

In the last podcast, we talked about Chardonnay. I mentioned that one particularly interesting example of Chardonnay is made in Chablis. I noted that Chablis wines often exhibit a tart citrus fruit character **on the nose** and they are famous for a stony, mineral, chalk or granite character. Chablis wines really do **express** the conditions of the vineyards there. Chablis is a really great example of a terroir.

So you might be interested in learning a little bit more about Chablis and what it is about Chablis that influences the wines so much. I'm going to talk about the vineyards in Chablis and a little bit about the winemaking.

Where is Chablis located? Chablis is a small town or village in Burgundy, halfway between Dijon and Paris. If you were to look at a map, you would notice that the heart of the Burgundy wine making region is quite far away from Chablis.

Unfortunately many consumers around the world may be confused about the wine, Chablis. And that's because some giant Californian and Australian producers have used the name "Chablis" for some of their cheapest, lowest quality white wines. That's right - even though Chablis is the name of a place - a place in France, these producers have been using the name **to denote** a certain style of white wine. So never, never buy a California wine that is labeled Chablis. And soon you might not be able to do that anymore. The reason is that finally the United States has finally signed a treaty that will make it illegal to use the name of a place that is associated with a particular product on a product in the United States. In other words, they will no longer be allowed to make American "Port," or American "Champagne," or "Chianti," or "Burgundy," or "Chablis."

You don't have to be confused about the real Chablis wine because they are ranked among some of the greatest, **age-worthy** French wines. Chablis wines are uniformly excellent, **food-friendly**, and, because of the global competition, often sell for less than they could be selling for.

Let me talk a little more about the wine in Chablis.

On the nose: what you smell in a wine you get "on the nose." (not IN the nose.)

To express: to show or reveal

To denote: to be a sign of; to mean



California "Chablis" in a jug. *Do not buy junk like this!!*

The soil in Chablis and amount of sunlight that vineyards can get are the two major factors that influence the quality of Chablis.

As wine regions go, Chablis is quite far to the north. It's one of those districts where the weather can change a lot from year to year, so it's a good idea to know something about **vintages**. But the weather can also change a lot during the growing season. Summers can get quite warm, but chilly temperatures can also come about when the grapes are trying to get ripe. Cold temperatures are also a concern during the springtime. If you have a **frost** when the **buds** are just popping out, you can destroy the grape crop for that year. For these reasons, the best vineyards face the sun - on South and south west slopes. The soil of Chablis is also important. Apparently there are two distinct types of soil there. In fact, you could say there are two distinct **geological formations** that come together in Chablis. One of these soil types is a limestone soil that brims with fossilized shells and sea creatures. Long ago, this area was under the ocean. This limestone soil is called Kimmeridgian, and it's responsible for the famous flinty or chalky mineral character of the wine. The other soil type is called Portlandian. It's similar to the Kimmeridgian, but the wines made from grapes grown on the Portlandian soil supposedly have less **finesse**. The best vineyards have the Kimmeridgian soil.

The best vineyards in Chablis face the sun and have the best soil, and they are also located on the higher slopes. Almost all the vineyards in Chablis are on hills rather than on flat land. And the best vineyards are at the top of the hills. On the steep slopes, rainwater drains quickly, and the grape yields remain low. One important belief in viticulture is that when soil conditions are poor, grape vines have to struggle to get water and nutrients. When they struggle more, they produce fewer grapes - but these grapes will have much better **concentration** and make better wine.

In Chablis, vineyards are ranked - some vineyards are known for having the best conditions for making great wine; other vineyards are known to make good wine - but not consistently the best.

Vintage: The year a wine is produced.

Frost: freezing temperatures.

Buds: The new leaves that emerge in spring; leaf buds.

Geological formation: the Kimmeridgian basin is a geological formation that stretches across northern France to England.

Finesse: delicacy, subtlety, elegance (nice qualities in classy wines!).

Concentration: the amount of substances in a solution (Wine - higher concentration = less watery).



Vineyard in Kimmeridgian soil

The categories are:

Chablis Grand Cru
Chablis Premier Cru
AC Chablis
Petit Chablis

Grand Cru means that the wines are made from vineyards with the very highest status. There are 7 grand cru vineyards - and they are all located on the same hill just above the village of Chablis. You will often see this hill in photographs of Chablis. If you buy a Grand Cru, you will notice that the label will state the name of the vineyard. And the label will also say, "Chablis Grand Cru."



Chablis Grand Cru
Vineyards planted on
steep slopes.

The second rank of Chablis is known as "Chablis Premier Cru." There are some 40 Premier cru vineyards. These vineyards also tend to face the south, and they are meant to have the same type of soil as the Grand Cru vineyards. Perhaps they are on lower slopes where there is less **drainage**. Or the soil may not be quite as good - perhaps it has fewer of the fossilized sea creatures in it! The premier cru vineyards are also scattered around the village on various hills rather than all located on the same hill. The Premier Cru wines are also made from single vineyards, and the labels will carry the names of the vineyards.

Drainage: The system of draining.

Single vineyard: sometimes grapes from special vineyards are made into wine separately (rather than *blended*). These are *single vineyard* wines.

Montrachet Vineyard: Extremely famous vineyard in Chassagne-Montrachet, another part of Burgundy.

Let me say something about **single vineyards** in this part of France. So when you get into these wines, you may begin to recognize the names of some of these famous vineyards. There are names like "Les Clos," or "Bougros" or "Fouchaume" or "Vaillons" are the names of single vineyards. But why is it that the houses of Christian Moreau, Brocard, Domaine Pinson, Joseph Drouhin and many more all claim to have wine made from the grapes of "Les Clos?" If you are used to California wines you know that famous single vineyards are usually owned by one producer. Or one producer gets to use all the grapes from that vineyard. Well, that's not the case in France - especially Burgundy. Because of very complicated inheritance laws almost all the famous vineyards are owned by several or even dozens of families. One family might even own just a few rows of vines (but, hey, a few rows of the **Montrachet Vineyard** wouldn't be bad). And these families may sell their grapes to one wine producer or to several wine producers. So this is why a range of producers can produce wines from the same vineyard. Now because of the theory of terroir, the important characteristics of the vineyard should be present in the wine of any producer.. And if you are a real connoisseur you should be able to detect what that is... But don't ask me! If I can just guess that a wine is Chablis, I'll be happy!

Back to the Grand Cru and Premier Cru wines. These are very special wines. The Grand Cru and the Premier Cru to a lesser extent are well known for being tight and closed when you first pour them into a glass. "Closed" means that even after you pour the wine into the glass and you stick your nose into it, you can't smell anything. If it's a poor quality wine, you may never be able to smell anything. But with these great wines of Chablis, after a few minutes, you'll begin to notice them opening up. They will evolve in your glass. The nose will change character. In fact, some people even recommend **decanting**. If the wine has more contact with air, the wine will open up faster. When you pour such "nectar of the gods" into your glass, let it sit for a while: you may notice the flinty-mineral character evolve into aromas of honey and fruit. Try to resist the urge to drink it all in one gulp!

Because these wines are rather special and made in small quantities, they will be rather expensive. Chablis Premier Cru in the United States probably starts around twenty five - thirty dollars a bottle; and the Grand Cru, probably higher than that. But in my opinion, these great wines of Chablis are priced a lot lower than the great white wines of other parts of France. And they are priced a lot lower than some of the expensive white wines of California. I'd much rather drink one of these Chablis wines.

The good news is that you don't have to spend a lot of money to taste Chablis because its perfectly reasonable to drink the wine of the third rank of Chablis - the basic, "village" Chablis. This is wine made from other vineyards around town. Some people would call this AC Chablis. AC stands for **Appellation Controlee** - and that means that the wine conforms to the rules of that area. The labels cannot name the vineyards. The wine may be made of a blend of several vineyards. While not quite as complex as the wine from the cru vineyards, Chablis offers you a subtle-yet-powerful, zesty and refreshing taste of what some of the greatest French white wines are all about.

The fourth category of Chablis is called Petit Chablis. It tends to be not so highly recommended - but I suppose the prices would be low, too. The Petit Chablis vineyards appear to be on the outer edges of the district. The soil of all the Petit Chablis vineyards is meant to be the Portlandian rather than the Kimmeridgian.

Decanting: pouring wine into a decanter - to allow contact with air.

Appellation Controlee: (appellation d'origine controlee (AOC) - "controlled term of origin." Certification from the French government that a product conforms to the standards of a particular locale.

Winemaking

One consideration in winemaking is whether or not you will expose your wine to wood - and, if you do, how much wood - or even what kind of wood. Wood is a way to add character to wine - and while too much wood is a problem in some places - almost all wine (especially red) will have some contact with wood. Wood is important - in most wine. One interesting aspect of Chablis, however, is that it is one of the only high quality French white wines that will not necessarily see any wood at all. A lot of the producers do not use wood in the fermentation - they prefer stainless steel. And many of them will use no wood barrels at all in aging the wine. There is a debate in Chablis about wood. Some producers believe wood will mask the famous flinty character of the wine. But others believe that at least a certain amount of wood plays with that character in more complex ways.

In the past, all the wines were fermented in large wooden or cement tanks. But today the majority of Chablis producers ferment their wines in stainless steel tanks. The advantages of stainless steel are that it is clean - no messy bacteria - and that control the temperature during fermentation. In stainless steel they can also better control the secondary or malolactic fermentation. This is a necessary step in Chablis because it tones down the bite of the very high acid. But as I said some producers do also ferment their wines in wooden vats.

Well... I could talk more about winemaking in Chablis... but I think this podcast has gone on a little too long already. Chablis is a big appellation so you should be able to find some wherever you live.



Wooden barrels in Chablis



Stainless steel tanks

Post Questions: Comprehension

1. Where is Chablis located?
 - A. In the center of Burgundy.
 - B. Near Paris
 - C. In California
 - D. Between Dijon and Paris

2. Why may consumers be confused about Chablis?
 - A.They may believe it's a "style" of California white wine.
 - B.They think it's too expensive.
 - C.They think it's a grape.
 - D.They think it's a sweet wine.

3. Two very important factors in the quality of chablis are
 - A.Minerality and citrus character
 - B.Soil and amount of sunlight
 - C.Vineyard management and winemaking
 - D.Limestone soil and fossilized sea creatures

4. What is Kimmeridgian?
 - A.A vineyard in Chablis.
 - B.A wine producer in Chablis
 - C.A type soil in Chablis.
 - D.A cold weather condition in Chablis.

5. Why are the best vineyards are planted on steep slopes?
 - A.They get more rain.
 - B.Rainwater drains away quickly.
 - C.The temperatures are warmer.
 - D.There are more nutrients in the soil.

6. A Grand Cru is
 - A.Wine made from one of the top vineyards.
 - B.Wine blended from the best grapes.
 - C.Wine made in new barrels
 - D.Wine made from a mountain vineyard.

7. When a wine is made from grapes of one particular vineyard, it's called
 - A.A.C. Chablis
 - B.Premier Cru
 - C.A single vineyard wine
 - D.Mountain grown

8. In Chablis, how is it that several wine producers can all make wine from the same Grand Cru or Premier Cru vineyard?
 - A.They invested in the vineyard together.
 - B.They can sell off unwanted wine to each other.
 - C.Some of them cheat by falsely using famous names on their labels.
 - D.The vineyards are owned by multiple owners.

9. When a wine is "closed" it means,
 A.The cork is difficult to pull out.
 B.The wine is very high quality.
 C.The wine has gone bad.
 D.It's difficult to detect aroma.
10. T. F. Soon California producers will not be allowed to use "Chablis" on their white wine labels.
11. T. F. Cold temperatures can be a problem in Chablis in both Spring and Fall.
12. T. F. Decanting will help a wine to open up.
13. T. F. A wine labeled as "Appellation Controlee" means it is from one of the villages in Chablis.
14. T. F. The lesser quality vineyards are probably planted on the the Portlandian soil.
15. T. F. Most Chablis wine has some contact with wood.
16. T. F. Stainless steel tanks are cleaner than wood tanks or barrels.
17. T. F. Malolactic fermentation increases acidity in wine.

With my dinner last night, I enjoyed a great bottle of Chablis. **On / In** the nose I got a wonderful **minerality / mineral** character - grapefruit - even lime. The wine was quite **large-bodied / full-bodied** and ended with a long **finish / finisher**. **On / At** the finish the fruit tasted a little like pear - or even hazelnuts. It was a wonderfully dry wine - very **food-friend / food-friendly**. I think I should buy some more - because it ought to **age / aged** well - if I can resist the urge to drink it up!

Answers:

1. D; 2. A; 3. B; 4. C. 5; B; 6. A; 7. A; 8. D; 9. D; 10. T; 11. T. 12. T. 13. F. 14. T.
 15. F; 16. T; 17. F.

With my dinner last night, I enjoyed a great bottle of Chablis. **On** the nose I got a wonderful **mineral** character - grapefruit - even lime. The wine was quite **full-bodied** and ended with a long **finish**. **On** the finish the fruit tasted a little like pear - or even hazelnuts. It was a wonderfully dry wine - very **food-friendly**. I think I should buy some more - because it ought to **age** well - if I can resist the urge to drink it up!