

## Common wine aromas

29 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

Here's a categorisation of some of the tasting terms I use most commonly for smells and flavours (you may have noticed that I have a somewhat limited wine vocabulary). I've put them into groups but their real use, I hope, is as a possible help in blind tasting (if a mature red wine smells strongly of strawberries, for example, chances are it's a traditional rioja) and a personal guide to developing a wine vocabulary of your own. None of us tastes in exactly the same way so your impressions and most obvious vocabulary are likely to be subtly different.

Not all of these terms are positive. I've marked negative attributes with an asterisk. In fact even the first attribute, butteriness, can be unattractive if present in excess - in wines subjected to clumsy malolactic fermentation, for example.

### Microbiological

- Lactic
- Buttery - rich Chardonnay, malolactic fermentation
- Yeasty
  - Bread yeast - some champagne
  - Flor yeast - Manzanilla, Fino

### Chemical

- Other
  - Acetaldehyde - sherry, oxidation\*
  - Peardrops - Beaujolais Nouveau, carbonic maceration
- Papery
  - Wet cardboard - dirty filter pads\*
  - Dry cardboard - glasses from a cardboard box\*
- Sulphury
  - Struck match - free sulphur\* (especially for asthmatics)
  - Rotten eggs - hydrogen sulphide/mercaptan\* (aeration can help)

### Mineral

- Flint - Pouilly-Fumé, Sancerre
- Wet stones - Chablis
- Petrol/kerosene - aged Riesling

### Earthy

- Undergrowth - mature, full reds
- Mould - TCA, 'corkiness' or other taint\*
- Dirty dishcloth - dirty glasses\*

### Woody

- Wet wood - dirty cooperage\*
- Oaky - any oaked wine, most obvious on Chardonnay
- Cigar box - red bordeaux
- Pencil shavings - Cabernet Franc
- Pine - Retsina

### Burnt

- Smoky - Alsace whites
- Burning rubber - Syrah
- Coffee - madeira, Banyuls, old reds
- Burnt toast - old Hunter Valley Semillon
- Toasted bread - fine oaked Chardonnay

### Sweet

- Biscuit - old champagne
- Honey - Chenin Blanc, Riesling

Barleysugar - Sauternes  
Caramel - ripe reds  
Molasses - Piedmont reds  
Chocolate - Shiraz

### **Nutty**

Almondy  
Almond - Soave  
Marzipan - Marsanne  
Other  
Coconut - American oak  
Chestnut - Some Portuguese reds  
Hazelnuts- white burgundy

### **Fruity**

Citrus  
Lemon - acidified whites  
Lime - Australian Riesling  
Grapefruit - English wine, Scheurebe  
Orange - marsala, sweet Italians

#### Tropical

Pineapple - cool fermented whites  
Melon - Mâcon Blanc  
Banana - Beaujolais  
Lychee - Gewürztraminer

#### Tree

Peach - eastern European whites  
Apricot - Viognier/Condrieu  
Apple - young Chardonnay  
Pear - Piedmont whites  
Black cherry - mature Pinot Noir

#### Berry

Mulberry - Shiraz  
Blackberry - North Rhône  
Raspberry - young Pinot Noir  
Strawberry - red Rioja  
Blackcurrant - Cabernet Sauvignon  
Gooseberry - Sauvignon Blanc  
Grape - Muscat

#### Dried

Raisin - Banyuls, Liqueur Muscat  
Prune - Recioto, concentrated reds  
Fig - port

### **Vegetal**

#### Fresh

Grassy - Sauvignon, underripe grapes  
Nettles - Sauvignon  
Green pepper - less than ripe Cabernet  
Eucalyptus - ripe Cabernet  
Mint - New World Cabernet  
Geranium leaves - sorbic acid\*  
Currant leaves - Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc

#### Processed

Canned asparagus - New Zealand Sauvignon  
Boiled cabbage - botrytis (noble rot)

#### Dried

Tobacco - Châteauneuf-du-Pape  
Straw - Chenin Blanc  
Tea - young port

### **Floral**

Vaguely floral - Riesling and crosses  
Violet - top quality mature reds  
Elderflower - young, cool climate whites  
Rose - Nebbiolo, Muscat  
Orange blossom - Muscat

**Spicy**

Spicy - Alsace whites, Southern Rhône reds  
Licorice - dense red wines, especially Syrah  
Black pepper - Syrah  
Vanilla - American oak

**Animal**

Raw

Cat's pee - Sauvignon Blanc  
Mousey - Brettanomyces\*  
Meaty - Pomerol  
Game - mature red burgundy, Rhône

Processed

Bacon fat - ripe Alsace  
Leather - wood-aged reds, especially Australian