Hugh Johnson's Wine Companion

The Encyclopedia of Wines, Vineyards, & Winemakers

Fully revised and updated by Stephen Brook

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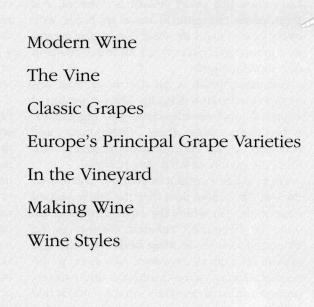
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Introduction



Introduction

t has been twenty years since the first publication of this book: beyond argument, the twenty most eventful years in the history of wine. Four previous editions have done their best to keep up with ever-accelerating change. For this fifth edition I have recruited one of the best-informed and most polished minds in the world of wine: Stephen Brook, himself the author of five books on the subject, to scan all my accumulated work and correct and update it for the twenty-first century with all the resources at the publisher's disposal. I have been involved all the way through, making corrections of my own, but the task of describing - even sketching - the modern wine world, its methods, and its personnel is now too much for one person.

For all its air of seamless and senior tradition, its classifications and regulations, nothing ever stands still in the world of wine. It is a constant fascination that every vintage is different, and then keeps changing in barrel or bottle with every year of maturity - and not, by any means, at a predictable pace. It has all the excitement of a moving target.

But much more is on the move than just vintage quality and maturity. The ownership of vineyards and wineries, laws and regulations, winemakers and their techniques philosophies are all in constant flux, and with them the quality of what they produce.

There is one constant in all this: – the terroir: the soil - but more than that; the whole natural environment in which the vines grow and the wine is made and cellared. Terroir is the ultimate factor in deciding both character and quality. Not at all constant, however, is the market. Today, wine-drinkers - their tastes, perceptions, and demands - have a major role in the ever-changing scene that must be added to all the other factors.

All these are potent reasons why a Wine Companion published in 2003 is a changed animal from its 1997 edition - let alone its first one in 1983. Then, I compared recent changes with those that led the nineteenth century writer Cyrus Redding to coin the term "modern wine". To Redding, the word "modern" distinguished the wines of his time from those

of the Ancients. His "modern" methods are now old-fashioned. They created most of the wines now referred to as "classics", but history has moved on again. Modern wine to us is the creation of the technology evolving in the last years of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first (though perhaps the word technology is too brutal). The way the great winemakers proceed today could be described as scientific philosophy.

This modern world began with such radical discoveries as the effects of different temperatures on fermentation. (We should remember that the nature of fermentation itself was discovered by Pasteur only in the 1860s.) The ability to slow down fermentation by refrigeration was the first great breakthrough. Without it, the New World of wine, essentially those regions whose Mediterranean climates had limited their potential in the past, would never have challenged the Old.

Their challenge, though, from the mid-1960s on, has made the Old World look again at its entrenched ideas, has made it modify, adapt, and discard old dogma to the point where the simple concept of Old World and New has only a geographical meaning. Old World and New, in fact, have met in what is becoming the global wine village.

Such neighbourliness carries its dangers. The first is the inclination to make the same sort of wine as everyone else: the principal trend of the 1980s, still a danger, but happily less inexorable than it was. Its most obvious manifestation was the near-universal planting of Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. A more insidious one was the fashion of using oak, not as it was originally intended - for conditioning the wine ready for bottling - but actually to flavour it like a dash of ketchup by adding oak chips or even essence. A generation grew up under the delusion that Chardonnay actually tastes of oak - while in reality if it does, it is either badly made or not ready to drink.

At the end of the twentieth century, it appears, too, that a fundamental difference in taste threatens to divide consumers on the two sides of the Atlantic. To simplify, influential American critics are judging wines more for the impact they make than for those traits that make them good companions: the power to

tempt and beguile, to accompany food, and quench thirst. Europe so far is unmoved, but it is a question to follow with interest.

This book is a portrait of this world of modern wine: its methods, its planting of vineyards and cellars, and above all, its practitioners. It is designed to be a practical companion in choices that become more varied and challenging all the time. Like any portrait, it tries to capture the reality of a single moment. The moment is past as soon as the shutter has clicked. The closer the focus and the greater the detail the more there is to change and grow out of date. This edition has been revised and updated to reflect the reality of 2003.

To make it a practical companion I try to give the essential information about each wine country and wine region you are likely to encounter or which is worth making an effort to know. I have shunned a catalogue of the legislation that surrounds the wine business increasingly each year. It casts little light and does nothing to add to the pleasure of our subject - which is, after all, either a pleasure or a failure.

The essentials, it seems to me, are the names and, as far as possible (which is not very far), descriptions of the world's worthwhile wines: who makes them, how much there is of them, how well they keep, and where they fit into our lives - which are too short, alas, to do justice to anything like all of them. You will also find answers to the recurring questions about grape varieties, production methods, and the ways of the wine trade. You will not find a historical survey or a technical treatise, but just enough information, I hope, to indicate essential differences and the trends of change in winemaking today.

The heart of the book is arranged by countries on the same system as my annual Pocket Wine Book, with the Index as the alphabetical alternative to find a name you cannot immediately place in a national or regional context. The Wine Companion is updated far less frequently than its annual pocket-sized stablemate, leaving to its more ephemeral editions the questions of current vintages, their quality, and maturity. Both will be much clearer if you possess the current (fifth) edition of The World Atlas of Wine, in which the regions are geographically displayed.

Each section provides the essential background information about the wines in question, then lists the principal producers with succinct details. In a few well-trodden areas the lists make themselves. In most others, a complete catalogue would be as unhelpful as it would be unmanageable. My (now "our") method, then, is to consult first our own experience, then the advice of friends, local brokers, and officials whom we have reason to respect. We have corresponded with as many producers as possible, asking them specific questions about their properties or firms, their methods, products, and philosophies. Often, unfortunately, the exigencies of space have forced us to leave out good producers we would have liked to include. In a few countries, we have also employed intermediaries to research, interview, and pass us their findings. We have tasted as many of the wines described as we could (which is why some specific tasting notes go back ten years or more).

The enjoyment of wine is a very personal thing. Yet if you love it, and spend your life among wine-lovers, you will find a remarkable consensus about which wines have the power to really thrill and satisfy us. Prejudice and narrow-mindedness have no place; preferences are what it is all about. We have not tried to hide ours among the fabulous variety described in this book.

How to Follow the Star-Rating System

The Wine Companion has introduced a new star-rating system for each producer listed.

*** Exceptionally fine or great quality, consistent over many vintages Consistently high quality *** At least good quality 22 52 Sound and steady wines

Any rating given in orange denotes particular good value. No rating is given to new producers whose wines are too new or too few to allow assessment; or to wineries that have recently changed hands.

Modern Wine

t its simplest, wine is made by crushing grapes and A tits simplest, wine is made by crossing gard, allowing the yeast naturally present on the skins to convert the sugar in their juice to alcohol. This is the process of fermentation. No more human intervention is needed than to separate the juice from the skins by pressing. Crushed and fermented like this, white grapes make white wine, and red grapes red.

The art of the winemaker can be equally simply expressed. It is to choose good grapes, to carry out the crushing, fermenting, and pressing with scrupulous care and hygiene, and to prepare the wine for drinking by cleaning it of yeasts and all foreign bodies. For some sorts of wine this entails ageing it as well; for others, the quicker it gets to market the better

These are the eternal verities of wine and winemaking, well-understood for hundreds of years. They can be carried to perfection with no modern scientific knowledge or equipment whatever - with luck. Great wines came to be made in the places where nature, on balance, was kindest. Given a ripe crop of grapes in a healthy state, the element that determined success more than any other was the temperature of the cellar during and after the fermentation. France (but not the south), Germany, the Alps, and Hungary had these conditions. The Mediterranean and places with a similar climate did not.

If there is one innovation that has made the most difference between old and modern winemaking, it is refrigeration. Refrigeration and air-conditioning have added the whole zone of Mediterranean climate to the world of potentially fine wine.

Yet technology has advanced on a broad front. Every aspect of grape-growing and winemaking is now under a degree of control undreamed of before. These controls are now common practice in almost all the bigger and newer wineries where wine is made. Its scientific basis is widely understood even in traditional areas and among small properties.

One California professor confesses that winemakers now have more possible controls than they know how to use. In leading-edge California, white winemaking is so clinically perfected that one of the main problems is deciding what sort of wine you want to make.

On the other hand, as Professor Emile Peynaud of Bordeaux University has said, "The ultimate goal of modern oenology is to avoid having to treat the wine at all."

The following pages summarize some of the more important modern techniques and currently held views on the many factors that affect the qualities of wine. They follow the processes of grape-growing and winemaking more or less sequentially, so that they can be read as an account or referred to as a glossary. Some processes apply to white wine only, some to red, some to both. The stages of making wine are shown diagrammatically on pages 30-31.

The Vine

wine-grower in the Clos de Vougeot has no choice about ${f A}$ what grapes to plant. It has been a sea of Pinot Noir for centuries. Nothing else is permitted. A wine-grower in the Médoc has an important choice to make: half a dozen varieties within the family of the Cabernets are allowed. The emphasis he places on the harsher or the smoother varieties is the basis of his house style.

A wine-grower in the New World is as free as the air. His own taste and his view of the market are his only guide. This choice, together with the debates it has started, has made all wine-lovers far more grape-conscious than ever before. Not only are more wines named by their grape varieties, but this very fact has made the clear ascendancy of some varieties over others public knowledge.

What is a grape variety? It is a selection from among the infinity of forms a plant takes by natural mutation. In the basic economy of viticulture, a wine-grower looks first for fruitfulness, hardiness, and resistance to disease in his plants. Then he looks for the ability to ripen its fruit before the end of the warm autumn weather. Lastly, he looks for flavour and character

There has been plenty of time since the discovery of wine to try out and develop different varieties. In the botanical genus Vitis, the vine, there are more than twenty species. The wine vine is only one: a wild woodland plant of Europe and

eastern Asia, Vitis vinifera. It was scrambling through the treetops of France long before the idea of crushing and fermenting its grapes was imported, via Greece, from the near East.

Nobody knows the precise origins of any of the varieties of vine that were developed locally in France, Italy, Spain, along the Danube, and in the rest of wine-growing Europe. But the assumption is that they started as selections by trial from local vine varieties, possibly interbreeding with imported ones of special quality. In Germany, for instance, the Romans made the brilliant discovery of a grape variety with habits perfectly adapted to the cool northern climate: the Riesling, or its ancestor. Selections, adaptations or descendants from it have become all the other grapes in the German style.

There are now 4,000 or more named varieties of wine grape on earth. Perhaps 100 have really recognizable flavour and character. Of these, a bare dozen have moved into international circulation, and the dozen can be narrowed again to those that have personalities so definite (and so good) that they form the basis of a whole international category of wine. They are the principal red and white grapes of Bordeaux, the same of Burgundy, the Riesling of Germany, the Gewurztraminer of Alsace, the Syrah of the Rhône, and the grandfather of them all: the Muscat.

Today, there is an increasing temptation to plant the champion grapes everywhere. It is a difficult argument between quality and that most precious attribute of wine - variety.

Classic Grapes

Riesling

Johannisberg Riesling, Rhine Riesling, White Riesling

The classic grape of Germany competes with Chardonnay for the title of the world's best white grape. The Riesling produces wines of crisp fruity acidity and transparent clarity of flavour. Even the aromas it gives off are refreshing. In Germany, it ranges from pale green, fragile, and sharp on the Mosel to golden, exotically luscious wines, especially in the Rheinpfalz. It is remarkably versatile in warmer climates, perhaps at its most typical in Alsace and Austria, becoming more buxom when grown in California and Australia, where it ages more rapidly to its unique mature bouquet of lemons and petrol.

Chardonnay

The white burgundy grape makes fatter, more winey, and potent-feeling wine than Riesling, less aromatic when young, maturing to a rich and broad, sometimes buttery, sometimes smoky or musky smell or flavour. The finesse of blanc de blancs Champagne, the mineral smell of Chablis, the nuttiness of Meursault, the ripe-fruit smells of Sonoma Valley wines show its unique versatility. It is a grape that is adapting superbly to Australia, Oregon, New Zealand, and northern Italy.

Cabernet Sauvignon

The Médoc grape. Most recognizable and most versatile of red grapes, apparently able to make first-class wine in any warm soil, in just about any winegrowing region of the world. Small, dark, rather late-ripening berries yield an intense colour, a strong blackcurrant and sometimes herbal aroma, and much tannin, which makes it the slowest wine to mature. It needs age in oak and bottle, and is best of all blended with Merlot, etc., as in Bordeaux. Outside Bordeaux, it is still common to find examples of pure varietal Cabernet, but increasingly, winemakers in areas as diverse as California, South Africa, and Italy, are opting for more subtle claret-style blends.

Pinot Noir

This is the red burgundy and Champagne grape. So far, it is apparently less adaptable to foreign vineyards, where the fine Burgundian balance is very hard to achieve. Sweeter, less tannic, and richer-textured than Cabernet, and therefore enjoyable at a far younger age. It is rarely blended, except in Champagne. It has proved especially successful in Oregon, California, and New Zealand, less so in Mediterranean countries.

Syrah or Shiraz

Widespread, and the great grape of the Rhône Valley. Makes tannic, peppery, dark wine, which can mature superbly. It is very important as Shiraz in Australia. Grown increasingly in the Midi, both for AC wines and vins de pays and in South Africa and California.

Gewu(ü)rztraminer

The beginner's grape due to its forthright spicy smell and flavour. Once almost unique to Alsace (without the umlaut), but now also encountered in Italy, Austria, Germany, New Zealand, and North America.

Sauvignon Blanc

The name derives from sauvage, - wild - which could well describe its grassy or gooseberry flavour. It it widespread in Bordeaux, where it is blended with Sémillon for both sweet and dry wines, but is most characteristic in Sancerre. A successful transplant to the New World, New Zealand, and South Africa in particular: it can be light and aromatic, or with fuller winey like Chardonnay.

Muscat

Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Moscato Canelli

The finest of the ancient tribe of Muscats is the "small white" used for sweet vins doux naturels from the south of France and for Asti Spumante. Most of the dry Muscats of Alsace come from a more regular-yielding variety, Muscat d'Ottonel.

Europe's Principal Grapes

France

All eight classic grapes are grown to perfection in France. The Muscat, Riesling, and Gewurztraminer are long-established imports, but the remaining five, the reds and whites of Burgundy, the Rhône, and Bordeaux, appear to be natives of France, representing an eastern and a western tradition: that of the Alps and that of the Atlantic. (They meet on the Loire.)

Nobody can say with any confidence how many other grapes make up this great tradition. A single variety may have four or five different names in different areas quite close together - or indeed, the grape may be a local strain and not quite the same variety. These local characters range from such common plants as the red Carignan of the Midi to the delicate white Viognier, once restricted to the Rhône, but now being more widely used for vins de pays; and such rare ones as the white Tresallier (limited to one tiny zone in the upper reaches of the Loire).

Red Grape Varieties

Abouriou grown in the Côtes du Marmandais in South West France.

Aleatico red Muscat variety of Corsica. Makes a wine of the same name.

Alicante-Bouschet prolific variety of southern table wine

Aramon high-yielding southern table-wine variety, now in decline.

Aspiran an old variety of the Languedoc.

Auxerrois synonym of Malbec in Cahors.

Bouchet synonym of Cabernet Franc in St-Emilion.

Braquet main variety of Bellet, near Nice.

Brocol synonym of Valdiguié in Gaillac.

Cabernet Franc high-quality cousin of Cabernet Sauvignon used in Bordeaux (especially St-Emilion) and in the Loire.

Cabernet Sauvignon see page 11.

Carignan leading bulk-wine producer of the Midi; dull except from very old vines. Greatly improved by carbonic maceration.

Carmenère old Bordeaux variety, now rare.

César tannic traditional variety of Irancy (Yonne).

Cinsaut (or Cinsault) prominent southern Rhône variety, that is used in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, etc, and the Midi.

Cot synonym of Malbec in the Loire.

Duras local Gaillac variety.

Fer (or Fer Servadou) used in several wines of the South West, notably Marcillac.

Fuelle Noir (or Folle Noire) Bellet variety.

Gamay Beaujolais grape: juicy, light, and fragrant. Also grown in the Loire esp. Touraine, and in central France.

Grenache powerful red used in Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Côtes du Rhône, and for rosés (e.g. Tavel) and dessert wines in Roussillon.

Grolleau (or Groslot) common Loire red used in, for example, Anjou Rosé.

Jurançon Noir Gaillac (Tarn) grape – not used in Jurançon. Malbec important variety now fading from the best Bordeaux, but central to Cahors.

Mataro synonym of Mourvèdre.

Merlot essential element in fine Bordeaux; the dominant grape of Pomerol.

Meunier (or Pinot Meunier) inferior "dusty-leaved" version of Pinot Noir "tolerated" in Champagne.

Mondeuse chief red of Savoie.

Mourvèdre key variety of Bandol in Provence - one of the improving cépages améliorateurs of the Midi.

Négrette variety peculiar to Frontonnais and Gaillac.

Nielluccio Corsican variety, possibly related to Sangiovese.

Petit Verdot high-quality subsidiary grape of Bordeaux.

Pineau d'Aunis local to the Loire Valley, especially Anjou and Touraine.

Pinot Noir see page 11.

Portugais Bleu once widespread in Gaillac, now declining in importance.

Poulsard pale-red Jura variety.

Pressac St-Emilion synonym for Malbec.

Sciacarello Corsican variety.

Syrah see page 11.

Tannat tannic variety of the South West, especially Madiran. Tempranillo Spanish (Rioja) variety grown in the Midi.

Trousseau majority grape in Jura reds, but inferior to Poulsard.

White Grape Varieties

Aligoté secondary Burgundy grape of high acidity. Wines for drinking young.

Altesse Savoie variety. Wines are often sold as "Roussette".

Arrufiac Béarnais variety (Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh).

Auvergnat (or Auvernat) Loire term for the Pinot family.

Baroque used in Béarn to make Tursan.

Beaunois synonym of Chardonnay at Chablis.

Beurot synonym in Burgundy of Pinot Gris.

Blanc Fumé synonym of Sauvignon Blanc at Pouilly-sur-Loire.

Blanquette synonym of Mauzac Blanc and Clairette Blanc.

Bourboulenc Midi (Minervois, La Clape) variety, also goes into (red and white) Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Camaralet rare Jurançon variety.

Chardonnay see page 11.

Chasselas neutral variety used in Savoie, Pouilly-sur-Loire, and Alsace.

Clairette common neutral-flavoured Midi grape, also makes sparkling Rhône Clairette de Die.

Colombard minor Bordelais grape most common in the Côtes de Gascogne. Also distilled for cognac and armagnac.

Courbu Jurançon variety (alias Sarreat).

Folle Blanche formerly the chief Cognac grape, also grown in Bordeaux and Brittany.

Gamay Blanc synonym of Chardonnay in the Jura.

Gewurztraminer see page 11.

Gros Manseng one of the main grapes of Jurançon.

Gros Plant synonym of Folle Blanche in the western Loire.

Jacquère the grape of Apremont and Chignin in Savoie.

Jurançon Blanc minor armagnac variety (not in Jurançon).

Klevner name used for Pinot Blanc in Alsace.

Len-de-l'El (or Loin de l'Oeil) variety used in Gaillac.

Maccabeu (or Maccabéo) Catalan variety used in Roussillon for dessert vins doux naturel.

Malvoisie synonym of Bourboulenc in the Languedoc, of Torbato in Roussillon, and Vermentino in Corsica.

Marsanne with Roussanne, the white grape of Hermitage and the Northern Rhône.

Mauzac used in Blanquette de Limoux and Gaillac.

Morillon synonym of Chardonnay.

Muscadelle minor, slightly Muscat-flavoured variety used in Sauternes and some dry white Bordeaux.

Muscadet gives its name to the wine of the western Loire. Also called Melon de Bourgogne.

Muscat see page 11.

Ondenc Gaillac variety.

Petit Manseng excellent South West variety used in the wines of Jurançon, etc.

Petite Sainte-Marie synonym of Chardonnay in Savoie.

Picpoul synonym of Folle Blanche in Armagnac; in the Southern Rhône and the Midi (Picpoul de Pinet) it is a different variety: Picpoul Blanc.

Pineau de la Loire synonym in the Loire of Chenin Blanc (not a Pinot).

Pinot Blanc closely related to Pinot Noir, grown in Burgundy, Champagne, and Alsace.

Pinot Gris (Tokay d'Alsace) a mutation of the Pinot Noir, widespread in Alsace.

Piquepoul see Picpoul.

Riesling see page 11.

Rolle Italian Vermentino in Provence.

Romorantin grown only at Cheverny; dry, often sharp wine.

Roussanne (with Marsanne) makes white Hermitage.

Roussette synonym of Altesse in Savoie.

Sacy minor variety of the Yonne.

St-Emilion synonym of Ugni Blanc in cognac.

Sauvignon Blanc see page 11.

Savagnin the "yellow wine" grape of Château-Chalon (Jura).

Sylvaner the workhorse light-wine grape of Alsace.

Traminer see Gewurztraminer.

Tresallier variety of the extreme upper Loire (St-Pourçain-sur-Sioule) now fading.

Ugni Blanc common Midi grape; Italy's Trebbiano; "St-Emilion" in cognac.

Vermentino Italian grape, known in Provence as Rolle; possibly the Malvoisie of Corsica.

Viognier aromatic grape of Condrieu in the Northern Rhône. Increasingly common in the Midi, especially as a varietal vin de pays.

Italy

Italy's grape catalogue is probably one of the longest of all. With wine-growing so universal a factor of Italian life, uninterrupted for millennia before phylloxera, local selection has completely blurred the origins and relationships of many varieties beyond recall. Similarly, is the fish caught off Tunisia and called by an Arab name the same as a similar one caught in the Adriatic and called by a name peculiar to the Romagna? In truth, Italian grapes are scarcely less slippery a subject.

In general, their selection has been on the grounds of productivity and good health, along with adaptability to the soil and reliable ripening, rather than great qualities of flavour or ability to age. The mass of Italian grapes are, therefore, sound rather than inspiring, their flavours muted or neutral. The only international classic to (maybe) come from Italy is the (Gewürz) Traminer, from the South Tyrol.

But once you start to list the exceptions, the Italian grapes with personality and potentially excellent quality, it does seem strange that more of them have not yet made a real name for themselves in the world. Nebbiolo, Barbera, Teroldego, Sangiovese, Montepulciano, and Aglianico are reds with much to offer. There are fewer first-class whites, but Ribolla, Cortese, Greco, Tocai, Verdicchio, and Vermentino all make original contributions, and the Moscato of Piedmont, while not exclusively Italian, is a very Italian interpretation of the most ancient of grapes.

At the same time, more and more is being heard of Cabernet, Merlot, Pinot Bianco, and even Chardonnay and Riesling, while Pinot Grigio has become wildly popular in Germany and North America. The northeast is now almost as international in its ampelography as any of the wine areas of the New World. The appearance of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Chardonnay in Tuscany in recent years is an important sign of changes in the wind.

The central question over the future of Italian wine is how far she will defend her traditions (which is the purpose of the DOC legislation) in sticking to her indigenous grapes, and how far she will bow to the international trend - as she is tending to do in winemaking techniques.

The world has begun to appreciate just what variety Italy has to offer. She will do well to develop her native flavours to the full. They include as wide a range as the wines of any country - France included.

There is no general rule on the mention of grape varieties on labels; local custom dictates whether the wine is labelled by place, grape, or a name entirely unrelated to either. With the current increase in variety consciousness, however, it does seem likely that producers will start to make more of the grape varieties in future - at least on wines destined for export.

Red Grape Varieties

Aglianico source of full-bodied Taurasi in Campania, and Aglianico del Vulture in Basilicata.

Aleatico Muscat-flavoured grape used for dark dessert wines in Elba, Latium, Apulia, and elsewhere.

Barbera dark, acidic Piedmont variety widely grown in the northwest.

Bombino Nero used in Apulia's Castel del Monte rosato.

Bonarda minor variety widespread in Lombardy and Piedmont.

Brachetto makes fizzy, perfumed Piedmont wines.

Brunello di Montalcino a noble strain of Tuscany's Sangiovese. Cabernet (especially Franc) widespread in the northeast; increasing elsewhere.

Calabrese synonym of Sicilian Nero d'Avola.

Cannonau leading dark variety of Sardinia for DOC wines, the Grenache of France.

Carignano (French Carignan), prominent in Sardinia.

Cesanese good Latium red.

Chiavennasca Nebbiolo in Valtellina, Lombardy.

Corvina Veronese main grape of Valpolicella.

Croatina much used in Lombardy's Oltrepò Pavese and in Emilia-Romagna.

Dolcetto low-acid Piedmont variety, source of several DOCs. Freisa Piedmont variety, makes sweet, often fizzy wines, and occasional dry ones.

Gaglioppo source of most Calabrian reds, including Cirò.

Grignolino makes light, pleasant wines around Asti in Piedmont.

Guarnaccia red variety of Campania, especially Ischia.

Lagrein grown in Alto Adige: faintly bitter reds and dark rosés. Lambrusco prolific source of Emilia's effervescent wines.

Malbec seen occasionally in Apulia and Venezia.

Malvasia Nera makes sweet, fragrant, sometimes sparkling reds in Piedmont; also a fine dessert wine in Apulia.

Marzemino dark grape grown in Trentino and Lombardy. Merlot Bordeaux native widely grown in Italy, especially in the northeast.

Monica makes Sardinian reds, dry and sweet.

Montepulciano dark variety of central Italy, widely planted. Nebbiolo the great grape of Piedmont, the base of Barolo, Barbaresco, Gattinara, etc. Its wine varies from smoothly

fruity to biting black, ageing superbly.

Negroamaro potent Apulian variety of the Salento peninsula. Nerello Mascalese Sicilian grape, for Etna reds and rosés.

Petit Rouge used in some Valle d'Aosta reds.

Piedirosso (or Per'e Palummo) features in Campania reds.

Pinot Nero Burgundy's Pinot Noir (see page 11), grown in much of northeast Italy.

Primitivo Apulian grape, the same as Zinfandel.

Raboso worthy, if tannic, Veneto native.

Refosco source of dry, full-bodied Friuli reds. Known as Mondeuse in France.

Rossese fine Ligurian variety, makes DOC at Dolceacqua.

Sangiovese mainstay of Chianti and one of Italy's most widely planted vines, with many clones and noms de verre. At best magnificent, astringent but full-bodied, ageing many years.

Schiava widespread in Alto Adige.

Spanna synonym for Nebbiolo.

Teroldego unique to Trentino, makes Teroldego Rotaliano.

Tocai Rosso (or Tocai Nero) makes DOC red in Veneto's Colli Berici.

Uva di Troia main grape of several DOC wines in north Apulia. Vespolina often blended with Nebbiolo in east Piedmont.

White Grape Varieties

Albana Romagna makes dry and semi-sweet wines.

Arneis Piedmont variety that is enjoying a revival.

Biancolella native of Ischia.

Blanc de Valdigne source in Valle d'Aosta of Blanc de Morgex, Blanc de la Salle.

Bombino Bianco main grape of Apulia and Abruzzi, where it is known as Trebbiano d'Abruzzo.

Bosco in Liguria, the main ingredient of Cinqueterre.

Catarratto widely grown in west Sicily, often used in Marsala. Chardonnay grown in Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, and Friuli and now used for IGT (indicazione geografica tipica) in Tuscany, Umbria, Piedmont, and elsewhere.

Cortese used in south Piedmont's finest whites: found also in Lombardy's Oltrepò Pavese.

Fiano in Campania makes Fiano di Avellino.

Forestera partners Biancolella in Ischia bianco.

Garganega main grape of Soave.

Grechetto variety of Umbria, important in Orvieto.

Greco Campania's best white.

Grillo figures, usually with Catarratto, in Marsala.

Inzolia used in Sicilian whites, as well as Marsala.

Malvasia common for both dry and sweet wines, especially in Latium (for Frascati etc.).

Moscato (Muscat, see page 11) widespread in sparkling wines (e.g. Asti Spumante) and dessert wines (e.g. Moscatos of Sicily).

Müller-Thurgau encountered in Friuli, Trentino-Alto Adige. Nuragus ancient Sardinian grape.

Picolit source of Italy's most expensive dessert wines from

Pigato grown only in southwest Liguria; good table wine.

Pinot Bianco Burgundy's Pinot Blanc, grown all over north Italy. Weisser Burgunder in Alto Adige.

Prosecco prominent in Veneto, mainly for sparkling wines. Rheinriesling see Riesling Renano.

Riesling Italico not a true Riesling, probably native to the northeast.

Riesling Renano Rhine Riesling, and thus authentic.

Sauvignon Blanc grown in parts of the northeast, and exceptional in Friuli.

Tocai Friulano used for DOC whites in Lombardy and Veneto, as well as in its native Friuli.

Traminer native of Alto Adige.

Trebbiano d'Abruzzo see Bombino Bianco.

Verdeca Apulian grape used in southern whites.

Verdicchio main grape of the Marches.

Verduzzo Friulian variety used also in the Veneto for both dry

Vermentino source of DOC white in Sardinia, and good table wines in Liguria.

Vernaccia di Oristano in Sardinia, makes sherry-like dessert wine. Vernaccia di San Gimignano ancient Tuscan variety, wine of the same name.

Germany

The international reputation of German wine for a unique effect of flowery elegance is based on one grape alone: Riesling. But the widespread use of Riesling as we know it, is probably no more than 200 or 300 years old. Germany has several old varieties of local importance, which continue to hold their own. More significantly, her vine-breeders have been struggling for a century to produce new vines that offer Riesling quality without its inherent disadvantage: ripening so late in the autumn that every vintage is a cliffhanger. The centenary of the first important Riesling cross (with Silvaner) was celebrated in 1982. The past 100 years have seen its fruit, the Müller-Thurgau, become so prolific that, for a time, it surpassed Riesling as Germany's most popular grape.

Yet none of the new varieties, not even Müller-Thurgau, has supplanted Riesling in the best and warmest vineyards. None has achieved more than either a sketch or a caricature of its brilliant balance and finesse. Nor have any survived such ultimate tests of hardiness as January 1979, when the temperature dropped by forty degrees to -20°F (-29°C) in twenty-four hours. Thousands of vines were killed. Riesling survived.

Seventy-six per cent of the German vineyard is white. Of the twenty-four per cent that is red, Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir) long ago overtook the inferior Portugieser.

Red & White Grape Varieties

Albalonga Rieslaner x Silvaner. Needs to be ultra-ripe. Now in

Bacchus an early ripening cross of (Silvaner x Riesling) x Müller-Thurgau. Spicy but rather soft wines, best as Auslesen, frequently used as süssreserve.

Cabernet Cubin One of a number of Cabernet crosses developed in the 1990s in Franken, with the intention of creating dark-red wines with high ripeness levels. Being adopted with caution.

Domina Pinot Noir x Portugieser. A deep-coloured cross, gradually being planted in the Ahr and southern Germany.

Dornfelder A complex cross, developed in the 1950s, but only widely planted in the 1990s, especially in the Pfalz. Gives dark, quaffable red wines even from high yields.

Ehrenfelser Riesling x Silvaner. A good cross, between Müller-Thurgau and Riesling in quality.

Elbling once the chief grape of the Mosel, now only grown high upriver. Neutral and acidic, but clean and good in sparkling wine.

Faber Weissburgunder x Müller-Thurgau, with a certain following in Rheinhessen and the Nahe.

Frühburgunder A small-berried mutation of Pinot Noir, its advantage being that it ripens earlier and has lower acidity. Good quality.

Gewürztraminer see page 11.

Gutedel south Baden name for the Chasselas, or Swiss Fendant. Light, refreshing, but short-lived wine.

Huxelrebe Gutedel x Courtiller Musqué. A prolific variety, very aromatic, with good sugar and acidity. Popular in Rheinhessen, but in gradual decline.

Kerner Trollinger x Riesling. One of the better new varieties, widely planted. When not over-cropped, it tastes like a blend of Silvaner and Riesling.

Lemberger Synonym for Austrian Blaufränkisch. Gives complex wine with good acidity in Württemberg.

Morio-Muskat It is hard to believe that this early ripening cross of Silvaner and Weisser Burgunder has no Muscat blood. The wine it makes in Rheinpfalz and Rheinhessen is often too blatant and blowsy.

Müller-Thurgau Riesling x Sylvaner. Created in 1882, but only widely planted after 1930. Immensely popular, despite suffering chronic insipidity, unless yields are heavily reduced. Also known as Rivaner.

Optima Silvaner x Riesling x Müller-Thurgau. This is an improvement on Bacchus, particularly in the Rheinpfalz.

Ortega Müller-Thurgau x Siegerrebe. Very early ripening, aromatic, and spicy with superb balance. Planted in the Mosel and in Franken. Gives rather cloying, sweet wines,

Perle Gewürztraminer x Müller-Thurgau. An extremely aromatic new cross, planted in Rheinhessen and Franken. In decline.

Portugieser Very popular, high-yielding red grape, but essentially insipid.

Regent One of the better new red varieties, becoming popular in the Pfalz and Rheinhessen.

Reichensteiner Müller-Thurgau x (Madeleine Angevine x Calabreser Fröhlich). A Euro-cross, slightly better for both sugar and acid than Müller-Thurgau.

Rieslaner Silvaner x Riesling. A brilliant variety, created in 1921, but hard to grow. Gives superb sweet wines with higher acidity even than Riesling.

Riesling see page 11.

Samtrot A mutation of Pinot Meunier found in Württemberg. Soft, but elegant wines.

Scheurebe the second cross Silvaner x Riesling to become celebrated, now well-established (Rheinhessen, Rheinpfalz) for highly aromatic, often unsubtle wine. At its best when made sweet.

Schwarzriesling German synonym for Pinot Meunier. Found in Baden and Württemberg.

Silvaner a late-ripener like the Riesling, also badly affected by drought in light or thin soils, steadily giving ground to Müller-Thurgau and others. Scarcely noble, but at its best (in Franken and Rheinhessen) the true yeoman: blunt, trustworthy, with unsuspected depths.

Trollinger The favourite grape of Württemberg, giving light red wine consumed in industrial quantities within the region, and regarded with bafflement outside it.

Weisser Burgunder (Pinot Blanc) makes good fresh full-bodied wine in Baden.

Spain & Portugal

Spain and Portugal have been net exporters, rather than importers, of grape varieties. A few of the international varieties have been planted, but they have certainly not yet taken hold in a way that radically alters the wine, whereas their grapes exported to the world include the Palomino (to California, South Africa, and Australia), the Verdelho (to Australia) and, probably, the Carignan, much the most widespread red grape of the South of France.

Traditionally, there are few "varietals" in Spain and Portugal, although, as with elsewhere, this is starting to change. Most wines contain proportions of at least three grapes, balanced for their qualities. The most notable exceptions are the four varietals of Madeira: Sercial, Verdelho, Bual, and Malmsey.

Red Grape Varieties

Agua Santa early ripening red of Bairrada, giving stronger wine than the Baga.

Alfrocheiro Preto prized red variety in Dão and Alentejo.

Alvarelhão Dão variety, and grown for port. Also found in Galicia.

Aragonez variant of Tempranillo, popular in Alentejo.

Azal Tinto red grape with high tartaric acid, used for vinho verde. Baga dark, tannic, potentially noble grape of Bairrada. Gives berry-fruit flavours.

Bastardo a rather pale and low-acid, but aromatic and wellbalanced, grape, used for port and in Dão.

Borraçal red Vinho Verde grape providing high malic acidity. Cabernet Sauvignon (see page 11) increasingly being planted in Spain, e.g. in Penedès for Torres's "Mas la Plana", in Navarra by Sarría, at Vega Sicilia in Ribera del Duero, and by Riscal in Rioja, along with many others.

Cariñena Carignan in France, originated in Cariñena (Aragón) but now more grown in Catalonia.

Castelão a minor Bairrada red, soft and neutral.

Castelão Frances preferred synonym of Periquita since 2002; widely planted grape of southern Portugal.

Cencibel synonym in La Mancha and Valdepeñas for Tempranillo.

Garnacha Tinta used in Rioja Baja for powerful, if pale Riojas, also Penedès, and Navarra, where it dominates. French synonym is Grenache Noir.

Graciano the most elegant and aromatic of Rioja grapes; gives quick-maturing wine.

Jaen a constituent of red Dão.

Mazuelo a Riojan red grape, possibly a synonym for Cariñena. Mencía used in Léon and Galicia for light reds.

Monastrell a widely grown red of good colour and texture, especially in Penedès, the Levante, and Valdepeñas.

Periquita see Castelão Frances.

Pinot Noir (see page 11) Torres grows Pinot for his red "Santa Digna". Also found in Navarra.

Ramisco the tannic, blue-black secret of Colares. Needs very long ageing.

Samsó Penedès variety.

Souzão deeply coloured and excellent port grape.

Tempranillo fine, aromatic, early ripening, and basis for Rioja. Grown throughout Spain under a variety of synonyms.

Tinta Barroca high-yielding but robust port grape.

Tinto Cão low-yielding red variety used for port and Dão.

Tinta Pinheira minor Bairrada variety; pale, low acid, but

Tintorera one of the Valdepeñas grapes.

Touriga Franca perfumed red used for port; previously called Touriga Francesa.

Touriga Nacional deep-coloured, big-yielding port variety, also used in Dão.

Trincadeira gives rich reds in Alentejo; known in the Douro as Tinta Amarela.

Ull de Llebre Penedès synonym for Tempranillo.

Vinhão Vinho verde red grown for its relatively high alcohol.

White Grape Varieties

Airén the main white grape of Valdepeñas and La Mancha. Albariño the best Galician variety for clean, dry, fragrant and often pétillant whites; also grown in Portugal (Alvarinho) for Vinho Verde.

Albillo used, with red grapes, in "Vega Sicilia".

Arinto used for lemony white Dão and Bairrada and to make the rare, dry Bucelas and sweet Carcavelos.

Barcelos recommended white Dão variety.

Bical fragrant and fine Bairrada white, complementary to the sharper Arinto.

Bual sweet Madeira grape, with luscious flavours, also used in Carcavelos and Alentejo.

Chardonnay (see page 10) becoming more established in Spain with wines from Penedès, Somontano, and elsewhere. Also the occasional Portuguese example.

Fernão Pires widely planted aromatic Portuguese white.

Gouveio minor white port variety, thought to be Verdelho.

Lairén see Airén.

Listan synonym of Palomino.

Loureiro high-yielding grape for Vinho Verde.

Macabeo synonym in Catalonia of Viura. For sparkling wines. Malvasia important white grape in port, Rioja, Navarra, Catalonia, and the Canary Islands.

Maria Gomes the principal white grape of Bairrada.

Moscatel widespread sweet wine grape.

Pansa grown in Alella. Synonym of Xarel-lo of Penedès.

Parellada used in Penedès for delicately fruity whites and

Pedro Ximénez grown for blending in Jerez, Málaga, and the principal grape in Montilla: dried, it adds intense sweetness and colour.

Traminer used (with Moscatel) by Torres for "Viña Esmeralda".

Verdelho white Dão variety, better known in Madeira.

Viura the principal grape of white Rioja, also Navarra. Alias

Xarel-lo Catalan grape, important in Penedès.

Zalema main variety in vino generoso of Huelva, being replaced by Palomino.

Southeast & Central Europe

The grape varieties of southeast Europe and the countries fringing the Black Sea are as old as those of the west. The Romans colonized the Danube at the same time as the Rhine. Under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the only wines to reach international fame were those of Hungary, led by Tokaji. The local grapes, therefore, evolved slowly on their own course, making spicy, often sweetish whites and dry tannic reds. The eastern fringes of the Alps in Slovenia, Austria, and north into Bohemia (Czech Republic) are essentially white wine country, dominated by their lowkey namesake, the Riesling (variously known as Italian, Welsch, Olasz or Laski), and Austria by its sappy, vigorous Grüner Veltliner. Hungary is most prolific in native white grapes of strength and style, led by the Furmint of Tokaji. Its red, the Kadarka, is widespread in the Balkans, more recently joined by the Pinot Noir and Gamay. Warmer climates near the Adriatic and Black Seas have reds and sweet whites. The last two decades or so have seen an invasion of classics from the west.

Red & White Grape Varieties

Ezerjó a white variety making fine wine at Mór, in Hungary. Also a bulk producer from the Serbian border region with Hungary and Romania. One of the best Hungarian dry whites.

Furmint classic white grape of Tokaji. (Sipon in Slovenia.)

Hárslevelü second main variety for making Tokaji. Full and aromatic.

Kadarka the common red grape of Hungary, but it is widespread throughout the region, producing a stiff, spicy red that is built especially for ageing. Known as Gamza in Bulgaria.

Kékfrankos (Austrian Blaufränkisch) more reliable than Kadarka and hence being planted as a substitute, especially in Hungary.

Kéknyelü white low-yielding variety of Hungary's vineyards north of Lake Balaton, making concentrated golden-green

Kraski Teran the Refosco of Italy, makes crisp, tangy red in Slovenia.

Leányka delicate, dry white esp. from Eger in the north of Hungary.

Lunel (or Yellow) Muscat Sargamuskotály in Hungarian. One of the four grape varieties permitted for use in Tokaji.

Mavrud makes Bulgaria's best red, dark and plummy, can last twenty years.

Mezesfehér Hungarian white grape ("little honey") but less grown now.

Misket indigenous to Bulgaria, both red and white often used to make a fatter blend.

Muscat Ottonel the East European Muscat, a specialty of

Olaszrizling Hungarian name for Riesling Italico. Widely planted. Grasevina in Slovenia and Croatia.

Oremus Furmint x Bouvier, authorized for use in Tokaji since 1994.

Plovdina dark-skinned red grape, native to Macedonia.

Prokupac red grape of Serbia and Macedonia, blended to make Zupsko Crno, and much used to make rosé.

Rebula (or Ribolla) an Italian export which makes slightly creamy yellow wine in Slovenia.

Rkatsiteli Russian variety that is good for for strong white wines, preferred sweet by local market. Also used in notheast Bulgaria.

St Laurent deep-coloured variety, of Alsatian origin, but now found only in Austria and Germany.

Saperavi variety indigenous to Georgia, giving intense, peppery wines akin to Syrah.

Smederevka chief white of Serbia and Kosovo for fresh dry

Szürkebarát a form of Pinot Gris grown in the Badacsonyi region of Hungary for rich, not necessarily sweet, wine.

Vranac makes vigorous reds in Montenegro.

Zilavka white variety with faint apricot flavour, grown in southern Serbia.

Zweigelt red grape making deep-coloured, pleasantly scented, spicy wine, especially in Austria.