

Why Taste Blind?

- Taste with a purpose: to learn
- Form taste references
- Recognize what's being tasted
- Develop scent and taste memory
- Improve your palate and ability to taste
- Improve your ability to describe a wine
- Understand classic wines and their regions

Sight: Visual Clues

Brightness in Whites

More brilliant white wine = lower alcohol

Dull white wine = higher in alcohol

Viscosity or Tears

Slow to form, slow to fall = high viscosity = higher alcohol or, in some cases, residual sugar

Quick to form, quick to fall = low viscosity = lower alcohol

Color

Green in whites = youthful or cool climate

Gold/Orange in whites = age

Pink/Purple in reds = youthful

Orange/Brick in reds = age

Aromatics and Structural Clues

Cool climate characteristics

- Higher acidity
- Lower alcohol
- Under-ripe state of fruit

Warm climate characteristics

- Lower acidity
- Higher alcohol
- Riper or cooked state of fruit



Aromatics and Structural Clues

“Old” world characteristics

- Lots of earth/mineral notes
- Less wood influence usually

“New” world characteristics

- Lots of forward fruit notes
- More wood influence usually

Classic White Grape Markers

Albariño: stone fruit and citrus, medium-bodied, salty, floral

Chardonnay: orchard fruit, neutral on its own, usually full-bodied, usually oaked

Chenin Blanc: bruised apples, wool, honey, can be dry or sweet, medium- to full-bodied, high acidity

Gewürztraminer: strong floral/spice perfume, dry to off-dry, moderate acidity

Grüner Veltliner: citrus and stone fruit, white pepper, vegetal, celery

Melon de Bourgogne: briny minerality, low aromatics, high acidity

Muscat: very floral, green grape, melon and tropical fruit, musky

Pinot Grigio/Pinot Gris: melon, light-bodied, almond or slightly bitter, very simple, sometimes slightly pink or grey in color

Riesling: stone fruit, petrol, can be dry or sweet, high acidity

Sauvignon Blanc: citrus fruit, herbaceous, usually medium-bodied, straw, hay, jalapeño

Torrontès: ripe citrus, jasmine, orange blossom, soapy, high alcohol

Viognier: fruit cocktail notes, oily, full-bodied, low acidity



Classic Red Grape Markers

Pinot Noir: red fruit, high acid, light-bodied, light tannins

Cabernet Sauvignon: black fruit, usually full-bodied, high tannins

Syrah: black fruit, medium-plus tannins, pepper, gamey, dark opaque color

Tempranillo (from Rioja): red and black fruit, usually aged in American oak so flavors of coconut and dill, medium tannins and acidity

Nebbiolo: neon orange rim, deceptively light but high in acid and tannins, rose petals, tar, red fruit, potpourri

Sangiovese: medium garnet, red fruit, savory herbs, tarragon, tomato water, high acid and medium plus tannins

Malbec: vibrant purple rim, black fruit, violets, medium tannins and full-bodied

Zinfandel: red fruit, jammy, raisins, figs, soft tannins and higher alcohol

Cabernet Franc: red fruit, herbal, bell pepper, medium-bodied and medium tannins, earthy-funky

Tips for Practicing

- Seek out “classic” wines from “classic” regions
- Deductively work through each wine you taste... use the *same exact* order every time; make it a habit
- Identify *specific* key markers for different types of wine — both in terms of aromatics/flavor profiles and structures
- Form a tasting group; meet regularly and follow a set tasting format
- Listen to your calls, use the clues

