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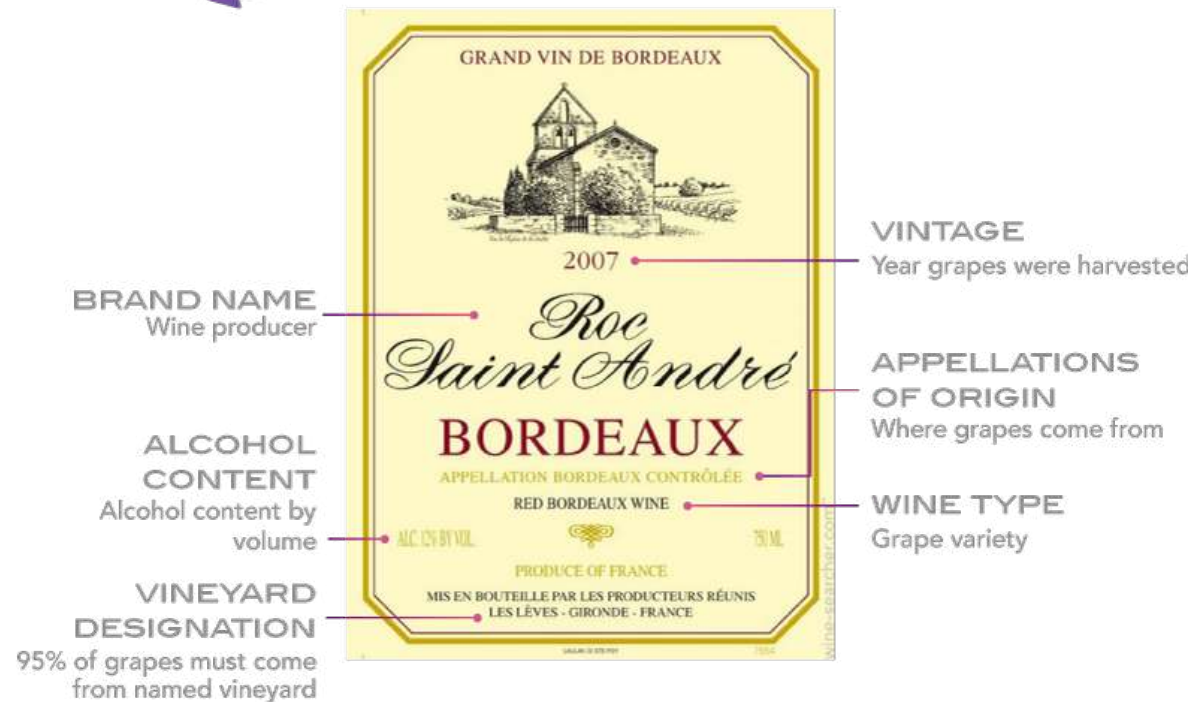
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**READING WINE LABELS**

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# Reading Wine Labels

## HOW TO READ A WINE LABEL



# Reading Wine Labels

- Wine labels have a lot of information on them. Some of it is critical to understanding what is in the bottle.
- There are generally 6 parts to a wine label
  - Brand Name
  - Alcohol Content
  - Vintage
  - Region or Vineyard Designation
  - Appellation Origin
  - Wine Type

# Brand Name

- The Brand / Producer name is either obvious or in small text at the top or the bottom of the label (such as many French wine label examples).
- The Brand name usually gives you a good idea of where the wine is produced.
- It also usually consist of the family name of the winemaker, if it's a family-owned winery.

# Alcohol Content

- The alcohol level actually says a lot about a wine. Many European wine regions only allow their highest quality wines to have 13.5% ABV and above.
- For some wines, ABVs can be quite high (up to 17% on some dry wines) and the alcohol level is an indication of how rich/big the wine may taste. For instance, wines from the USA, Amarone, Port wine.
- Many higher alcohol wines are made from riper grapes and tend to have more fruit-forward flavours. Again, this is a generalization and there are exceptions to the rule.
- Sparkling wines usually have a lower ABV percentage ranging from around 10 to 12.5 percent

# Vintage

- Vintage refers to the year that the grapes were harvested is the vintage.
- The vintage tells a lot about a wine if you are familiar with vintage variations.
- As a general rule, multi-vintage wines or “NV” wines are table wines, because they have the ease of pulling wine from multiple vintages to control the flavour, and are generally not vintage dependent.
- This is except in the case of Champagnes and sparkling wines, where non-vintage wine production can be a norm

# Region or Vineyard Specification

- The region indicates from where the grapes were sourced to produce the wine.
- A wine from a larger region is typically produced with grapes sourced from vineyards within several appellations within a region
- Whereas a wine from a specific vineyard site often denotes that grapes are sourced within a single plot of vineyard, and which can be often highlighted as a 'Single Vineyard Wine'. Such wines usually hold more prestige and exclusivity.
- If a wine is from a specific vineyard site, that site will be indicated in quotations (e.g. "Les Suchots") or located right below the region designation (e.g. Vosne Romanee *Les Suchots*).
- Generally, as you narrow the source to a specific site, the quality level becomes more refined and the price increases.

# Wine Type or Appellation Origin

- The wine type refers to what grape or grapes are used in making the wine – *Merlot* for example, or *CMS Blend* (Cab, Merlot, Syrah).
- Many blends will not reveal the constituent grapes nor the percentage that each makes of the whole.
- If there is no varietal given, look for the Appellation, which can give you clues to what varietals were used based on the rules governing that region.
- There are 15 nations with officially regulated appellations, though the strictness of the rules and what matters varies wildly among them. One example is Burgundy in France.

# Other Terms

- Reserve
  - The indication of *Reserve* sounds fancy but it doesn't actually mean anything official. There are no rules to what a reserve wine is and thus this word on a bottle could mean nothing at all. Many small producers use it to indicate their top-tier wines that use the winemaker's highest quality production wines from the best barrels.
- Old Vines or Vieilles Vignes
  - The use of grapes from older vines typically lends to more concentrated flavours in a wine. However, there are no rules to say how old the old vine must be to get an "Old Vine" designation. Producers use it to help indicate the style of wine they produce. Vines can range from 15 to 115 years that get the tag "Old Vines" on the label. Some wines that are designated "Old Vines" have a blend of young vine grapes and old vine grapes together.
- Contains Sulphites
  - The words "Contains Sulfites" is a labeling requirement put on all officially imported or domestic wines in the United States. Most grapes actually have sulphur on them in the vineyard and there is a rather loaded debate on whether or not sulphites matter in wine.

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