine) both from Italy. Also terrific with milk chocolate is bargain-priced semi-secco (slightly sweet) Cava sparkling wines from Spain. These three are divine with strawberries dipped in milk chocolate.

✽ If you prefer dry red wines, experiment with semi-sweet chocolate and any dessert such as brownies made with semi-sweet chocolate. Ask your wine store’s wine expert for a red with concentrated fruit in the middle range of the taste, such as Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Syrah or Shiraz, and Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc. The sweetness and cacao content of semi-sweet chocolate is between those of milk chocolate and bittersweet or dark chocolate.

✽ Bittersweet or dark chocolates—the best are 60% to 70% cacao—are terrific with luscious, sweet red dessert wines, such as Zinfandel Port from California, or Ruby Porto from Portugal. If you are not sure you can take the sweetness of port, then choose a blanc de noir or rosé sparkling wine. Not all of these wines are expensive. I’ve had Prosecco rosé from Italy that was very reasonable. Even better was a Spanish Cava sparkling wine from the acclaimed Freixenet (pronounced “fresh-eh-net”) company called Brut de Noirs (retail price about $8). This wine has deep rose-pink color, delicious strawberry aroma from the black grapes used to make it, and drier style.

CNN just reported the latest medical research says we get the most antioxidant benefit from eating bitter-sweet chocolate in moderation. Researchers discovered it actually had health benefits for your blood vessels if eaten in small amounts on a regular basis. That’s one prescription I’ll be happy to take! If you cannot afford expensive bittersweet chocolate, buy bittersweet baking chocolate from the grocery store. And while you are there, check out the wine department. Looking at the labels of the best wines gives you many clues as to why they are great.

To do list
- Learn the 10 steps used to produce Champagne or other sparkling wines in the classic méthode champenoise
- Learn how to buy, serve, and enjoy Champagne, and understand when (and if) it’s wise to buy non-standard sized bottles
Putting the Bubbles in Champagne

Sparkling wines and Champagne are bubbly because they have carbon dioxide bubbles trapped in the bottle from a second fermentation. The most famous sparkling wine is Champagne from France made in the méthode champenoise or Champagne method that the French developed over many years to create the tiniest, longest-lasting bubbles.

Wherever it is used, the méthode champenoise, or Champagne method, produces the world’s finest sparkling wines. This method involves a second fermentation that takes place in the bottle—the same bottle that you eventually buy in the store. Many other countries, including Spain, Italy, and the United States, have successfully adopted this method for the production of their best sparkling wines. The following sections describe the méthode champenoise process for producing great sparkling wine.

Harvesting and Pressing the Grapes

Grapes are harvested 100 days after the grapevines flower in June. This places the time of harvest in the northern hemisphere in September or October. The CIVC (Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne), the official organization that represents the Champagne industry, declares great vintage years when the harvest is exceptionally good because of an excellent growing season. Prices for grapes from the best single vineyards in the Champagne region are always higher, with the 100%-rated vineyards getting 100% of the going rate, 95%-rated vineyards getting 95% of the going rate, and so on, based on their ranking. The finest Champagnes are Vintage Champagne from a single declared great vintage year, and those are from the best vineyards.

Experienced sorters cull out any green or rotten grapes in the vineyards before they get to the presses. This costs extra and is only done for top-of-the-line Champagnes. The grapes are pressed quickly in low, flat, wooden presses to extract the clear juice from the skins. Even with this quick pressing of the black grapes, the juice is tinted an “eye of the swan” blushing pink/gold color, which will be bleached out somewhat during the second fermentation.

Fermenting and Blending the Juice

The first fermentation in the méthode champenoise turns the grape juice into wine. But the juice from each vineyard and each grape variety is fermented separately,
usually in stainless steel for temperature control (though some Champagne companies may ferment in traditional oak barrels). All these separate fermentations create a large number of individual wines that will later be blended in the *assemblage* of the *cuvée*.

The following spring, professional tasters blend the *assemblage* or *cuvée* (pronounced “koo-vay”) from different vineyards and grape varieties so that the sum is better tasting than the parts. Most French Champagne is a blend or *cuvée* of 2/3 black grapes and 1/3 white grape. In French Champagne, the only black grapes allowed are Pinot Noir and their relative Pinot Meunier, and the only white grape allowed is Chardonnay. This means most French Champagne is actually *blanc de noir* though they do not label it as such. The exception to the rule of French Champagne being made mostly from black grapes is the more delicate, rare, and costly *blanc de blanc* Champagne. It must, by law, in France be made from 100% Chardonnay.

Each Champagne house or company has its own house blend or style, some using more Pinot Noir, some using more Chardonnay—although Chardonnay is expensive since it comes from one small hillside called the Côte des Blancs (“slope of white”). Most Champagne houses use very little Pinot Meunier in their top of the line *cuvées*.

### Adjusting and Bottling for a Second Fermentation

After blending, a first *dosage* (pronounced “doh-saj”)—technically called the “liqueur de tirage”—of sugar and yeast is added to the newly blended wine. Then the wine is bottled and closed with a cork or crown cap (looks like a soda cap). The Champagne will remain in this bottle until it is purchased from a store’s shelves by some lucky wine lover. The yeast finds the sugar and begins a *second fermentation* in the bottle. The second fermentation runs its course until the yeasts die from creating too much alcohol. The powdery sediment of dead yeast cells or “lees” in the bottle gives Champagne its characteristic yeasty, toasted bread or brioche flavor. The alcohol that is produced from the second fermentation bleaches the slightly pink/gold *blanc de noir* color somewhat. The bubbles of carbon dioxide produced during the second fermentation become an integral part of the wine, forming tiny, long-lasting bubbles that will rise in your glass for a long time.

### Aging the Wine, Removing its Sediment, and Adjusting its Sweetness

Vintage Champagne is aged on its lees of yeast in the cellar for three years after harvest. Non-vintage (abbreviated NV and sometimes called multi-vintage) Champagne is a blend of juices made in years where the season did not produce grapes good enough to be declared and labeled with a single vintage year. NV champagne usually is aged on the yeast in the bottle for 15 months, though the most prestigious companies go over these minimum limits. Because French Vintage Champagne is made only from one vintage year, and a great one at that, it is more expensive than non-vintage Champagne.
Since no one wanted to drink the powdery sediment of yeast, the young Veuve (Widow) Cliquot developed the next two steps in the Champagne method to remove the yeast. Her name remains on one of the greatest French Champagnes whose top of the line Vintage Champagne is called “La Grande Dame” or the great lady. Veuve Cliquot Champagne is also available as a Rosé.

The first step in the process of removing the sediment takes place in triangular racks that hold the bottles upside down, and the lees of yeast are spiraled down onto the crown cap by hand riddling or rotating of the bottles. It takes almost two months of daily turning and shaking of the bottles until the yeast is in the neck. Imagine riddling thousands of bottles! No wonder some modern wineries use machine operated metal cages that automatically do the riddling.

The upside-down bottles with yeasty sediment in their necks are then aged in the ancient 60-foot-deep chalk tunnels dug by the Romans under the Champagne district. If you wish to visit one of the six remaining original Roman chalk tunnels still in use for Champagne making, we recommend a visit to Taittinger in Reims, France where a million bottles of Champagne are aging on their yeast.

The second step in the process to remove the yeast is called disgorging. After years of aging, the neck of the bottle is placed in a brine solution to freeze the yeast sediment. Then the cork or crown cap is popped. The frozen plug of sediment shoots out because of the pressure of the carbon dioxide bubbles trapped in this bottle. The wine is topped up with the same kind of Champagne, and a final dosage of sugar and older wine is added to achieve the various sweetness levels. Here are the descriptions of the levels of sweetness used to describe champagne:

- **Extra Brut** (also called Naturel in the U.S.) is the driest type, having no sugar added
- **Brut** is the most common style of dry Champagne having just the tiniest amount of sugar
- **Extra Dry** is actually medium-sweet and costs less because there is less of the original wine
- **Sec** and **Demi-Sec** are the next higher sweetness categories
- **Doux** dessert style Champagne is the sweetest of all

The wide range of sweetness found in these different types of champagne forms the truth behind the statement that “one can drink Champagne with every course of the meal.”

Brut Champagne is perfect not only for a wedding toast to the bride and groom, but also for salty appetizers such as smoked salmon or sushi, light seafood dishes such as Dover sole or scallops, chicken or turkey, and veal or pork with cream or even mustard sauces.
Finally, the bottles are corked with a very thick cork made in sections to hold in the bubbles. The cork is wired down to make sure the cork remains firmly seated in the bottle so the Champagne doesn’t go flat. Even so, experts know not to keep Champagne for too long because of the danger of it losing its bubbles and oxidizing. This danger is especially great for non-vintage champagnes, as you have no way of knowing how old they are. Now you know why the Champagne method is so great, and why it costs so much.

Buying and Enjoying Bargain Champagne, Big Bottles, and Splits
Champagne corks are large. When you remove them, they take on an hourglass shape, and you won’t be able to get them back in the bottle. If you don’t drink all of the champagne, you will have to use a screw down metal closure designed especially for re-capping sparkling wines. My husband and I never seem to have this problem. If you think you’ll drink less than a full regular-sized bottle of champagne in a single sitting, you can buy champagne in half-bottles or even splits. It should be mentioned that all wines age more quickly in smaller bottles and age more slowly in larger bottles. For example, the magnum or 1.5 liter (50.8 oz.) size is equivalent to two 750 ml. or 25.4 oz. regular-size bottles. Sometimes even larger bottles are available, such as the jeroboam, which holds four 750 ml. bottles or 3 liters of Champagne. In Bordeaux, a jeroboam holds six 750 ml. bottles or 4.5 liters. These larger bottles command a proportionally higher price because few are made and the wine ages more slowly. Since the Champagne method is done mostly with regular size bottles, the small half-bottles (375 ml. or 12.7 oz.) and even smaller quarter-bottle “splits” (187.5 ml. or 6.35 oz.) are filled from them, and can be disappointingly flat as a result.

Though champagne is a luxury wine, you don’t need to feel reluctant to enjoy it often. You will be very pleasantly surprised to learn that real French Brut non-vintage Champagne can be purchased for only $20 per bottle! Champagne is the wine of celebration—so always invite a lover or friends over to share when you pop the cork of a full-size bottle.

Fortified Wines: Porto, Sherry, and Madeira
Fortified wines are fortified by the addition of extra alcohol in the form of brandy or spirits to bring them up to an alcohol content of 18%–20%. Porto, Sherry, Madeira, Marsala, and Vermouth are all fortified wines. If the extra alcohol is added after
fermentation, a dry fortified wine such as Sherry is the outcome. Adding the alcohol during fermentation results in a sweet wine such as Porto.

*Marsala* is made from white grapes grown on the volcanic soil of the island of Sicily, Italy. Marsala has a burnt caramel flavor and is 18%–20% alcohol like all fortified wines. The sweet *all’uovo* (egg) version is used in desserts such as Zabaglione. Dry *secco* Marsala is used when cooking veal. Marsala can also be flavored.

*Vermouth* made in the Piedmont area of northwest Italy is used worldwide as a cocktail or in cocktails. All vermouth is fortified wine with many herbal ingredients based on secret family recipes from long ago. Three types of Vermouth exist: *rosso* is a sweet red, *bianco* is a medium-sweet white, and *secco* is a dry white used in martinis. The main brands are Cinzano and Martini & Rossi.

Porto and sherry are two very popular fortified wines. The following sections discuss these wines in more detail.

**Porto From Portugal**

Port originated in Portugal, where it is called *Porto* to distinguish it from ports made elsewhere in the world. In Portugal, Port or Porto (the term I prefer to use for Portuguese Port) is defined as the sweet red, tawny, or white fortified wines bottled in Oporto (or its sister city), which is where the Douro River meets the Atlantic Ocean and the Porto companies are headquartered. White Porto is used as an *aperitif* or before-dinner wine, or mixed with tonic water to make a refreshing drink. But Portugal’s most famous Portos are the higher priced, deep, black-red Vintage Porto; the more moderately priced and slightly less inky Late-Bottled Vintage Porto; the very affordable Ruby (red) Porto; and the fine 10- or 20-year-old Tawny Portos that are caramel or tawny brown around the edges.

The grapes for Porto are grown far inland from the sea in the *quintas* or vineyards located on steep, rocky cliffs above the Douro River. Many types of black grapes are planted, including the most important variety, *Touriga Nacional*.

All Porto starts out as sweet wine, because the fermentation is stopped at a midpoint by racking the wine into barrels containing brandy, which kills the yeast. (Please note that this is one of the eight ways to make sweet dessert wines; you will learn about the other techniques later in this chapter.) The brandy not only kills the yeast and stops it from fermenting any more grape sugar, but it also fortifies the Porto to 20% alcohol.

Porto is classified as *Vintage Porto* only in the declared great vintage years of exceptional quality. This means that Portuguese Porto and French Champagne are the only two wines in the world that do not put a vintage year every year on the bottle. So any Vintage Porto or Vintage French Champagne is from a great vintage year. Vintage Porto is a collector’s item because it can live and improve in the bottle for decades. The high alcohol, sugar, and tannin content of the Porto are what preserve
it. That’s why most Porto is bottled in opaque black bottles to keep light from the wine. Vintage Porto is aged in oak barrels for just two years, so it will throw a heavy sediment in the bottle as it ages. This must be decanted or separated from the Vintage Porto before serving. It is the most deep black-red color of any Porto, with lush aromas of licorice, chocolate, and black cherry.

Other classifications of Porto include the more moderately priced Late-Bottled Vintage (abbreviated LBV) that are from single vintage years but are aged longer in wood where it throws most of its sediment (LBV is not bottled until 4 to 6 years after harvest), which means it usually doesn’t have to be decanted, especially if it’s been filtered. Ruby Porto is a blend of vintages that is aged in casks for 2 to 3 years. It has a ruby red color and can be a real bargain. Finally, Tawny Porto is a lovely light tawny brown or caramel color around the edges. The Tawny Portos with indicated age, such as 10 or 20 years old and older are the best, tasting of lace cookies, candied orange, and spice. Australia makes a lot of award-winning Tawny Port.

The sugars in the wine have caramelized, making Tawny Porto a perfect partner for flan, shortbread cookies, pound cake, bread pudding, pumpkin pie, and spice or carrot cake. Tawny Porto also marries well with triple crème cheeses.

Besides chocolate, Zinfandel Port (from California), Ruby (not Tawny) Porto, Vintage, or LBV Porto (the latter three are from Portugal) are perfect matches with the English blue cheese called Stilton. At posh wine tastings, you may see a huge wheel of this exquisite blue-veined cheese on display next to the Porto, which is its classic partner on a continental menu. Sometimes they go one step further. They poke holes in the Stilton cheese and then pour the Porto into the holes so that it works its way down and turns the cheese red. Then they cut wedges of the Port-soaked Stilton for serving. Americans took this idea and made “port cheese balls” of cheddar with artificial pink color. Not the same thing, but any blue cheese is great with any ruby style port. Try it!

Sherry From Spain

*Sherry* is the fortified wine originally created in the area of Jerez de la Frontera (where we got the word Sherry) on the Atlantic Ocean in southwest Spain. The best Sherry vineyards have chalk soil, and the great white grape of Sherry is called Palomino. All Sherry starts out as a dry white wine and, therefore, is fermented to dryness. To make Cream Sherry and other sweeter styles, a sweeter white wine is
added. In the case of Cream Sherry, the winemaker can add a golden wine made from naturally sweet Pedro Ximenes (abbreviated PX) grapes, or the lesser Moscatel grape. (This is one of the eight ways to make a sweet dessert wine, which you will learn about later in this chapter.)

Only the very rare Añada Spanish Sherry is ever vintage-dated, but there are new categories of Age-Dated Spanish Sherry: VOS (Very Old Sherry) and VORS (Very Old Rare Sherry), which are respectively certified a minimum of 20 and 30 years old. All other Spanish Sherries are made in a solera system that blends each new vintage into the year-old casks of wine below it in a “nursery” of barrels representing as many as 30 vintages. Wine is drawn from the oldest barrels for bottling, which makes space for younger wines to be added and integrated into the older wines. This produces a consistent taste year after year. It may take from 12 to 30 years to establish a solera.

The two major grape varieties used to make Sherry—Palomino and Pedro Ximenez—are kept in separate soleras until the final blending. While still in the barrels, the Sherry is classified according to whether natural flor (meaning flower) yeast is growing on the surface of the wine in the barrels. The barrels are filled only 7/8 full to leave an air space for the fortunate but elusive flor to grow. The barrels that develop flor yeast are destined to produce the driest and finest types of Sherry, such as Fino, Manzanilla, and Amontillado. These and all of the other types of Spanish Sherry are explained below.

The types of Spanish Sherry are

- **Fino**, which is the lightest, most delicate and some say driest of the Spanish Sherries. Served chilled with Tapas appetizers
- **Manzanilla**, which is also very dry, has a salty taste because it is aged in barrels placed outdoors on the beach where the sea air penetrates the porous wood
- **Amontillado**, which tastes more medium-dry to me, has a pronounced nutty flavor that makes it perfect in and with soups
- **Oloroso**, which means beautiful aroma, is dry but a richer, fuller-bodied style of Sherry
- **Palo Cortado**, is a rare type of Fino that loses its flor yeast and acquires a character between Amontillado and Oloroso
- **Cream**, which is the sweetest type of Sherry, is suitable on its own after dinner, or with dessert

For dessert wine, I really prefer buying a Pedro Ximenez (PX) wine—it’s labeled by this grape variety, not as Sherry—because it is absolutely fabulous, like liquid honey. Cigar smokers even dip the cut end of their cigars in Pedro Ximenez wines to put a sweet taste in their mouths.

Spanish Sherries have either cork stoppers or screw caps that allow you to easily remove and replace them so you can use as little or as much as you like at a time.
And since all but the Finos are fortified to a strength of 18% to 20% alcohol, you can keep them for a couple of months in your kitchen cabinet.

If you can only have one white wine on hand in the kitchen to use in cooking, your best bet is an Amontillado Sherry. It is perfect for cooking fish, soups, sauces, and beans because it makes them easier to digest. You could also use dry Vermouth as cooking wine, but an Amontillado Sherry has more flavor, color, and concentrated richness. Do not buy “cooking sherry”—it has additives and a lot of sodium. A real Spanish Sherry costs just $6 to $12 per bottle.

**Madeira My Dear**

*Madeira* is a fortified wine made on the island of Madeira, which sits in the Atlantic Ocean about 400 miles off the coast of Portugal. Madeira wine has been famous since the time of the 13 American colonies when the wine was sent in sailing ships, which took up to 2 years to reach our shores. During that time the thin, dry, acidic white Madeira wine was rocked and heated in its barrels until when it reached its destination it was a caramel-colored, sweet, concentrated wine. Since then Madeira wine has been baked to re-create this effect, and is the only wine in the world that is *madeirized* or oxidized on purpose to achieve a perfection of deep brown color and burnt sugar richness.

Madeira is usually a varietal wine named after the white grape variety used to make it. The five types of Madeira are

- **Sercial**, the driest type, used in Beef Wellington recipes and sauces for main courses and soups.
- **Verdelho**, called Verdejo in Spain, has slightly more body, color and richness, but is still very dry.
- **Bual**, which is very similar to Verdelho, is also considered a dry style of Madeira.
- **Rainwater**, which is a blend of varietals, is light and medium-dry in style and first became popular among America’s founding fathers at the time of the 13 original colonies.
- **Malmsey**, the sweetest type, is made from the Malvasia grape and is used in the dessert called English Trifle, which consists of layers of cake, pudding, and fruit.

To make sweet Malmsey Madeira the fermentation is stopped in the middle to leave some of the natural grape sugar in the wine. All Madeira is baked in rooms as hot as ovens for several months. Then the wine is fortified to 20% alcohol and most of it is placed in a *solera* system for aging and blending. Like Sherry, Madeira is not usually vintage-dated. However, some Madeiras indicate age, such as a 5 or 10 year old Malmsey, and so forth.
CHAPTER 3  Winemaking—The Six Basic Types of Wine

Madeira is a little more expensive than Sherry, but is terrific in sauces and soups—especially bisques or cream soups because it keeps them from curdling and makes them taste richer. And all Madeira comes with a cork stopper so you can use a little at a time for cooking or drinking over a couple of months. Other countries also make Madeira, but it is not as good as the original from the island of Madeira.

To do list

❑ Learn the eight types of dessert wines
❑ Understand how winemaking techniques determine dessert wine types

Dessert Wines Made Eight Ways

As mentioned previously in this chapter, eight methods are used to make dessert wines. We've already discussed four methods—those used to make sweet Champagne, Porto, Sherry, and Madeira. To summarize, sweet Champagne has a dosage of sugar and older wine added to make it sweeter. This is how the rest of the world makes different sweetness levels of sparkling wine using the Champagne method. Porto was our example of a sweet dessert wine that is made by stopping fermentation with brandy to kill the yeast and leave the natural grape sugar in the wine. Cream Sherry is produced using a third method of making sweet dessert wine by adding a separate golden sweet wine made from a different grape variety. Finally, the technique for producing Madeira—baking the wine in ovens to carmelize the sugars and adding grape spirits to the barrels to stop fermentation before all the sugar is converted by the yeast—represents a fourth way to make dessert wine. The remaining four methods are discussed in the sections that follow.

Pressing Frozen Grapes: Eiswein or Ice Wine

The fifth of the eight types of dessert wine that we are discussing is Eiswein in German or Ice Wine in English. Since Germany has the northernmost vineyards in Europe, it must contend with very cold weather. In some growing seasons, it is so cold after normal harvest time that a hard frost (or snow) freezes the grapes. These frozen grapes are picked before dawn (when the grapes begin to thaw), and pressed to release a deliciously sweet juice that’s fermented into Eiswein. In certain years, Eiswein grapes are harvested before Christmas and after New Year’s so that two vintage years appear on the label.

Mother Nature alone makes this wine. As the frozen grapes are pressed, the water content of the grapes is held as ice crystals. The ice doesn’t pass into the pressed juice, which makes the wine quite concentrated and sweet. In Germany, Riesling
grapes are used to make Eiswein, but Ice Wines in other parts of the world can be made from other varieties, such as Gewürztraminer in New Zealand, Vidal in Niagara, Canada or New York state, and Muscat in California.

Some Niagara peninsula Ice Wines from Canada are in such demand that they can cost more than $90 per half bottle. German Eiswein, which is a world-class wonder of delight and delicacy, is a comparative bargain at less than half that price, and New Zealand Ice Wines are even less expensive. Like Canada, the U.S. does not allow the use of the German word Eiswein, so California wineries such as Bonnie Doon called their wine made from frozen grapes “vin glaciere” in French.

**How Botrytis and Late Harvesting Produce Dessert Wines**

The sixth way to make dessert wines is with raisin grapes that have been shriveled by Botrytis, the noble rot fungus. An example of a dessert wine produced this way is the prestigious Sauternes of Bordeaux, which is a Botrytis Semillon. The noble rot fungus is not a common occurrence. Only the right conditions of temperature and humidity in perfect vintage years set the stage for Botrytis to appear naturally. That is what is so amazing about any dessert wine labeled Botrytis. In addition, the grapes must be *[late harvested]*, which means that there must be extra weeks of sunshine to ripen the grapes long past the normal harvest time.

In Germany, the most expensive and sweetest wines made in great vintage years with plenty of sunshine are true *[Trockenbeerenauslese]*, which means they’re made only from Botrytis-affected shriveled grapes. Only Botrytis can give a wine its distinctive honeycomb aroma—like the entire beehive of honey, royal jelly, and beeswax. That’s why collectors are willing to pay the price for these golden sweet Botrytis wines. Another world-famous late harvest Botrytis desert wine is Hungary’s Tokaji Aszú.

Other sweet dessert wines made from late harvest grapes do not necessarily have Botrytis. These wines are picked or harvested in stages in Germany with the *[Spatlese]*—meaning “late harvest” in German—coming in first. Workers are then sent back through the vineyards several times, a week or so apart, to pick the ripest grapes out of each bunch. So there are actually several grades of sweetness in the late harvest German wines. Winemakers in other parts of the world who want to emulate this late harvest style of dessert wine also have to pray for long weeks of sunshine so that they can harvest and produce these great dessert wines.

**Making Vin Santo—Italy’s Sweet Holy Wine**

The seventh of our eight types of dessert wine is *[Vin Santo]*. Vin Santo was originally the name of the Greek dessert wine from the beautiful island of Santorini. When the Italians from Venice controlled Greece centuries ago, they became fans of Vin Santo. When they no longer controlled Greece, they decided to make their own supply of Vin Santo in Italy.
To this day, Vin Santo is one of Italy’s most famous dessert wines. It is made in a special process where the white grapes are hung on hooks to dry on the upper level of the wineries where it is very hot under the roof, even with the shutters open. The drying process shrivels the grapes to raisins. These white raisins are crushed and then fermented in small oak barrels for a very long time. They create an amber color dessert wine that tastes and smells like fruitcake.

Each area of Italy uses its own homegrown white grape variety to make its version of Vin Santo. I’ve had wonderful examples of Vin Santo in Tuscany, particularly from the area of San Gimignano where the white Vernaccia grape is used. It was a highlight of our trip there to drink Vin Santo with excellent almond biscotti, and to do as the Italians do, dip and soften the biscotti in Vin Santo. Upscale Italian restaurants offer this as a dessert course.

**Stopping Fermentation to Determine Sweetness**

Our final and eighth type of dessert wine is made from very ripe grapes whose fermentation stops automatically when the alcohol level rises over 15 percent. At this level of alcohol, the wine yeasts die and no longer ferment any more grape sugar, leaving the wine sweet. At what point the fermentation stops is really determined by the winemaker, who controls the sweetness of the outcome by chilling the wine so low that fermentation stops, or by filtering out the yeast so there is no more yeast to continue fermentation. Of course, it all depends on how sweet the grapes were to begin with. Very ripe late harvest grapes can be twice as high in natural sugar as grapes that are used to make dry wines. That’s why we must depend on Mother Nature to cooperate in the vineyard, or these great dessert wines simply cannot be made.

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**To do list**

- Learn why winemakers use specific bottle colors for certain wine types
- Learn what a wine bottle's shape might reveal about its contents

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**“Reading” a Wine by its Bottle Color and Shape**

Most bottles are made of transparent glass so that the clarity of the wine can be observed through it. Seeing sediment in a young red wine is a danger sign and usually means the wine was mishandled or heated in shipment. White wines are almost always bottled in clear glass. They do not need ultimate protection from light, since most are consumed while young. Ditto for rosé and blush wines. The deep punt or
indentation in the bottom of the bottle is not to catch any sediment, but rather to make the bottle sturdy enough to withstand the pressure of the bubbles in Champagne, or the weight of bottles stacked on top of each other in a cellar.

Certain bottle shapes are reserved by tradition for certain types of wine. Experts can often make an educated guess as to what grape variety any particular bottle contains just by its shape. Here are the most common shapes and the type of wine they typically contain (see Figure 3.1):

**FIGURE 3.1**
How to "read" a wine by the shape of its bottle.

- Alsace
- Bordeaux
- Burgundy
- Champagne
- Chianti
- Côtes de Provence
- Franken
- German Wine Bottle
- Porto
• High-shouldered Bordeaux bottles in dark green glass usually contain the red Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, while clear glass Bordeaux bottles are traditionally used for the white Bordeaux grapes Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. Also, brown Bordeaux-shaped bottles are used in Italy for fine red wines from Sangiovese in Tuscany.

• Sloping shouldered Burgundy bottles in mint or olive green glass are reserved for the Burgundy grapes Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Rhône bottles are shaped similarly to Burgundy bottles but made of darker glass. These heavier Rhône bottles signal the Rhône grapes such as Syrah, or heavier wines such as Barolo from Italy.

• Tall, slim, green or brown German bottles foretell contents of German or Alsace grapes such as Riesling, Gewürztraminer, and Pinot Gris.

• Thick, heavy, dark green bottles with deep punts are necessary for Champagne bottles and sparkling wines to withstand the pressure of the bubbles.

• Finally, Porto bottles are opaque black glass to keep out the light and hide the sediment forming over many years of aging.

A REVEALING LOOK AT SOME WINE MYTHS

As you’ve been reading this chapter, some of your fondest notions about wine probably have been disproved. The most common misconception about wine is that more wine can be made anytime the winery needs product to sell. Wrong! Real wine (not the kind of homemade wine made from concentrate in a can) is made only once a year from freshly harvested grapes.

I once was asked by the assistant to a top CEO to get a prestigious single vineyard California Chardonnay that even he could not get. When I phoned the winery, they told me I should know better (I did, but I wanted to try for the bigwig). The winery said they simply did not have any more of that wine because the production from that vineyard is so small that only a few precious bottles are produced each year. And what they did have in the winery was still aging in the barrels. If I were speaking to the gentleman directly, I would have explained that he was lucky to have tasted such a “one of a kind” item from a great vintage because the wine can never be exactly repeated.

Other wine myths usually involve blaming wine for hangovers and problems whose caused by some other factor, such as water retention—how many of those salty peanuts and crackers did you eat? Wine is a natural diuretic because of its alcohol content. Since white wines are so high in acid as to resemble lemonade, and red wines can be so tannic as to be like iced tea, they have digestive properties. To avoid water retention, eat non-salty water crackers or wine crackers or good breads when you’re drinking wine. Watch your indulgence of the saltier blue cheeses, and always drink plenty of water in all cases.
Summary

And now for the best news of all—you have already done your homework on wine vocabulary by reading this chapter. You have learned all of the important winemaking terms for whites, reds, Rosé, Champagne or sparkling wines, fortified wines, and dessert wines in this chapter. And don’t worry if you need a brush-up on your wine vocabulary as you read through this book; our A to Z Dictionary of wine terms can be found in Appendix B.

In the next chapter, we will have a very easy time becoming conversant in vintage years and their influence on each type of wine. Until then, please keep in mind two of my favorite aphorisms (aphorisms are short pinpoint sayings that embody general truths):

**Younger Tastes Better**—This is especially true for moderately priced wines. And it really means that you do not know enough about wine—as yet—to buy older vintages with confidence and your hard-earned cash.

Please resist buying older wines if you do not know how they have been stored or transported. All wines age more quickly in general distribution.

**Bland is Bad**—As with food, you pay for, and want, more intensity of taste and flavor in better wines. As I’ve said before, if the wine has no concentrated fruit, it is not worth any price—no matter what is on the label.