

Chapter 1

Principles of Wine

In order for the avid wine enthusiast to taste and grade wine, an intricate partnership between man, machine and nature must function. A co-operation not too easily achieved without dedication, experience, investment and good weather conditions. This requires man to do his work alongside nature, otherwise wine cannot be produced in the quantities and qualities sought by wine connoisseurs today. There are three major steps or processes that need to be discussed so that you can understand more fully what is in your glass and what factors affect what you find there. These steps are:

- Viticulture
- Vinification
- Marketing, Sales, and Distribution

This chapter has been designed to give you a quick overview of the viticulture and vinification aspects associated with grape farming and wine-making. What we taste in the glass is a direct result of what has been done to the wine in the vineyard and cellar. Although wine-making is a science requiring years of study, I will attempt to cover the most important areas as generally as possible.

Good wine begins in the vineyard. We've all heard that statement thousands of times, and as it happens, it is also very true. Without good grapes, there is no good wine.

Viticulture

“Terroir” as the French call it, is the composition of location, soil type, mineral makeup and weather conditions (total hours of sunshine and rain with cool evenings, nights and mornings with warm days). The weather conditions directly affect the quality of the grape during the growing season and at harvest time. Too much rain produces diluted grapes, which results in less concentration. Too much sunshine, on the other hand, results in grapes that grow too quickly, producing fruit with excess sugar, less acidity and poor phenolic structure (skin, tannins, and color pigments), wines with high alcohol levels, poor length and balance. The key is to produce grapes with the correct balance of sugar, pH, phenolic structure, acidity and good fruit characters (found in the pulp and skins), thus giving the winemaker the best possible prerequisites for the desired wine style.



Fig. 1.1. A vineyard in Bordeaux France during the winter season.