lesson 1

what is wine?

What Makes Wine *Wine* • How Wine Is Made • Wine Types

Wine is an amazing journey through time, history, religion, climate, love, war, and fashion. It lends itself beautifully to any level of involvement, from sipping a simple glass of rosé on the back porch to traveling to the great wine centers of Europe and coming home laden with exotic wines. Wine is one of the most rewarding hobbies you can explore: There's always more to learn, more to experience—more to taste!

Unfortunately, the subject of wine intimidates many people. Some folks have grown shy of wine because they believe that there are "right" and "wrong" ways to enjoy it.

In addition to presenting you with good, basic wine information, our goal in this book is to encourage you to trust your judgment. If you find that you like red wine with fish instead of white, or you discover that you prefer your white wines at room temperature instead of chilled, or you decide to serve a dessert wine with your meal, we want you to feel free to do so. Remember, wine is fun!

WHAT MAKES WINE SPECIAL

Strictly speaking, wine is the fermented juice of any kind of fruit (like peaches, pears, or mulberries), grain (for instance, rice in sake), or plant (such as dandelion). In this book, we're going to talk only about wine made from grapes. But wine is much more than its physical components. It's an adventure, a challenge to the senses, a chance to immerse yourself in the pleasure of the moment. It's an ever-changing kaleidoscope of culture and craftsmanship, art and agriculture. In places where wine has been made for centuries, it is interwoven in the history, the land, and the lifestyles of the people who produce it.

Wine is also the world's most romanticized beverage. Poets and sages across time have praised its effects on the human spirit. Wine is almost synonymous with celebration and good living; its mere presence on the dinner table brings a festive atmosphere to a meal. Ask yourself, have you ever had a bad day drinking Champagne?

The Sensations of Drinking Wine

Drinking wine is an adventure that affects the senses in a complex variety of ways. Before the wine even touches your lips, you drink it in with your eyes. You appreciate the color and clarity of a newly poured glass of wine, whether it's a golden Sauternes, a ruby red Cabernet Sauvignon, or a Riesling so sheer and pale that it's almost transparent. Wine catches the light, reflects and glorifies the world around it, and tells the stories of its journey to your glass.

Wine impacts your sense of smell most profoundly. Any given wine contains hundreds of aromatic compounds that manifest themselves in unique combinations, allowing the "nose" of the wine to inspire its own language. No one could set a limit on the number of terms one could use to describe wine, but we can recognize a common structure in most wines and then identify subtle nuances, depending on hundreds of variables.

Wine's flavor is not just its sensation on the tongue, but the combined effect on the taste buds and nasal receptors. Have you ever tried to drink wine when you had a head cold? It's disappointing. Without its subtle aromas, wine's flavors become one-dimensional. Your mouth tastes only the basics: the wine's relative sweetness, acidity (sourness), and bitterness. But your nose processes its complex aromas.

Your sense of touch is part of the wine-drinking experience, too. Wine lovers talk of the "mouthfeel" of a wine: whether it's light, medium, or heavy in body and whether it's oily, sheer (like silk in your mouth), angular, chewy, or any number of other descriptors. You can enjoy wine with four of your five senses (or all five if you can appreciate the sounds of people drinking great wine or the satisfying *pock* of a cork slipping from a bottle—a sensory delight that heightens the celebratory mood).

A tremendous part of the pleasure of a good wine lies in immersing yourself in the sensual experience of exploring the multiple layers of the wine's personality. Wine challenges you to develop your senses.

Wine's Personality

No two wines are exactly alike. Tasting a special wine from a special place, made by gifted hands, is a completely different experience than gulping down a cola, because today's cola tastes pretty much like last year's, and cola from a plant in Des Moines is indistinguishable in flavor from cola made in Poughkeepsie (assuming that it's of the same brand)—at least that's what we've been told.

Even the same grape variety grown in the same place can look, smell, and taste different from year to year. In fact, a wine can taste different from day to day. That's the mystery, beauty, and romance of enjoying wine: appreciating these subtle differences!

We should make a distinction here between fine wines and those that are made for casual drinking. Everyday jug wines can be a pleasure to drink, and if you just want a wine that tastes good, you can find one without having to spend your inheritance on it. But when wine enthusiasts gather to taste and obsess over wine, they're talking about fine wine crafted with pride to present an extraordinary experience.

You're probably reading this book for the latter reason, because part of the beauty of jug wines is that they don't require much information to enjoy. Your enjoyment of fine wine, on the other hand, grows with knowledge and experience.

The Stories Wine Tells

The story of a wine's creation can be as intriguing as the wine itself. Sometimes the joy of drinking a particular wine lies in understanding

its special significance. Was the wine made under difficult conditions? Is the wine so rare that only the very fortunate have even seen the label? Has the wine taken on mythical dimensions, like that of a rare coin? In addition to its sensuous pleasures, wine can offer the intellectual satisfaction of uncovering a great story.

Wine's Place in History and Culture

Wine has touched many of history's greatest events. Jesus Christ presented it as his blood at the Last Supper, a moment reenacted throughout the Christian world to this day. Napoleon celebrated his conquest with it; Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence while sipping it. The Spanish Armada sailed with wine; the czars of Russia included it in their celebrations. Baseball teams celebrate with it; couples toast with it. Wine bonds us and allows us to crystallize special moments. Wine allows us to reflect and release. It adds soul to a new memory.

For centuries, wine has been the drink of choice of poets, novelists, playwrights, artists, and composers. Great minds across the ages have sung its praises:

> "[Wine] awakens and refreshes the lurking passions of the mind, as varnish does the colours which are sunk in a picture, and brings them out in all their natural glowings." —Alexander Pope
>
> "The soft extractive note of an aged cork being withdrawn has the true sound of a man opening his heart." —William Samuel Benwell
>
> "Wine is Sunlight, held together by water." —Galileo
>
> "He will tether his donkey to a vine,
> his colt to the choicest branch;
> he will wash his garments in wine,
> his robes in the blood of grapes." —Genesis 49:11
>
> "What is the definition of a good wine? It should start and end with a smile." —William Sokolin
>
> "Nobody ever wrote a great novel drinking water." —Ernest Hemingway
>
> "I cook with wine; sometimes I even add it to the food." —W. C. Fields

a note from
the instructor

APHRODISIA RECIPE

From *Aphrodisia* by Ken Atchity

1 bottle Pinot Noir, decanted in a crystal bowl
2 tablespoons honey
2 leaves of fresh mint
2 red or pink roses
1 teaspoon rose water

Pour the Pinot Noir into a saucepan over the lowest possible flame. Add the honey, the mint (crushed gently in your fingers), and then the rose water. Leave it on the flame until the honey is liquefied, and then add a touch of cinammon and a touch of cardamom. Turn off the flame, and sprinkle the petals of the two roses across the surface of the liquid. Pour into goblets, preferably gold ones (though crystal will do as a substitute), and serve.

Wine's Magical Effects on Food

Wine is made to go with food; it can turn a meal into a memorable event. And food returns the compliment: A fine wine only gets better when served with compatible food. Individually, great wine and great food can be wonderful soloists, but the combination of good food and wine is like a well-practiced symphony. Wine enhances your enjoyment of the food, and food enhances your enjoyment of the wine.

The combination of wine and food offers so many dazzling possibilities that it can't help but come down to a matter of personal taste. In this book, we're not going to focus much on the food and wine pairings that wine experts recommend; we'd rather encourage you to find out which combinations *you* like best. Lesson 14 contains much more information about the marriage of food and wine.

Wine's Sociability

Wine loves company. It eases the collective mood and encourages conversation. Its festive presence lends an air of elegance to social events. Wine inspires and invites lively commentary and brings a built-in topic of conversation to any gathering.

a note from
the instructor

FOOD AND WINE PAIRINGS: BENDING THE RULES

Although volumes have been written about the "appropriate" wine for each food—such as red wines with meat and white wines with poultry and fish—today's wine-drinking wisdom simply states that you should pair wine and food according to what you like. After all, if you adhered strictly to convention, you'd never know the joy of Oregon Pinot Noir with grilled salmon.

When you pair food and wine, it works well to focus on the dominant ingredient, whether it's the sauce, the protein (meat, bean, or grain), or the spice. Using this rule, you'll be able to keep a much more open mind about food and wine pairing—and you'll take more chances (see Lesson 14 for more on this subject). While you're at it, open *two* bottles, a red and a white, and compare! Two wines with dinner are better than one anyway.

Remember, though, that your enjoyment of a wine is a separate experience from your *appreciation* of it. You can judge the qualities of a fine wine empirically, whether you happen to like the wine or not. On the other hand, you can find a great deal of joy in a simple bottle of wine that would never be judged world class.

THE MAKING OF WINE

At its highest level, making wine has become an art form. With continued evolution and increased understanding, winemaking and farming techniques allow producers to make better wines every year. But viticulturalists and winemakers find themselves under enormous pressure, because expectations run very high. Consumers have been conditioned to expect that a winemaker will create not only a wine product, but also an epic experience, a personality—a masterpiece.

Some of the greatest wines in the world, though, are products of great restraint. The winemaker did little to "make" the wine, allowing the wine to "make itself" and to fully reflect the vineyard from which it came. Tom Mackay of Sonoma Valley's St. Francis Winery says, "We can only make great wine when we have great grapes."

a note from
the instructor

WINE IN TIMES PAST

Wine of centuries past was not the complex, "refined" drink that fine wine is today. Without slow fermentation in modern stainless-steel vats, controlled temperatures, and other technological developments, wine would still be as coarse as it probably was in ancient times.

Even without the modern fine-tuning, wine played a noteworthy role in the ancient world. Archaeological evidence reveals a thriving Greek wine industry at around 3000 BC, and recent findings suggest wine cultivation in Russia as early as 6000 BC. In the Roman Empire, wine was a symbol of the emperor's power. The ancient Greeks believed that wine was a gift from the god Dionysus. Since they knew nothing of the modern corks that keeps today's wine from oxidizing, Greek winemakers often topped off their wine vessels with olive oil to seal the wine from contact with the air. Winemakers coated wine vessels with pine pitch to retard evaporation, lending ancient wines a distinct piney aroma and flavor that are still prized in some Greek wines today.

Viticulture

Fine *viticulture*, or the growing of grapes for winemaking, seeks quality more than quantity. Fine winemakers would rather create a small amount of high-character wine that's a tribute to Mother Nature than produce a large yield.

Viticulturalists (grape-growers) and winemakers often work as a team. The vineyard manager may strive to create a crop that enables the winemaker to showcase the best qualities of the grape variety. Or the winemaker might try to craft a wine with certain attributes ideal to its type, like the tantalizing tannin of a fine Cabernet or the ripe stone-fruit flavors found in Chardonnay. In each case, they're working with a sensitive, often unpredictable set of variables at every step of the process, and the finished product is a testimony to their skill, their judgment, and a little good luck.

The elements of earth, wind, light, and water are Mother Nature's chess set. Her temperament is highly unpredictable: In certain years, she sets us up with high expectations only to punish us for our greed

and disobedience, and in other years, we prepare for the worst and are pleasantly surprised. This combination of variables in a grapevine's environment is characterized and idealized by the French term *terroir* (tare-wah). Terroir can have subtle and not-so-subtle effects on a wine's character. A good wine can hint of certain things in its environment: For example, many German wines grown in slatey soils pick up mineral and wet stone flavors; rich red wines from the southern regions of Spain and Italy often carry the perfumes of the flowers that grow abundantly about the countryside. And in Napa Valley, a sweet dust can add a nice accent to the deep cherry flavors of the region's Cabernets and Merlots.

Most wine grapes prefer long, warm growing periods with plenty of sunshine during the day and cool temperatures at night. These conditions produce great complexity of fruit and acid. Grapes growing in otherwise marginal climates can thrive if they receive enough reflected sunlight from light soils and bodies of water. But too much direct, hot sunlight can cause the grapes to ripen prematurely. A light wind is generally a plus; it keeps the grapes from overheating (and maturing too quickly) and evaporates excess moisture. Too much wind, however, can shear off blossoms, leaves, and immature fruit and even stunt the vine's growth.

The optimal climatic conditions for a crop of wine grapes are a cold winter followed by a warm, wet spring and then a long, breezy, sunny summer—not too warm—with cool nights and moderate rain tapering

a note from
the instructor

A VICTIM OR A BENEFICIARY OF WEATHER'S WHIMS?

Wine grapes are highly sensitive to changes in their environment. A powerful wind at the wrong moment can rip tender buds from the vine and spoil the crop; too much rain in the fall can cause the grapes to rot; and too much heat can ripen the grapes too quickly, robbing them of the complexity that comes only with long, slow ripening.

Some wines, though, actually require growing conditions that you normally wouldn't think of as ideal. Sauternes, for example, can be made only from grapes that have been infected with the *botrytis cinerea* fungus. In a year with a dry autumn, the "noble rot," as winemakers call it, may not develop at all, and producers of fine Sauternes will release no botrytized wine for that year. (See Lesson 5 for more about this fungus.)

to a warm, dry autumn. A cold winter allows the vines to go dormant and rest, which strengthens them. A warm, wet spring can produce a large set of blossoms, and a long, sunny summer and fall give the grapes plenty of time to develop lots of character. But it's never predictable, and getting it just right is almost always a challenge. Most grape growers will tell you, "I'd rather be lucky than good anytime."

How Wine Grapes Grow

Grapes grow only from flowers that have "set" on the vine—a process easily halted by untimely storms, wind, or excessive early heat. If the flowers set successfully, they produce clusters of tiny green berries that gradually swell and change color, becoming grapes. All grapes start out green. White grape varieties turn various shades of gold or pink; red varieties flush red, purple, or black.

Once the berries begin to grow, vineyard workers often cut away some of the burgeoning bunches (called crop thinning) so that the vine can focus all its energy on the bunches that remain. Over time, the vine begins to crop thin naturally; in the sense that older vines make fewer grapes with more concentrated flavors. It's a common theory that old vines make better wines.

Vines also produce higher-quality grapes if they endure a certain amount of beneficial stress. Broad temperature fluctuations, brief periods of drought, and depleted soil can force a vine to work hard, dig its roots deeper, and focus its efforts on producing a small crop of intense berries.

Harvesting Wine Grapes

Grape-growers aim to harvest their grapes when the sugars and tannins have ripened and the decreasing acids and increasing sugars have reached a balance. In general, the longer grapes stay on the vine (viticulturalists refer to the total number of days on the vine as "hang time"), the more concentrated their sugars become, and the less acid remains. A good wine-grower knows that sweetness and acidity complement each other; a sweet wine needs the sharp edge that acidity brings to avoid becoming syrupy, and an acidic wine needs some sweetness to temper its sour disposition.

student experience

"My husband and I have visited several wineries and I always learn something at each one. One winery pointed out a field they had planted with lavender and other herbs with the plan of eventually plowing those crops under and growing grapes. Apparently the grapes pick up the subtle scents and flavors of the crops that linger in the soil, which impacts the flavor of the wine. I was fascinated to discover just how much the soil in which grapes are grown has an impact on their taste."

—Stephanie, business consultant

Tannin, the bitter compound found primarily in a grape's skin (which, in red wines, is critical for providing flavor, structure, texture, and longevity) also needs to ripen. A well-trained viticulturalist recognizes the taste of ripe tannin. Tannins are the all-important stagehands behind a fine red wine's performance; they give it the backstage support it needs to show off its complexities and nuances. The best reds for aging contain high levels of balanced, ripe tannin.

Harvest time can be dicey. In areas where autumn weather is unstable, the days leading up to harvest keep a viticulturalist on pins and needles. Do you harvest early and sacrifice some of the prized complexity of a more mature grape, or do you risk losing the crop to the season's first sleet storm? As the harvest approaches, more than at any other time in the growing season, a wine-grower's judgment can make the difference between an unforgettable vintage and a lackluster one.

When the harvest is called, skilled vineyard workers cut the grape bunches from the vines. Wineries that rely on mechanical harvesters generally produce wines of lesser taste and quality. Typically, the greater the care that is taken with well-grown grapes, the greater the quality of the finished product.

Traditionally, grapes were grown, crushed, fermented, aged, and bottled right on the winemaker's estate. The world's top wineries still make wine this way. But in large commercial enterprises, the grapes are often shipped to a distant location and sold to a number of winemakers for off-estate production. Today, most grapes *don't* come from the winery that makes them into wine. In fact, great vineyards are pretty rare and have tremendous demand placed on them, so the prices paid for the crops from these select vineyards are very high.

Vinification

Whereas viticulture is the art of growing grapes, *vinification* is the craft of turning them into wine. During vinification, the harvested grapes come into contact with yeast, and wine results. Along the way, the grapes go through a variety of techniques designed to optimize the expression of their fruit. The winemaker's philosophy and experience guide the grapes through destemming, crushing, one of a number of possible fermentation techniques, fining (or filtering), aging, and bottling. At every step, the winemaker chooses among variables: which, when, why, and for how long.

1. **Destemming:** Leaves, stems, and other nongrape matter are removed before the winemaking process begins. A destemming machine usually performs this work, and, like a mechanical harvester, it sometimes leaves a few stems and nongrape bits in the product. Destemming is especially important in fine white wines, which suffer more than heavier reds from remaining stems. Stems left in the wine can produce "green" or "stemmy" flavors.
2. **Crushing:** In a bygone era, crushing wine grapes required footwork: Winemakers literally stomped on the grapes with their bare feet. Today, in all but a few wineries, machines do the crushing—which makes curious wine lovers wonder what subtle flavors and aromas modern wine might be missing since the traditional foot method was abandoned.
3. **Adding yeast:** Yeast is the magical microscopic beast that transforms the juice of crushed grapes into the beverage of kings. Some traditional wineries still make do with yeast that forms naturally on the grapes in their environment; in a bygone era, winemakers used only this yeast. Today, most wineries add hybrid or synthetic yeast to kick-start the fermentation process.

   During fermentation, the yeast dines on the grapes' natural sugar, producing both alcohol and carbon dioxide as it feeds. The work of the yeast affects the sweetness of the wine and its alcohol content: If it's allowed to finish the job, the wine will be termed "dry" and will have reached its highest potential level of alcohol; if fermentation is halted early, the wine will be sweeter and lower in alcohol.

4. **Fermentation:** Ripe grape juice plus yeast equals heat, carbon dioxide, and wine (see the following illustration). Nearly all commercially produced wine ferments inside sterile, stainless-steel, temperature-controlled vats. Modern fermentation vats allow for greater quality control and a finer, subtler product. These vats also are equipped with machinery for "punching down" (not unlike what bakers do to rising bread dough: winemakers break up the cap of floating skins and pulp that rises to the surface and submerge it back into the liquid) and stirring the fermenting juice. In the past, wineries often accomplished this step by having a naked vintner plunge into the vat and wallow around. Today, many great wines of the world hand-stir the *must* (the vintner's term for the fermenting grape juice) as often as every few hours.

Ripe Grape Juice + Yeast = Heat, CO_2, and Wine

Ripe grape juice plus yeast equals heat, carbon dioxide, and wine.

- **Racking:** As fermentation proceeds, solids begin to settle out of the must. Winemakers periodically drain the liquid from these solids in a process called *racking*. Additional racking from tank to tank or barrel to barrel allows for further cleaning and removal of solids from the wine.
- **Fining:** When used in the context of winemaking, this term means "to make fine, or pure." It most likely came from the Latin *finire* ("to finish"). After fermentation, winemakers often filter and clarify the wine to remove excess particles and potentially harmful bacteria. They use a protein, often egg whites or a protein gel, to fine the particles away. Modern winemakers often use a step of cold stabilization and filtration in addition to, or instead of, fining the wine.
- **Barrel aging:** Many wines spend time aging in oak barrels. As wines barrel-age, they slowly evaporate and oxidize. Aging in oak barrels softens a wine and imparts some of the wood's flavor and tannin to it.

a note from
the instructor

TO OAK OR NOT TO OAK?

Many wine enthusiasts object to the heavy use of oak in a wine because it masks (or buries) the wine's subtle flavors. They argue that wine is supposed to taste like a fruit, not a tree. But plenty of wine lovers look forward to a wine's oaky qualities. If you're going for the complex nuances of a fine wine, overoaking is a problem; otherwise, it's a matter of individual taste.

How long a wine ages in its barrel depends on its type. Many styles of Chardonnay (including some Chablis) spend several months in oak. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are typically aged for up to two years in barrels; Vintage Ports spend up to three years there. Beaujolais Nouveau, on the other hand, spends little or no time in barrels.

Winemakers often experiment: They may choose barrels made of American, French, or Slovakian oak, and they may have their barrels "toasted" or charred (lightly to heavily). All of these variables affect the flavor of the wine.

- **Bottle aging:** When wine is transferred from the barrel to the bottle, its days of gentle oxidation are over. As wine ages in the bottle, it develops nuances, or "bottle bouquet." The best condition for bottle aging is dark, cool, humid quietude.

When Is the Wine Ready to Drink?

Tradition and experience aside, determining when a wine is ready is a matter of taste—or, more accurately, of tast*ing*. As a rule, wines harvested in great years take longer to develop than wines from good or so-so years. A wine from an average vintage may reach its full potential in 4 or 5 years; a truly outstanding wine may take 10 to 20 years or more to reach its zenith. A fine old red that's beginning to go brown has probably already passed its prime, but the drinking experience still may be phenomenal.

TYPES OF WINE

Wines are categorized by the following characteristics:

- Color (red, white, or rosé)
- Intended use (aperitif, table, or dessert)
- Relative sweetness or dryness

In addition, sparkling wines are typically categorized separately from "still" (nonsparkling) wines. Most of these categories overlap: Sparkling and still wines can be red, white, or rosé; dry and sweet wines can be served with a meal or as desserts and aperitifs; and fortified wines, as described in this section, come in red, white, dry, and sweet styles.

White, Red, and Rosé

The color of a grape's skin generally determines the color of the wine it produces. Pale green or yellowish grapes make white wine. Grapes with dark or reddish skin generally make red wine. The time during which the fermenting juice is left in contact with the pulverized red skins largely determines the darkness of the wine, but exceptions do exist. When making a *blanc de noir* sparkling wine, for instance, a winemaker crushes red grapes (Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier) but separates the fermenting juice from the skins after a few days so that the wine doesn't have a chance to pick up color.

Rosé wines, sometimes called blush wines, get their pink shade in one of two ways. Most often, red grapes are used, and their skins are left in contact with the fermenting juice long enough to add a desirable reddish tinge (as in "blush" or "white" Zinfandel). Other times, red and white grapes are fermented separately, and then their juices are blended to the desired flavor and shade of pink. You can find out more about white, red, and rosé wines in lessons 3, 4, and 5, respectively.

Table, Dessert, or Fortified

Table wine, as the name suggests, is to be enjoyed at the dining table with a meal. Dessert and aperitif wines like Tokay Aszu, Barsac, and Sauternes are meant for sipping before or after dinner, or to be savored on their own. Fortified wines are so named because they have been strengthened with extra alcohol, typically from distilled grape spirits.

a note from
the instructor

SWEET WINE TRIVIA

To make sweet "ice wine," winemakers leave the grapes on the vine until winter temperatures freeze them solid. The frozen grapes have an intense, concentrated sweetness. Many winemakers in New York, Canada, and Germany have made ice wine a specialty. In Germany, it's known as *Eiswein.*

In Australia, sweet wines are called "stickies." Many of Australia's stickies are made from Muscadelle and Muscat grapes and are fortified like Port or Sherry.

In the days before modern winemaking techniques and airtight containers, this fortification was necessary to keep wine from spoiling. The high alcohol content acted as a preservative and a barrier to oxidation. It also stabilized the wine enough for it to survive long, arduous journeys. Many of the first wines to be exported were fortified: Port, Sherry, and Madeira. Again, the distinction blurs a little when you realize that fortified wines make terrific after-dinner sippers and, if not too heavy, can even be enjoyed with a hearty meal. Lesson 5 contains more information about dessert, aperitif, and fortified wines.

Sweet or Dry

Whether red, white, rosé, sparkling, or fortified, nearly all wines are classified as sweet, dry, or something in between. Because the alcohol in wine comes from the sugar in the grapes, the level of sweetness is determined by how much sugar remains when the fermentation process is halted. In the driest wines, all the sugar has been converted into alcohol. In sweeter wines, fermentation is stopped earlier so that some sugar remains.

Some wine drinkers confuse sweetness with ripeness, but they aren't the same. A sweet wine has residual sugar that is left behind after fermentation has stopped; a *ripe* wine (wine made from fully ripened grapes) has plenty of natural sugars to begin with and tastes of sweet, mature fruit. A ripe wine, then, can be sweet or dry. An ultra-ripe wine may lack acidity, while many *sweet* wines owe their greatness to the high acidity that keeps them from becoming syrupy. When you say,

"Waiter, may I have a glass of dry white wine?" you're probably craving not a dry wine but a wine with crisp acidity. But "Waiter, may I have a glass of acidic wine?" just doesn't sound very appealing.

Champagne and Sparkling Wine

All wines could become sparkling wines if they were permitted to, because all wines produce carbon dioxide as they ferment. In Champagne, France, prior to the late 1700s, *not* having bubbles in wine was a challenge. Champagne as we now know it became popular only when the technique for producing it became popularized.

Not all sparkling wine is Champagne. Champagne, France, is a very special place where the soils are solid white from the high chalk content. When the grapes grown in Champagne's chalky soils are made into wine by using the special *méthod champenoise*, the result is the magical wine we drink for celebrations. While other sparkling wines are made by this labor-intensive, handcrafted method, only wines from the Champagne region of France can rightfully be called Champagne. You can read more about Champagne in lessons 5 and 7.