

## What's For English? Wine in Easy English

### Color and Aroma



Wide range of color (Photo by Gerald)

### Pre-Questions

1. Which sense do you rely on most when you taste wine: sight, smell or taste?
2. Before you taste wine, do you look at the color and check out the nose?
3. What colors in wine really attract you?
4. Do you find it easy to identify the aromas in wine - or do all wines smell vaguely "fruity," "woody," "old," or "young?"
5. What do you enjoy smelling in wine - fruit? Earthiness? Sweet smells? Alcohol?
6. Do you like aromatic wines?

*You will hear the following words in this podcast:*

*Color, hue, shade, clarity, opacity, viscosity, nose, aroma, aromatic, bouquet, odor.*

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Hello and welcome back to Wine in Easy English. I'm Gerald Wright.

Sometimes I hear wine described as sensuous... sometimes as sensual. Sensuous... Sensual... Is there a difference?

According to the dictionary I'm looking at, sensuous refers to the information you pick up through your five senses. You experience wine mainly through your senses of sight, smell and taste - though touch and even hearing can play a role, too. When you pay attention to the color of a wine or try to determine what a wine really smells like, you are dealing with wine as a sensuous experience.

But sensual is more about stimulating your senses - **delighting** your senses - **titillating** them; it's about the pleasure you get through your senses. Pleasure, titillation... **gratification**. You might hear the words hedonism and hedonistic in relation to certain wines. **Hedonism** is when you think only about your own pleasure. A hedonist loves pleasing him or herself with the best stuff. A hedonistic wine is a wine that gives total pleasure. So, yes, some wines can be very sensual - and that's what a hedonist is looking for.

I hate to tell you, but today we're not going for the sensual: like what wine to serve your lover on a romantic valentine's day evening.... We'll have to do that some other time. Rather I'd like to talk about the sensuous - and talk about how we describe the taste, smell and color of wine. It's a huge topic. So I'll try to keep it simple. In this podcast, I'll talk about what you see and what you smell in a glass of wine - that is color and aroma. Next time I'd like to take more about taste and flavor.

You experience wine through your senses, so naturally the way you describe your experience with a wine is to describe how the wine looks, smells, tastes - and maybe even feels.

Your eyes go to work first. There's actually quite a lot to look at in a glass of wine. Color - or **hue**; clarity, opacity, and viscosity. Wine color is influenced by grape variety, wine making and age. Grapes come in many different hues or shades, so the wines will, too. So many shades of red and purple; so many shades of yellow and gold. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes are dark purple - almost black.

But Grenache grapes are blue - sometimes tinged with a little pink. Chardonnay grapes are green; but Gewurtztraminer grapes are reddish-pink - even though Gewurtztraminer wine is white. Color changes as wines get older. So a young Cabernet may be deep, dark red - almost purple. But an older one will look more and more like the color of red bricks. White wines may go increasingly golden as they age.

Now let's talk about clarity. Clarity refers to how clear or transparent the wine is. White wines are naturally more transparent than reds; so with red wine we might talk more about the degree of opacity. But white wines that have not been **filtered** will have less clarity; they'll be less transparent.

**To delight (v); a delight (n); delightful (adj).**

*Their new Chardonnay is a real delight. The '08 Chardonnay will delight you. I was delighted by the new '08 Chardonnay. The '08 Chardonnay is delightful.*

**To titillate:** to excite or arouse...

*The new Britney Spears video was titillating at times, but not very good.*

**Gratification (n); to gratify (v)**

*The '07 Pinots offer instant gratification. You can drink them immediately.*

**Hedonism (n); hedonist (n); hedonistic (adj).**

*If you are a hedonist, you will love the Turley Zins.*



Cabernet Sauvignon (photo posted on [Wikipedia Commons](#))



Grenache (photo by John McFadden/[Wikipedia Commons](#))

In fact, they may even be cloudy. And while some people believe that **unfiltered** wines are more flavorful - cloudy wines certainly don't look very inviting. Clarity and Transparency: how well you see through the wine; Opacity: the degree to which you cannot see through the wine. Some reds - especially the Bordeaux varieties can be quite opaque - especially when they're young. This opacity will decrease with age; these wines will become clearer. Syrah, Zinfandel and Malbec can be thick and dark. Now you probably think of Malbec as a wine of Argentina. But in France Malbec used to be associated with one particular region: Cahors - and it was known as "the black wine of Cahors." Obviously these wines are way high in opacity. Opacity is not just related to grape variety, though. It can be a sign of heavy extraction. Remember when we talked about **maceration** in the podcast on Rose? More maceration - or fermenting the juice with the berries will extract more stuff out of the grapes and the wine will be heavy with extracted fruit.

Earlier I mentioned viscosity. What's viscosity. Viscosity is the quality of

a liquid - or qualities in a liquid - that make the liquid thicker or more syrupy. Swirl your wine around the glass and look at what happens to the wine on the side of the glass. If you see thick drops of wine slowly sliding down along the edge of the glass, that wine's pretty high in viscosity. Some people call the little drops dribbling down the legs. You might say, "this wine's got great legs!" If you do see a lot of viscosity, that could be a sign of high alcohol - but it could also be a wine with more residual sugar - as in a sweet desert wine.

So we've mentioned color or hue, clarity, opacity, and viscosity. One more pleasure for the eyes - but only in a very special type of wine: bubbles! You definitely judge your Champagne or other sparkling wines by the amount of tiny bubbles foaming up to the surface.



Clarity and a light golden hue.  
(Photo by Gerald)



Maceration (Photo by Agne21 on [Wikipedia Commons](#))



Deep red and fairly opaque  
(Photo by Gerald)

Let's move on now to another one of our senses - perhaps the very most important: our sense of smell. So you've picked up your glass and taken in the color, clarity or opacity of the wine. Then you **swirl** the bowl around a few times - to release the aromas from the wine into the glass - and stick your nose in and breathe in. You might inhale deeply - or maybe take a few short sniffs. Now you're dealing with the nose. I don't mean YOUR nose (which is important) - but more importantly, THE nose; that is all those wonderful and powerful aromas and odors that are in a glass of wine. This is where wine is so complex and wonderful because the array of aromas you find in each wine makes that wine so unique - and often so hard **to pin down**.

Let's talk about that word aroma. It's really a word we use for things that smell nice - the more pleasant odors - especially those associated with spices or cooking. So if you smell something really unpleasant, like something stinky in a child's diaper, you're not going to say, "What's that aroma?" You're more likely to say, "What's that smell?" Or "Something stinks!" But aromas - that's what you smell in fresh pot of coffee or in a woman's perfume.

With wine there are two words used a lot: aroma and bouquet. Probably most people **use these two words interchangeably**. The aromas in this Chianti; the bouquet in that Champagne. But some people do **make a careful distinction**. Aromas are the smells that derive from the fruit, from the grapes themselves. But the bouquet comes out of the winemaking (maybe the fermentation or barrel contact) and also the aging in the bottle. So I pick up a glass of young Zinfandel and it's full of aromas of blackberries or maybe cherries and plums; but in a glass of a much older Zin, I get a bouquet of earthiness and dried fruits - dried figs or raisins.

Related to the word aroma is aromatic. Really all wine is aromatic - because all wine has aromas - lots and lots of aromas. But some wines have aromatic qualities that really **stand out**. Check out the nose of Gewurtztraminer, Riesling, or Viognier. Your brain may really begin to swirl. By contrast, the nose of a Chardonnay may be a bit more neutral - or nuanced (that is, subtle, not so obvious, harder to pin down.) So white wines made from Gewurtztraminer, Riesling, Viognier - and several others - these are sometimes called aromatic whites.

So what is it that you smell in a glass of wine? Where do all those aromas come from? Well they come from the grapes first of all. And certain grape varieties are associated with certain aromas such as black currant or cassis in Cabernet or lychee fruit in Gewurtztraminer or raspberries and spices in Grenache. But it quickly becomes a lot more complicated. How ripe was the fruit? Did they separate the berries from the stems? Did they remove rotten and unripe berries before crushing? All these choices will affect the future aromas in the wine. Characteristics of the vineyards - the terroir - add their own aromas. We talked about flint and mineral in podcasts on Chablis.

**Filtered / Unfiltered:** whether or not a wine has undergone **filtration** - the process of increasing clarity by removing sediment and particles.

**To swirl (v):** to rotate (a wine glass)

**To pin down:** to comprehend; to figure out.

**To use interchangeably:** to use different words to mean the same same thing.

**To make a distinction:** to consider two similar things to be different.

**To stand out:** To be different, unique

But you might note aromas of **kerosene** in Rieslings produced along the Rhine River, or grassiness in New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc; pepper and even bacon fat in Syrah of the Northern Rhone. Obviously winemaking gets in there as well. How are the grapes fermented: in wood, stainless steel or cement tanks? Does the winery maintain hospital-like conditions of cleanliness? Or is it a traditional, **bacteria-laden** dirty old cellar.

**Kerosene:** type of fuel

**Bacteria-laden:** full of bacteria

Well - it's too complicated to go further. And if you find trying to identify the aromas in a glass of wine too overwhelming, there's a device that can help. It's called the [Aroma Wheel](#). It was developed by Ann Noble, a professor at University of California at Davis. All it does really is to break down larger categories of aroma into smaller and smaller components. So, you've got your glass of white wine and the aromas seem "Fruity," but you're not sure which fruit. So you look at the Aroma Wheel, and you notice that "Fruity" breaks down into Citrus, Berry, Tree Fruit, Tropical Fruit, Dried Fruit and Other. OK...Take another sniff of the wine, and the fruit doesn't remind you of berries. Maybe it's a little tropical, but not too much. But Tree Fruit seems to be more accurate. Tree Fruit then breaks down further into Cherry, Apricot, Peach and Apple. Peach! That's it. There's a good chance you're tasting Viognier or perhaps Riesling. The Aroma Wheel may help you identify nasty or bad odors in wine as well. You might smell something that seems not quite right and the Aroma Wheel helps you realize it's the smell of a Moldy Cork (in the Earthy category) or a Burnt Match (in the "Chemical" category.)

I can't include the Aroma Wheel on my blog; the author works pretty hard at protecting her copyright. But just google it and you'll find it, or you'll find other aroma wheels - even aroma wheels that include both aromas and flavors.

Well... I'm going to bring this podcast to an end. We've covered some words and expressions related to color. So you can say things like: "The color makes me think this is an older wine." Or: "Look at how opaque this wine is!" Or "Nice clarity in this Pinot." And if you're going to talk about aromas, you can say "I'm getting some nice spice and pepper aromas here."

And on and on it goes. Next time, we'll talk about taste and flavor.

Fruity					
Citrus	Tropical	Tree Fruit	Berry	Dried Fruit	Other
Lemon Grapefruit	Pineapple Banana Melon	Cherry Apricot Peach Apple	Blackberry Raspberry Strawberry Black Currant Blueberry	Strawberry jam Raisin Fig Prune	Artificial fruit

How the Aroma Wheel breaks down "Fruity"

## Comprehension Questions

*Choose True / False*

1. The color of wine changes as it grows older. **True False**
2. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes are dark purple - almost black. **True False**
3. Clarity refers to how dark the color of a wine is. **True False**
4. Opacity refers to how dense the wine is or difficult it is to see through. **True False**
5. A cloudy wine may be one that is unfiltered. **True False**
6. Clarity is a characteristic of white wines only. **True False**
7. Heavily extracted wines may look opaque. **True False**
8. Viscosity could be a sign of high alcohol. **True False**
9. When you describe the aromas in a wine, you are describing the nose. **True False**
10. The nose refers to all the pleasant smells in a wine. **True False**
11. According to experts, aroma and bouquet mean the same thing. **True False**
12. Bouquet are the smells that derive from winemaking and aging processes. **True False**
13. Some white wines are "aromatic whites." **True False**
14. What you smell in a wine is almost entirely related to the type of grape. **True False**
15. The aroma wheel was invented to help wine tasters pin down the aromas they pick up in wine. **True False**

*Choose the correct word or word form.*

1. Wine tasting is **sensuous / sensual**.
2. Drinking old vine Zinfandel with dark Godiva chocolate on a rug in front of a fire in a mountain cabin is **sensuous / sensual**.
3. Red wines come in a wide range of **hues / aromas**.
4. "**My nose / The nose** on this wine is wonderful!"

5. "Wow! This Sauvignon Blanc has such gorgeous **clarity / transparency.**"
6. "Can you believe the **opaque / the opacity** in this Malbec!"
7. "This Cotes du Rhone is really **stinky / aromatic** - it smells like a dirty barn."
8. "I love these **aromas / aromatics** of apricot and peach.
9. "This Chardonnay is so **viscosity / viscous.**
10. Cloudy wines may be **unfiltered / filtered.**

#### Answers

1. T; 2. T; 3. F; 4. T; 5. T; 6. F; 7. T; 8. T; 9. T; 10. F; 11. F; 12. T; 13. T; 14. F; 15. T.

1. sensuous; 2. sensual; 3. hues; 4. The nose; 5. clarity; 6. the opacity; 7. stinky; 8. aromas; 9. viscous; 10. unfiltered.