

Wine in Easy English

What's For English Dot Com

How to use this transcript:

The transcript does not match the voice on the podcast exactly. But it follows all the main ideas and details. For good listening comprehension, you should read the transcript first (or skim through it quickly) and then listen to the audio.

Pre-Questions

1. What kind of white wine do you like?
2. Can you name some white wine grapes? Which of the following is NOT a white grape:
3. Sauvignon Blanc Chardonnay Syrah Riesling Sylvaner
4. What sorts of aromas do you like in white wine? Citrus Fruit (grapefruit, lemon); Tropical Fruit (pineapple, mangosteen); Butter-vanilla; Mineral aromas
5. Do you think that many white wines are beginning to taste alike?
6. What do you think are some key differences in white wines from France vs. those from California or Australia?

A Tale of Two Tasting Notes

Hello and welcome back to wine in easy english. I'm Gerald Wright.

The question I'd like to ask you today is what do you think has more influence on the taste of a wine? Would it be fashion and consumer demand? Or would it be **terroir**.

In the podcast today I'm going to talk a little bit about the influence of fashion and consumer demand on wine vs. the influence of terroir on wine. But most of this podcast as well as the next podcast will be about wine from a particular place. But I'm not going to tell you about which place that is until a bit later.

In this podcast, I'll also read a few **tasting notes**. In this way I will begin a new theme - the words we use to describe the tastes and smells or aromas in wine. But today we are really going to just touch on that theme a little bit.

I'd like to begin today by reading a couple of tasting notes. I found them on the internet. Listen carefully. Can you tell what grape or grapes these wines are made from? From the tasting notes, can you tell if the wines belong to any particular place?

Terroir: the "taste" of the climate, soil or other environmental conditions on a wine.

Tasting note: a description or assessment of the taste of a wine - usually written by a "professional" or well-educated wine taster.

Here's the first tasting note.

Light yellow-green; complex **aromas** of attractive butter, tropical pineapple, peach and minerals; lightly sweet flavors, fruity and tropical, slightly candied with mineral; soft **mouthfeel**, light to medium **body** with some richness; **balanced** but slightly tart, a long **finish**, 13.9%. Pleasing, complex style; very nice wine, although some panelists thought a little too **oaky**.

OK? You got that? Maybe not.

Now I'll read the second tasting note. Could this wine be made from the same grape?

Pale, bright gold color; A clean, mineral and perfumed nose, with flinty flavors of grapefruit. Takes a little while **to open up**, but then it's vibrant, with granite notes and a hard mineral edge. Tart fruit curls around the edges of that mineral core, and extends into an impressively long finish. A true food wine, with clean flavors and great balance.

Both tasting notes follow a similar pattern. They begin by describing the color.

They move on to describe the nose of each wine.

Then they talked about taste and mouth feel.

And they finished off with the finish. The "finish" refers to how the wine tastes after you swallow it; the flavors that remain in the mouth.

OK any guesses as to grape? Could both of these notes be from wines made of the same grape? Tropical fruit flavors compared with tart fruit? One of them with a soft mouthfeel and the other with more granite character? Well they are both from the same grape. Yes, indeed. They are both Chardonnay.

Aroma: what you smell in a wine - in particular the smells related to the grapes and juice rather than winemaking technique or aging.

Mouthfeel: the texture of the wine in your mouth - i.e. soft, creamy, sharp, full, etc.

Body: an aspect of mouthfeel - the weight of the wine in the mouth - i.e. "full bodied," "light bodied."

Balance: the balance between alcoholic strength, acidity, residual sugar and tannin.

Finish: the flavors you pick up as you swallow the wine.

Oaky: adjective for a wine that has had too much oak treatment.

To open up: Some wines give off little aroma when first poured in a glass - but after contact with air, the aromas come out - the wine opens up.

The first is a California Chardonnay. In fact, the note described a 1999 Acacia Chardonnay from Carneros in Napa. But it could have been describing any one of hundreds of chardonnay wines that come from California - or Australia, or Chile, or Argentina or even France. Tropical fruit flavors, some vanilla and somewhat sweet. This is the international style of Chardonnay - a result of strong consumer demand and intense global competition. Do you like this style? Lots of people do. Or has it turned you into an ABC?

An ABC is a person who will prefer anything but chardonnay.

The second note describes a Chardonnay that is most definitely a product of the local terroir. And this wine is a Chablis.

The wine in the tasting note was a Christian Moreau Chablis 2004. - just a village Chablis not a premier or grand **cru**. But many aspects of the wine - such as the minerality and citrus fruit flavors and high acid - you would expect to find in almost all Chablis.

Good Chablis will be refreshingly crisp and zesty, with fruit that is more **citrus** than **tropical**. It's famous for a flinty or chalky mineral character that underlies good Chablis makes it a great food wine. This minerality is sometimes described as flint or chalk but also granite, gravel or wet rocks. For those of you who are used to the international style of Chardonnay, it may take some time to get used to. But once you develop a taste for this kind of character, you will look for it. And it goes well with all sorts of fish or shell fish - even sushi and sashimi.

Since I have a few minutes, let's talk a little more about that international style of Chardonnay. Again, what are the characteristics of that style? Fruit that tends to be more tropical - pineapple or mangosteen. And then that buttery vanilla character on the nose, the sweetness and the full, rich, luscious mouthfeel.

Cru: French word for vineyard - especially a special vineyard. In English, we may use the word "growth." -- Premier Cru = First Growth.

Citrus: flavors or aromas of citrus fruits (oranges, lemons, grapefruits)

Tropical: flavors or aromas of tropical fruits (pineapple, mango, lychee)

Acidity: the fresh, tart or sour tastes in wine.



Of course, the warmer climates in California or Australia have an effect on the wines. These new world chardonnays will have a harder time matching the **acidity** of Chablis. On the other hand, new world winemakers have been planting much more chardonnay in the cooler locations - like Carneros, the Sonoma Coast, Monterrey, to name a few. Cooler climate increases the acidity in the wines. But even if the acid is higher, the international style of chardonnay is dominated by the very heavy use of oak treatment in order for the wines to develop that vanilla butteriness that seems to be so popular.

Barrel fermentation. Aging in new wooden barrels. This leads to the vanilla butteriness. Or if the producers are making wine in larger quantities and they want to cut costs, they don't have to use the wooden barrels; they can put wood chips into the large tanks that the wines are aging in and that will get this vanilla character at a much lower price. Sometimes they let the wine spend more time sitting on the lees (Lees refers to the sediments from the grape must) this leads to a richer complexity.

Interestingly, there are a number of producers in Chablis who are using many of the same techniques - barrel fermentation, aging in wooden barrels, and letting the wine sit on the lees. (But NOT soaking the wine with wood chips!) But in Chablis it is almost like they have to do these things just so they can make their wines a little bit softer. Yet the wines will not develop that international character that is so pronounced in the other wines.

Finally, to further conform to the international style, the winemakers may leave some residual sugar - so that the wines will be a bit sweeter; and, lastly, they can work at getting the wine to be higher in alcohol. High alcohol wines will feel more intense in the mouth.

In some cases, it requires a lot of delicate, expensive labor intense work to make wines like this. To be sure, many of these wines are not bad wines - they just conform to a style that is boring many more discriminating wine drinkers.

Chardonnay does not have to taste like that Acacia Chardonnay - even though it is made in such a popular style. If you want more character from your Chardonnay, try Chablis.

In my next podcast I'll talk more in detail about Chablis. Where the place is located; what's special about the terroir; what to expect from the different categories or crus of wine from Chablis.

Post Questions:

1. **T F** Most Chardonnays made in California, Australia and Chile have a unique taste that is clearly different from each other.
2. In a Chardonnay made in the "international style," you might expect to find:
 - A. Aromas of tropical fruit; strong hints of butter or vanilla; some sweetness on the finish and higher alcohol.
 - B. Aromas of tropical forests, peanut butter and marshmallows.
 - C. Citrus fruit, mineral or stony aromas and low alcohol.
 - D. Highly complex aromas and flavors and finish.
3. **T F** A good Chablis should be crisp and zesty with a recognizable mineral character.
4. **T F** Chablis is best as an aperitif.
5. **T F** An oaky character is the result of grapes growing in a cool climate.
6. **T F** A cheaper way to add oak to wine is to put wood chips into the bottles.
7. **T F** "ABC" means "anything but Chardonnay."
8. **T F** The "international style" is a way of making cheap Chardonnay.
9. **T F** The "international style" is the result of intense competition and high demand.
10. **T F** Chablis wines are naturally high in acid.

Choose the correct word so that the sentences are correct.

1. This wine has some nice _____ - tropical fruit - even a little mineral.
A. oaks B. aromas C. tastes D. characters
2. Do you agree with the description in that tasting _____?
A. bottle B. book C. note D. sheet
3. I love the honey character that's starting to come out now that the wine is _____.

A. opening up around. B. opening out C. opening in D. opening

4. This wine is too high in _____. It's much too sour.

A. alcohol B. acid C. oak D. residual sugar

5. The _____ character in this Chablis is amazing. It's like drinking wine with rocks in your mouth.

A. mineral B. sweet C. oak D. aroma

Answers

1. F; 2. A; 3. T; 4. F; 5. F; 6. F; 7. T; 8. F; 9. T; 10. T.

1. B; 2. C; 3. A; 4. B; 5. A.