

*Wine, decidedly, is a language, and one that we're all constantly learning. To add to your fluency, here's a list of terms you may encounter while perusing our website and beyond!*

**ACIDITY:** The fresh, tart elements of a wine, especially as compared to the sweeter, riper components. If you're feeling technical, this quality can be measured using the pH scale of 1 to 14, with 7 being neutral and almost all wines falling in between 2.5 and 4.5 pH. Clean, crisp whites are typically found residing in the 3.0 to 3.3 range, and most reds in the 3.3 to 3.6 category. (Note that a wine with a pH of 3 will be 10 times more acidic than one with a pH of 4!)

**AGRONOMIST:** An expert in the science of soil, the agronomist specializes in everything that happens at and below the surface of the ground. A sort of "dirt doctor", this person may help match grape varieties to specific *terroirs*, assist in topsoil management, and help plan the overall sustainability of an estate.

**AOC/AOP:** Acronym for the French term *Appellation d'origine contrôlée* (or *protégée*), AOC refers to the French system of appellations, founded in 1937 with the legal recognition of Côtes du Rhône. In the second half of the 20th century, this inspired multiple other nations to follow suit (see also DOC for Italy). Regulations for each zone vary greatly, but overall, the program was created to safeguard the style, location, and production level of specific *terroirs*. AOP is a newer system of regulation used throughout Europe and expanded to include a host of other agricultural products. When seen on a wine label, it is essentially the equivalent of AOC.

**APPASSIMENTO:** The Italian term for drying grapes for an extended period—traditionally on straw mats or racks known as *arele*—in order to concentrate the flavors and sugars. Most notably, this method is used to make Amarone in the Valpolicella, but various other regions have their own variation on a theme. In Tuscany, for example, the *Governo alla Toscana* process involves a portion of the grapes being set aside to dry, then used to provide balance or sweetness for the local Sangiovese.



Appassimento Dry-Aging Racks

**APPELLATION:** An officially recognized and regulated growing zone. Growers must respect specific, well-defined geographical borders, along with locally determined parameters on style, yield, and production. See also AOC (France) and DOC (Italy).



Edi Simcic Barriques

**BARRIQUE:** A small barrel, typically made from oak and used to store wine after fermentation. The age and size of a barrel, along with the type of wood, toast, and amount of time the wine spends aging inside, can all have a significant impact on the flavor, hue, and tannic structure of a wine. Smaller barrels like barriques have a greater wood-to-wine ratio and can deepen this impact. Larger vessels such as tonneaux (3-4 times larger than barrique) may lessen the influence.

**CHARMAT:** Less expensive than the *méthode champenoise*—or traditional method—of creating sparkling wine, bubbly produced using the charmat regimen undergoes a secondary fermentation inside stainless steel tanks (instead of individual bottles). While more affordable, this process also lessens contact with the lees and may lead to larger, less refined bubbles. Prosecco, to name one prime example, is made using this technique.

**CLONE:** No, we're not talking about sheep—or science fiction—here. Actually, the word clone was first coined by botanists and comes from the Greek word *klon*, meaning twig. Essentially, there is a historic point of origin, or “mother clone”, for every type of grape. While the genetic makeup of all offspring is theoretically the same, slight variations occur over time as vines evolve and merge with their own specific microclimates. Altitude, soil type, weather patterns—these can all have an impact over time. Eventually, you can have dozens or even hundreds of natural clones based on a single grape variety. In Tuscany, for example, there are countless strains of Sangiovese which have developed over the centuries—in Montalcino, they use the robust clone named *Sangiovese Grosso* to make Brunello, while in nearby Montepulciano, the local favorite, *Prugnolo Gentile*, and has a softer, dustier profile.

**CRU:** Linked to the French concept of *terroir*, a *cru* refers to a single, specific, and often superior vineyard or growing site. While it may also encompass a series of vineyards, in which multiple producers cultivate vines, the spirit of a *cru* is that it's limited in size and emphasizes higher overall quality.

**DOC/DOP:** A legally recognized, Italian growing zone, and the acronym for *Denominazione di origine controllata* (or *Protegit*). While the rules governing quality, style, and geography are ever so slightly more relaxed than Italy's top tier of appellations (see DOCG), they're likewise designed to protect the integrity of each historical region. While it can't guarantee quality all on its own, a DOC is a great indication of style and place—think of it as a signpost to follow once you develop an affinity for a certain type of wine. DOP (equivalent to France's AOP) is the related classification now being used more widely throughout the European Union.

**DOCG:** In Italy, if a specific growing zone produces a wine whose style and *terroir* are not only unique, but unrepeatable elsewhere, they may get assigned that country's highest tier of appellation, or DOCG. The acronym stands for *Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita*, and it guarantees that producers followed the strictest possible regulations to make that wine. As with DOCs, however, this status is never an assurance of quality in and of itself – within a given growing zone, there may be a range of producers with an array of artistic and commercial motivations.



Palmento Constanzo - Sicilian Dry Farming

**DRY FARMING:** An approach to agriculture that prohibits irrigation (even drip irrigation). In most grape growing regions of Europe, this is mandatory once vines have taken root and achieved adolescence. In the majority of French and Italian appellations, for example, a producer has between 0 and 3 years to water young plants, after which time no further assistance can be given. As a result, instead of fanning out near the surface and depleting the topsoil, grape roots grow vertically in their quest to find water, bypassing the topsoil and helping to maintain its integrity. Amazingly, in a typical growing zone, your average grape root will grow 1 foot straight down every year until it finds what it's looking for. So, now imagine 50-year-old vines, with a 4-story building's worth of roots diving down underneath the surface... that's what we call *terroir*!

**ENOLOGIST/OENOLOGIST:** The person who helps guide the chemistry and biology of a wine, starting with the vine and following it into the cellar. Often, an estate will hire an outside enologist as a consultant. With smaller outfits, however, it is just as likely that a producer serves as their own enologist.

**FERMENTATION (PRIMARY):** Also known as alcoholic fermentation, this is the process wherein yeasts consume the sugar in grapes, producing alcohol, carbon dioxide, and heat. All wines go through at least one fermentation, with most sparkling wine also undergoing a secondary fermentation to produce bubbles.

**FREE RUN JUICE:** The highly prized liquid released when grapes on the bottom of a vat are crushed by the weight of those on top—in other words, the juice resulting from gravity alone! Producers who use this technique generally devote it to their best wines. They may rotate the fruit over a 24-hour period in order to evenly disperse the weight, but beyond this there's no manipulation or mechanical press. Particularly in the case of whites, this juice is considered to be of the highest ilk, as it has the least possible contact with seeds, skins and stems.



**FRIZZANTE:** The Italian word to describe bubbly that is lightly sparkling, or even semi-sparkling—usually owing to a shorter secondary fermentation. (In French, this style is called *perlant*.) *Frizzante* wines are typically contrasted with *spumante* style wines, or sparklers with tighter, more numerous bubbles. Both terms gauge a wine's effervescence but, importantly, neither denotes sweetness. *Frizzante* offerings usually clock in at a modest 2.5 to 3.5 bars of atmosphere, while *Spumante* wines range from 5 to 6 bars. (For this reason, the former usually don't require a cork and a cage.)



Double Guyot Vine Training

**GUYOT/DOUBLE GUYOT:** A vine training technique developed in France in the late 1800s and designed to encourage low yields. Like the spurred cordon system (see below), it involves training smaller vines that grow fewer buds, concentrating the plant's resources in a finite amount of fruit. Vines may be trained with a single cane originating from the trunk (Guyot), or a pair of branches (double Guyot). Plants are also "cane pruned", meaning the vine is manually cut back each winter, leaving only the trunk and one or two canes for the following season. This approach tends to fare well in cooler climates—less surface area makes the vines less vulnerable to frost—but it requires great skill.

**HAND-PICKED:** While modern technology has already given us machines that can help with the harvest, no machine (as yet) can gauge ripeness. Ergo, real eyes and hands are required to select the best fruit, especially so no green or overripe grapes find their way into the mix. While hand-picking doesn't guarantee fine wine in and of itself, it's often those producers who place quality over quantity who employ this traditional harvest method.

**IGT/IGP:** *Indicazione geografica tipica* (or *protetta*) is the third of four classifications of wine recognized by the Italian government, coming after the DOC and DOCG designations. Take note, this is not a direct measure of a wine's quality—it simply means that the growers in a particular region can't yet meet all the criteria for a DOC label. The category itself was

created, for example, to accommodate producers of the first, important Super Tuscans in the highly esteemed village of Bolgheri. Their wines, while extremely well-made (and often very expensive) did not yet have the historical basis that would grant them a DOC. To this day, some of Italy's most intriguing, affordable, and adventurous wines remain IGT.

**LEES:** There are two types of lees, whose aggregate is the sediment left in a tank or barrel after fermentation. Immediately following this process, the wine is transferred or "racked" off the *gross lees* (larger material such as skins, seeds, and stems). The wine can then be aged on the *fine lees* (dead yeast cells) for an extended period, usually with the goal of adding complexity, weight, and aromatics to the wine.

**LOW YIELD:** As the name might suggest, wines that are low yield obtain significantly less juice from a single vine than high yield wines. In Europe, producers express this concept in terms of "bottles per plant". By nature, a vine that is planted low to the ground and trained to only have 5 or 6 clusters will produce considerably less juice than a large trellis with, say, 20 clusters. Combined with picking by hand, the former technique may only lead to "one bottle per plant", the gold standard in Europe. Elsewhere in the world, 2-3 bottles per plant may still be considered low yield. The global average is currently between 5 and 6 bottles per vine, and anything above 8 bottles per plant is considered 'corporate'.

**MALOLACTIC FERMENTATION:** A technique used to give wine a creamier, more unctuous texture. In the case of whites, this can also give wine a buttery taste. Ironically, the term itself is a misnomer: since there's no yeast involved, "malo" or "MLF" as it is also called, isn't technically a type of fermentation. Instead, a specific type of bacteria called *oenococcus oeni* is used to convert the wine's tart malic acid into softer lactic acid with a higher pH. (In a nutshell, the overall acidity of the wine is reduced.)

**NATIVE YEAST:** Yup, you guessed it: the same micro-organism that makes bread dough rise is also used to ferment wine and beer. In the case of wine, it's also used to convert sugar to alcohol and carbon dioxide. Native yeasts (a.k.a. ambient or wild yeasts) are those that occur naturally on grapes or in the cellar, as opposed to being generated commercially. Many producers—including those making natural wine—maintain that native yeasts are more authentic, but unsurprisingly, they can also be less reliable at times.

**NATURAL WINE:** While no official definition exists, there is a "vibe" to natural wine that most producers agree upon. In addition to using grapes from sustainable, organic, or biodynamic vineyards, natural wines are hand-picked, use only ambient yeasts, and allow no other additives during fermentation. Further, wines tend to be unfiltered, and contain low-level or no sulfites.

**ORGANIC:** Whether certified or not, “organic” indicates crops which are sustainably grown without the use of manmade fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides. The legal definition, of course, can vary from one nation to the next. In Europe, for example, the use of sulfur dioxide is permitted in organic wines, while this is not allowed in the U.S. Often, native yeasts are also used, but this technique is not required.

**PODERE:** An Italian word denoting a country farm on a hillside—especially one that was parceled off after historically belonging to a larger estate.

**POGGIO:** An Italian word meaning small hill or, more specifically, a knoll.

**RESIDUAL SUGAR:** Also known as “RS”, this is the natural sugar from grapes left over after the process of fermentation. In the case of dry wines, fermentation is allowed to go on until most or even all of the sugars have been consumed; for sweeter wines, fermentation is arrested before all the sugars can be converted to alcohol.

**RISERVA:** An Italian term used to designate a wine that has aged longer than the standard denomination. While the guidelines vary widely from one region to the next, producers often devote first pick grapes to such wines.

**SECONDARY FERMENTATION:** The chemical process which creates the bubbles in sparkling wine. (All wine goes through a single fermentation, and bubbly goes through two.) Whether in the tank (*charmat* method) or in the bottle (traditional method), yeast is added, which starts consuming the sugars, producing both alcohol and carbon dioxide. Eventually, the lees are removed, and the wine clarified. As a rule of thumb, the longer the secondary fermentation, the tighter and longer-lasting the bubbles.

**SINGLE ESTATE:** Coming from one farm or producer, with no additional, purchased grapes.

**SPUMANTE:** In Italy, this term simply identifies a wine as ‘sparkling’—typically with larger bubbles and more atmospheres of pressure. While it can easily be contrasted with *frizzante* wine (smaller, lighter bubbles), it’s good to remember *spumante* doesn’t have anything to do with the level of sweetness. Ergo, the Italians consider Champagne, among others, to be *spumante*.

**SPURRED CORDON:** A vine-training technique that encourages extremely low yields. First conjured by producers in Bordeaux, it’s now popular with quality producers everywhere. Essentially, spurred cordon takes the notion of ‘old vines’ and applies it to young plants: as many of you know, the older a vine gets, the fewer clusters it tends to support. For example, by the time a grape vine reaches 80-100 years of age, it may only be producing 1-3 bunches... but that fruit gets all the plant’s resources and enjoys tremendous concentration.

With spurred cordon (and other planting styles like Guyot), this “bonsai” approach is employed from the very start. A very short, woody trunk is established for each new vine, along with a single, perpendicular branch, trained along a wire. This branch, in turn, usually supports no more than 5-6 clusters of grapes. With vines trained low to the ground like this, nutrients get concentrated and clusters don’t have to compete for resources with a larger trunk, more foliage, and each other.

**SUSTAINABLE:** While this term has a looser definition than “organic”, sustainable farming is cut from a similar cloth. Producers tend to be eco-friendly, with no commercial pesticides and lower sulfites. Their cellars may also be more energy efficient, with the goal of a reduced carbon footprint. In Europe, the equation often involves dry-farming, too.

**TANNINS:** The polyphenols (organic compounds) present not only in the seeds and skins of grapes, but also in most things botanical, including tea leaves and oak barrels. If you’ve ever sipped a big red – or a black tea that steeped too long in the cup – and felt the sides of your tongue “tighten”, then you’re well-acquainted with their effects. Most prominent in red wine, tannins are a major component of structure and texture – they also help preserve the wine and (along with acidity) allow for greater ageing potential.

**TERROIR:** Originally coined by the French, this term can be summarized as a “sense of place”. In other words, how a region’s climate, soil, and terrain all influence a wine’s flavor and aroma—the more heightened its *terroir*, the more you can smell and taste the place inside your glass. It was also this same concept which originally gave rise to the first (AOC) system of recognized growing zones.

**VEGAN:** In the case of wine, there’s a lone stage of development with the potential to keep it from being vegan—and without asking first, it’s difficult to know! When wines are clarified, the dead yeast cells left over from fermentation are removed by means of a fining agent. This binder can either be an animal-based protein, such as casein from milk or egg whites... or clay-based, like bentonite, and therefore vegan.

