

Chapter 4 – Wine Producing Countries

Wines of France

Introduction

In the whole world France wines are standard of comparison. France makes extraordinary wines because of – France is blessed with a suitable climate, different types of soil, and expertise in viticulture and Vinification for the producers to manufacture wines par excellence.

Wine is an essential part of life of the French. It is used in a variety of culinary preparations, which make French dishes so unique and delicious. France is currently the world's number one producer of wine by volume. Nearly every type of wine imaginable is made in styles that vary from modern to very traditional.

The top wine regions are Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Loire, Rhone Valley, Provence and Languedoc-Roussillon.



Wine Laws - The application system

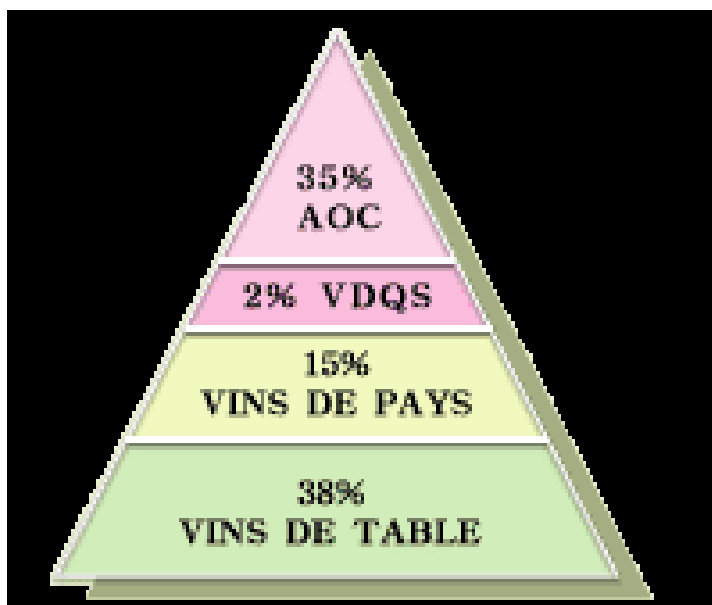
The application system was created in 1935 to protect the authenticity of wines & livelihood of producers. French wine classification systems exist to inform consumers of the process used to make each bottle and indicate its quality.

It defines the boundaries and within each area stipulating their permitted grape variety, yield, alcohol content, cultivation, vinification, maturation practice & labelling procedure.

French wine laws are enforced very strictly. Wine laws of many wine producing countries simply follow the system of French wine laws.

The following are the objectives of the laws –

- ▶ To prevent fraud and malpractice
- ▶ To help producers achieve and maintain the highest standards of quality.



AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée)

This is the highest standard of quality. This labelling guarantees –

- Area of production
- Grape varieties used
- Viticulture methods such as pruning etc.
- Maximum yield per hectare
- Minimum alcohol content
- Methods of vinification and preservation.



Vins delimités de qualité supérieure (VDQS)

These wines are of superior quality produced in delimited (enclosed) areas with the following conditions guaranteed:

- Area of production
- Grape varieties used
- Minimum alcohol content
- Methods of viticulture and vinification
- Although the wines have to be good to merit the VDQS label, they are less fine than the AOC wine.

Vins De Table (VDT)

The second labelling category, Vins de table, is divided into two:

1. Vin de pays (VP)
2. Vin de consommation courante (VCC)

Vins de pays (VP) - Local or country wine. Medium in quality, these wines must be made from recommended grapes grown in a certain area or village. They must have a minimum alcohol content, and come from the locality stated on the label.

Vins de consommation courante (VCC) - Wines for everyday consumption and sold by the glass, carafe or pitcher in cafes and bars all over France. Often completely authentically French, these wines may also be blended with other EU wines of similar style. Non- EU wines may not be blended with French wines.



Wine regions of France

BORDEAUX

Bordeaux is probably the most well-known wine region in France. The best wines in the world, both red and white, come from France and especially from the Bordeaux region. It produces about 70% AC quality wines of which two – thirds are red and the rest is white. Bordeaux wines have always been popular in Britain.

The bright, light – coloured red wines from Bordeaux are known as “**Claret**”. The wines of this region are named with the word “**chateau**” (estates).

The main black grape varieties used are –

- Cabernet Sauvignon
- Cabernet Franc
- Merlot
- Petit Verdot

Wine Producing Districts of Bordeaux

Saint – Emilion

Saint – Emilion produces rich red wines. Wines popular from this region are – Chateau Cheval – Blanc & Chateau Ausone.



Sauternes

Sauternes produces sweet white wine of remarkable quality. The grapes utilized in making of sweet wines are affected by the beneficial fungus botrytis cinerea, whose spores will evaporate the water in the grape and cause it to shrivel up. This is termed as 'noble rot'. The over ripe 'nobly' rotten grapes are hand-picked to produce juice of concentrated sugar which results in naturally very sweet wine.

Wine popular from this region – Chateau d'Yquem



Pomerol

Pomerol is known for the full-bodied reds with good bouquet. Wine popular from this region – Chateau Petrus.



Medoc

This region produces excellent red wines. Wines popular from this region are

- ▶ Chateau Latour
- ▶ Chateau Lafite



Graves

The name 'graves' refers to the nature of soil which is gravelly. Though this district is well known for the white wines outside, it also produces excellent red wines. The reds are more robust and slightly drier than the reds of Medoc. Popular wine –

- ▶ Chateau Haut – Brion



BURGUNDY

Few of the most exciting wines in the world come from **Burgundy**.

Burgundy is a region with various soils, divided in numerous districts: Chablis, Côte d'Or (divided in Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune), Côte Chalonnaise, Mâconnais and Beaujolais. **Burgundy** wines are of a velvety and subtle red or of a sensual and characteristic white.

Burgundy is an area of small vineyards often split among many owners as a result of laws of inheritance.

- ▶ Example – the vineyard of **Clos de Vougeot** has more than seventy – five owners. Not all owners of the vineyards are good winemakers which result in wines of different character from the same vineyard.

Most growers ferment the wines and sell in the bulk to the negociants (merchants). The merchant's age, blend, bottle, and sell the wine according to the norms laid by the appellation. Some growers sell their wine directly. The negociants play a significant role in marketing the wine. Between the growers and negociants, there are couriers (brokers) who know all the growers, quality of vineyard, what wine is available, and what price the growers want. They also know what the negociants are looking for and what price they are prepared to pay.

Four grape varieties used in Burgundy –

- ▶ **Red**
- ▶ Pinot Noir
- ▶ Gamay
- ▶ **White**
- ▶ Chardonnay
- ▶ Aligote

Wine producing districts of Burgundy

The main wine producing districts of Burgundy are –

- ▶ Cote d' Or (Cote de Nuits & Cote de Beaune)
- ▶ Cote Chalonnaise
- ▶ The Maconnaise
- ▶ Beaujolaise
- ▶ Chablis

Cote de Nuits – Produces fruity full-bodied red wines with good colour, bouquet, and fineness.

- ▶ **Wine popular - Chambertin (R), Clos Vougeot (R)**

Cote de Beaune – Produces both red and white wines, but is popular for its white wines.

- ▶ **Wine popular – Le Corton (R), Charmes (W)**

Cote Chalonnaise

- ▶ **Wine – Cremant de Bourgogne**

The Maconnaise

- ▶ **Wine – Pouilly- fuisse (White wine, popular in the USA)**

Beaujolaise

It is a reputed area for lightweight and fruity reds meant to drink young. The red wines produced here are opposite to the other reds produced in Burgundy. Some of wines produced here are marketed by 15 November each year and are termed as Beaujolais Nouveau.

Alsace

Alsace is a white wine area. The white wines of this area are fresh, dry, light, fine and aromatic. Wines are named after the grapes in this area. The wines were unknown at one point in the international market when the region was under German rule. The wines used to be blended with the German wines. The situation changed in 1945 and the producers devoted themselves into replanting vineyards with noble grape varieties. Alsace is the region, which utilizes brown colour bottles to bottle the wines. They are known as – Alsace Flutes. Alsace also produces sparkling wine, which is known as Cremant de Alsace.



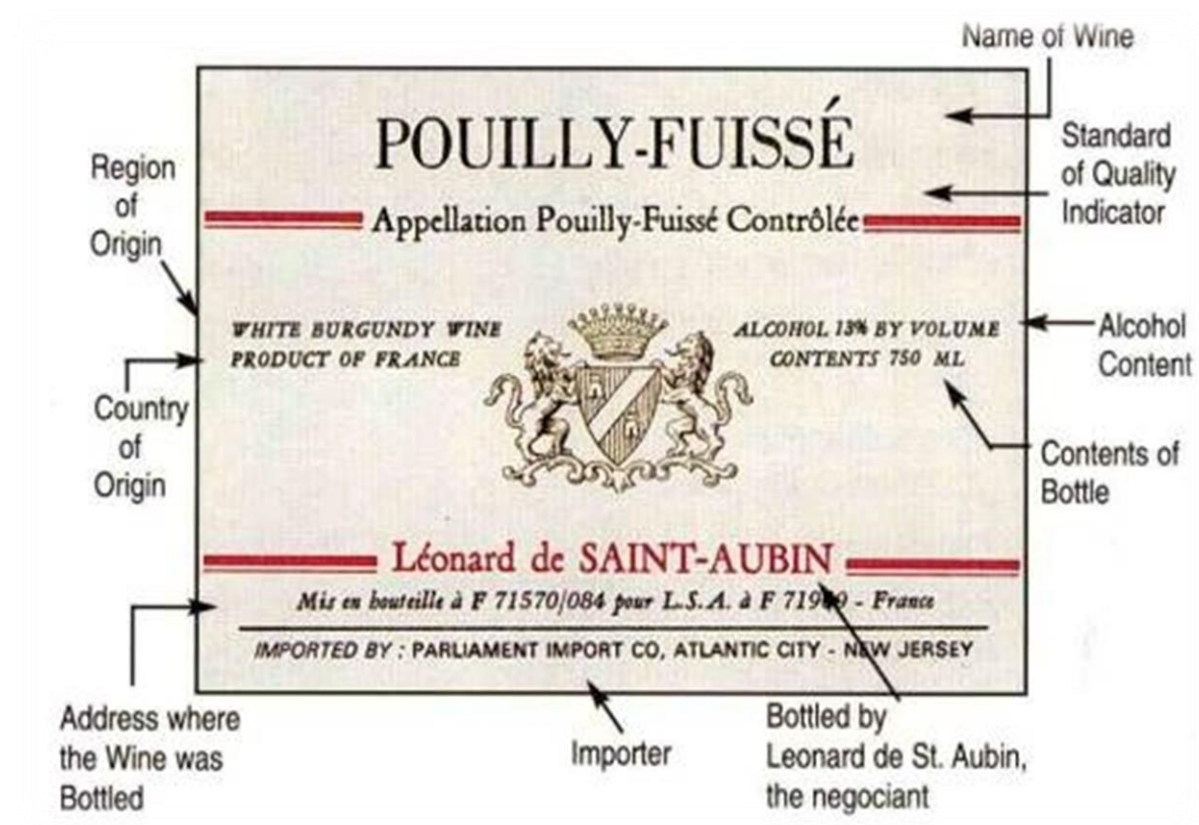
Champagne

Champagne is a sparkling wine produced from grapes grown in the champagne region of France following rules that demand secondary fermentation of the wine in the bottle to create carbonation.

Some use the term *champagne* as a generic term for sparkling wine, but the majority of countries reserve the term exclusively for sparkling wines that come from Champagne and are produced under the rules of the application system.

Champagne appellation law only allows grapes grown according to appellation rules in specifically designated plots within the appellation to be used in the production of Champagne.

Wine Label



Glossary Terms

Appellation... Contrôlée (AOC): The word(s) appearing between these two words on the label indicate the official place-name of the wine, the location where the grapes grew.

Château: A wine estate

Crémant: An AOC sparkling French wine from some region other than Champagne.

Cru: A vineyard, a village, or sometimes a wine estate.

Cuvée: A blend of wines, or a particular batch of wine.

Domaine: Wine estate, usually a smaller property than a Château.

Grand cru: A region's highest quality vineyard or vineyard area

Grand vin: A winery's best vin

Millèsime: Vintage (year of the harvest)

Mis en bouteille au château: Estate-bottled

Premier cru: A top vineyard area or wine estate, but less prestigious than a grand cru.

Rouge: Red.

Blanc: White.