Some special sorts of wine

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Organic and biodynamic wines

This is a vast subject growing in importance which has been covered in some depth on the site already. Although an increasing proportion of wine producers follow organic methods, there are no universally agreed rules for organic winemaking, or oenology. However there are several certification schemes for organic vine-growing, or viticulture. It is quite a commitment of time (years), effort and money to be officially certified organic and many producers, however enthusiastic about the general principles, cannot be bothered to go through the necessary hoops. Organic viticulture involves finding more natural alternatives to pesticides, insecticides and herbicides. There is no doubt that fewer and fewer agrochemicals are being used in viticulture, just as in agriculture generally. Some wine drinkers report that they feel much better after drinking organic wine than those produced using agrochemicals.

Biodynamic viticulture is something much more extreme. Following the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, it involves administering homeopathic doses of often bizarre-sounding substances prepared by, for example, burying manure-filled cow horns for six months, according to the cosmic calendar. Scientific explanations for all this are thin on the ground but in many cases the vines look much healthier and resulting fruit tastes much more intense. Some argue that this is simply because biodynamic growers pay such close attention to each vine rather than as a specific result of the techniques.

I will try to return to this topic here but if these issues interest you, you might like to take a look at But are biodynamic wines better than organic?

and follow the links within.

Lower alcohol wines

Some wines are naturally low in alcohol, either because they are produced somewhere far from the equator such as the **Mosel** valley with limited amounts of sunshine to produce fermentable sugar in the grapes or because some of that sugar has been left in the wine, or because, like **Asti**, the fermentation is deliberately stopped half-way through to produce a sweet, low alcohol wine.

As wines have become increasingly alcoholic and we have become more aware of our alcohol intake, however, all sorts of lower-alcohol wines are appearing on the market, some of them the result of very careful vine growing and winemaking, some of them semi-industrial. Many of them taste decidedly unlike wine although the overall quality is steadily improving. A really good soft drink or a spritzer can be more delicious.

Low-calorie wine?

Wine is not slimming. The two components which contribute to its calorific value are alcohol and sugar, so the most fattening wines are strong reds from hot countries, plus dessert wines. The least calorific are dry whites and light reds from cool climates. It is by no means the case that white wine is less fattening than red, nor that dry wines are necessarily low in calories. The least calorific wines are bone dry and low in alcohol. Unchaptalised Dutch, Belgian, Danish, English and Luxembourgish perhaps?

Wines for special medical conditions

Diabetics should take care to choose bone dry wines, for example **Champagne, Chablis, Muscadet, Sancerre** or **Pouilly-Fumé**, **fino** and **manzanilla** sherry and most red wines – so long as they are relatively low in alcohol. Wines sold specifically as Diabetic are usually low in both sugar and alcohol.

Many people find that their bodies react badly to either white or red wines. Since red wines contain a much wider range of components than white, the second of these reactions is easier to understand and some think it may reflect red wine's higher histamine content, others that it may have something to do with red wine's higher charge of phenolics. It is possible that the white wines which have caused an allergic reaction are rather higher than most in sulphur and some asthmatics react particularly badly to this common food preservative. Much more research is needed in this area, but the wine trade is generally composed of people who react extremely well to wine and there has therefore been little enthusiasm for this research unfortunately.

Kosher wine

Wine is kosher, and therefore acceptable to religious Jews, if it follows rabbinical law according to who has handled it as it was made. For years kosher wine was pretty dire, mainly sweet, red and oxidised because so often poured from half-empty bottles (few people would drink it for pleasure). Since the 1980s however a number of kosher wines that are every bit as good as non-kosher wines have emerged, not all of them Israeli.

. The very expensive Ch Valandraud of St-Emilion for example makes a kosher cuvée which I sometimes prefer to their regular one in my annual en primeur tastings

for example).

(see Bordeaux 2004 notes

Vegan wines

Many wines are clarified by fining agents containing animal products such as egg whites, fish bladders and casein from milk; some wine producers deliberately use other finings so that they can offer their produce as vegan wines

. It should be noted, however, that finings are not designed to remain in the finished wine.

Commercial wine mixes and coolers

Commercial bottled blends of fruit juices and wine had their moment as wine coolers and still sell. The development of artificial essences of peach, apricot, raspberry and so on helped this trade enormously. When it comes down to it, some of the best are duplications of the most successful fresh mixes of wine and fruit juice - orange juice and sparkling wine (Buck's Fizz) and peach juice and sparkling wine (Bellini). The commercial brands can taste a bit artificial however and are invariably very sweet.