

Chapter 16

Wine

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering wine varieties (there's more than just red and white)
 - ▶ Exploring port and sherry
 - ▶ Checking out sparkling wines and vermouth
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Wine, as most of you know, is made from fermented grapes. It comes in red, white, or rosé (pink or blush) varieties. Winemaking dates back to roughly 3000 BC, and it's here to stay.

Wines from Around the World

Climate is a big factor in making good wine. To grow wine-worthy grapes, summers can't be too hot and autumns need to be cool. Light rainfall is necessary in the winter and spring, and the rain needs to taper off in the summer and fall. Harsh, cold winters with hail, frost, and heavy winds are bad for growing grapes.

The type of grape determines the type of wine, and only certain types of grapes grow in certain climates. To make matters even more complicated, the soil of a particular region plays a big role in how its grapes turn out. So while the climate in certain regions of California and France may be perfect for, say, chardonnay grapes, the soil in those regions affects the grapes to the point that the resulting wines from each region are different.

Many wines receive their names from the grape from which they're produced. See the following list of some popular wines named after grapes:

- ✔ **Barbera** (red): Italy
- ✔ **Cabernet Sauvignon** (red): France, United States
- ✔ **Camay** (red): France, United States
- ✔ **Chardonnay** (white): France, United States, Argentina, Australia, South America
- ✔ **Chenin Blanc** (white): France, United States
- ✔ **Gewürztraminer** (white): Germany
- ✔ **Grenache** (rosé): France, United States
- ✔ **Merlot** (red): France, United States, South America
- ✔ **Pinot Noir** (red): France, United States
- ✔ **Reisling** (white): Germany, United States, France
- ✔ **Sauvignon Blanc** (white): France, United States
- ✔ **Semillon** (white): France, United States, Australia
- ✔ **Zinfandel** (red and white): United States

Some popular French wines are as follows. They're named after the region of France from which they originate.

- ✔ **Alsace** (white)
- ✔ **Beaujolais** (red) from Burgundy
- ✔ **Bordeaux** (red and white)
- ✔ **Burgundy** (red and white)
- ✔ **Rhône** (red)
- ✔ **Sauterne** (white) from Bordeaux

The following is a list of some German wines that are worth noting (all are white):

- ✔ **Gewürztraminer**
- ✔ **Johannisberg Riesling**
- ✔ **Spalleseen**

Italy produces all kinds of regional wines:

- ✔ **Barbaresco** (red) from Piedmont
- ✔ **Barbera** (red) from Piedmont
- ✔ **Bardolino** (red) from Veneto
- ✔ **Barolo** (red) from Piedmont
- ✔ **Chianti** (red) from Tuscany
- ✔ **Orvieto** (white) from Umbria
- ✔ **Pinot Grigio** (white) from Trentino
- ✔ **Riserva** (red) from Tuscany
- ✔ **Soave** (white) from Veneto
- ✔ **Valpolicella** (red) from Veneto

Australia's wines are growing in popularity. Here are the names of just a few:

- ✔ **Grange** (red)
- ✔ **Grenache** (red)
- ✔ **Semillon** (white)
- ✔ **Shiraz** (or **Syrah**) (red)

Some South American wines include

- ✔ **Chandonnay** (white)
- ✔ **Malbec** (red) from Argentina
- ✔ **Merlot** (red) from Chile
- ✔ **Torrontes** (white) from Argentina

In the United States, California produces 90 percent of all wine. Most California wine comes from Napa Valley or Sonoma Valley, and those areas produce both red and white wines in varieties too numerous to list.

Port

Port is a sweet, fortified wine to which brandy is added. It's named for *Oporto* — a city in northern Portugal. It's made from grapes grown in some 72,000 acres of vineyards in a designated area along the Douro River, known as the *Alto Douro*.

Although many wines are sold as port throughout the world, authentic port wine is the unique product of Portugal. By law, it must be made only from approved grape varieties native to the Alto Douro district and grown nowhere else in the country.

Fortification with brandy gives port extra strength and, more important, preserves the fresh flavor of grapes that makes port so delicious.

Port comes in three varieties:

- ✓ **Ruby:** Dark in color and fairly sweet.
- ✓ **Tawny:** Lighter in color and drier because it's aged in casks longer.
- ✓ **Vintage port:** Released only in certain exceptional years; the fullest and sweetest of all ports.

The following are some popular brands:

- ✓ **Cockburn's**
- ✓ **Croft**
- ✓ **Royal Oporto**
- ✓ **Sandeman**



Port is a great after-dinner drink. It also goes well with cheese and cigars. An opened bottle of port has a shelf life of four to six months.

Sherry

The English discovered the wines of Jerez, Spain, calling them *jerries*, and the word later evolved into *sherry*. Sherry is a

fortified wine to which grape brandy is added. No longer limited to production in Spain, sherry is now produced all over the world.

Sherry comes in five basic styles:

- ✓ **Fino:** Light and very dry; usually served chilled as an aperitif.
- ✓ **Manzanilla:** Pale, dry, and light-bodied; also served chilled as an aperitif.
- ✓ **Amontillado:** Medium-dry and full-bodied; perfect between meals or with soup and cheese.
- ✓ **Oloroso:** Gold in color with a strong bouquet; more hardy than Amontillado.
- ✓ **Cream:** A smooth, sweet wine. Cream sherry is what results when Oloroso is blended with a sweetening wine, such as Moscatel. Cream is the largest-selling sherry. It can be served at any time, chilled or over ice.

The following are popular sherry brands:

- ✓ **Dry Sack**
- ✓ **Gonzalez Byass**
- ✓ **Harveys Bristol Cream**
- ✓ **Savory & James**

Sparkling Wines

A monk whose name is now familiar — Dom Perignon — developed the first sparkling wine in the 1600s in the Champagne region of France. Without going into all the details, he developed a method of bottling wine so that carbon dioxide, a product of fermentation, remains in the bottle with the wine, and the result is the presence of bubbles.

Sparkling wine made in the Champagne region is called, of course, *champagne*. It's made with a mix of different grapes (including pinot noir, pinot meunier, and chardonnay) through a process called *méthod champenoise*, which is quite costly and time-consuming. Sparkling wines from other places

in the world are made in different ways with different grapes. For example, prosecco is an Italian sparkling wine made from *glera* grapes. But you can find sparkling wines from places such as California that are made using the *méthod champenoise*.

Champagne and other sparkling wines should be stored in a cool, dark place away from heat, light, vibrations, and severe temperature variations. Unlike the best wines from Bordeaux or California, sparkling wines are ready for consumption when they're shipped to the market. However, some wine lovers also enjoy cellaring their champagnes for a few extra years.



Before serving, chill the wine well, but don't freeze it. Placing the bottle in a bucket filled with ice and water for 30 to 40 minutes is the best way to chill champagne. You can also chill a bottle by refrigerating it for several hours, but don't keep bottles in the fridge for extended periods of time. The excessive cold and the vibration of the motor will cause the flavor to go a little flat.

Champagne is best served in tall flute or tulip glasses at a temperature of 42 to 47 degrees Fahrenheit. Tiny bubbles will rise in a continuous stream. When serving, pour a small quantity of champagne into each glass and allow it to settle. Then fill each glass two-thirds full.



For much more information on how to buy and serve champagne, check out *Champagne For Dummies* by Ed McCarthy (Wiley).

Vermouth

Vermouth originated in the 18th century, when wine growers in the foothills of the French and Italian Alps developed a method of enhancing the taste of sour or uncompromising wines with the infusion of a variety of sweeteners, spices, herbs, roots, seeds, flowers, and peels. Just a few of the herbs and spices used to flavor and aromatize the wine include cloves, bitter orange peel, nutmeg, gentian, camomile, and wormwood, which in German is *wermut*, from which vermouth got its name. After it's flavored, the wine is clarified, pasteurized, and fortified to an alcoholic content of about 18 percent — close to that of sherry.

The standard classification of vermouth is white/dry and red/sweet, but exceptions do exist, including a half-sweet variety known as rosé. And though most dry vermouths are considered French and sweet vermouths are considered Italian, both types are produced in France and Italy, as well as throughout the world, including in the United States.

Vermouth is an ingredient in many cocktails, and just as carefully as you select other liquor to pour at the bar, so you should take care and time in selecting a good vermouth. Choose the brand of vermouth that tastes best to you — crisp and light, not too heavy or burnt. Check out the following list of popular brands:

- ✓ **Boissiere**
- ✓ **Cinzano**
- ✓ **Martini & Rossi**
- ✓ **Noilly Prat**
- ✓ **Stock**

You need to refrigerate a bottle of vermouth after opening. The shelf life of an open bottle, when refrigerated, is approximately one year.

One Final Word on Wines

I haven't said nearly as much about wine as I would like. The fact is, people have written whole books on single types of wine, so it's sort of foolish for me to even pretend to give a comprehensive overview in a single chapter. The focus of this book, after all, is cocktail recipes.



A great introduction to buying, serving, and drinking wine is *Wine For Dummies*, 4th Edition, by Ed McCarthy and Mary Ewing-Mulligan (Wiley). It's full of useful and interesting information, and it makes a great companion to this book.

