

Chapter 7

Grape Varieties, Oak & Additives

Although there are thousands of grape varieties to choose from, I have selected 30 of the most well-known varieties, 15 red and 15 white, and I will cover each in detail within this chapter. I am fully aware that there are many other important varieties not covered here, some of which will appear in future publications.

Nevertheless, I hope that you will get enough information about each of the grape varieties discussed. For each of them I will give you some background to the grape, its origin, the various styles and whether or not it is used in a blend as well as the grape's phenology and wine-tasting characteristics for red and white wines. At the bottom of each page a character summary is provided along with tactile sensory graphs, which help you to identify the variety, decide on storage potential, grape typicity and how to match it with food or cheese.

Each of the grapes discussed have their own unique characteristics, which I call 'trademark characters'. These

characters are usually present unless the climate conditions were adverse and/or something went wrong in the winemaking process.

The aim of this chapter is to show the benefits of each variety. By understanding these benefits you may gradually increase your appreciation for the grape and be able to combine it appropriately with various kinds of foods and in different social situations.

The end of this chapter is dedicated to discussing the purpose, use and effects of oak in wine, and winemaking. This will help you understand the various characteristics caused by the oak itself as well as the differences between European and American oak.

The following is a list of the 30 grapes for which you'll find a full description:

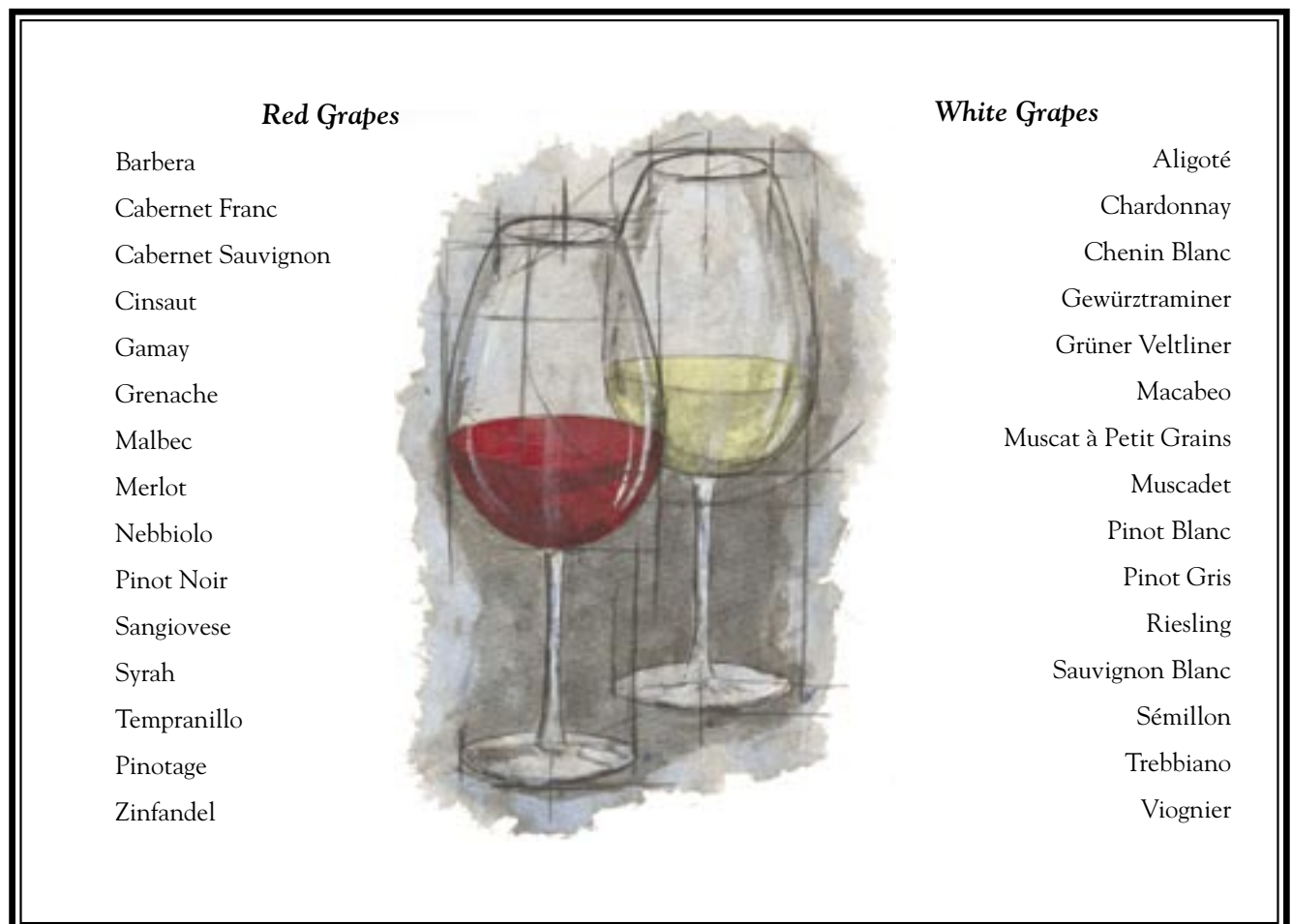


Fig. 7.1.

Barbera

Barbera is the most widely planted grape variety in the world. In both Italy and California it is regarded as a valued grape, as it thrives in warm climates but, more importantly, it produces high acidic wines with low tannin content. Usually a good complement to food, it is considered to be a good average table wine. **Synonyms:** Alba, d'Asti and del Monferrato.

Areas Found:

Barbera has its roots in Italy but is also found in Argentina and South Africa but, most importantly, in California's San Joaquin Valley, where it is responsible for about 13% of the state's total grape production. Barbera is found throughout southern Italy and is the most planted grape variety, followed closely by Sangiovese.

Wine Styles and Blends:

Found as a single varietal but more often today used as a blended wine in the warmer climates, where the high acid levels of Barbera help to lift the other heavier varieties that tend to suffer from poor acidity levels if picked too late.

Grape Physiology:

Vigour: Very vigorous. It produces high yields of about 70 hl/ha. Grows well on sandy, fine and poor soils.

Phenology: Ripens in late-season, so it is a good grape for warm weather climates where summers are relatively hot. At full maturity the average sugar content is between 22° to 23.5° Brix / Balling (total dissolved compounds in grape juice and sugar concentration), and total titratable acid of 6 to 7.5 g/l.

Berries: Medium in size, with a thin skin. The berry has an off-round shape grape with a bluish / violet / pink-red color.

Diseases: Susceptible to leafroll, rot and Pierce's disease.

Sensory Characteristics:

Appearance:

In young wines, Barbera has a deep purple hue with a pinkish hue towards the rim-

proper. In warmer climates, such as in southern Italy and central California, Barbera has a tighter gradient but changes hue a lot quicker. In 85 point wines it has a light to medium purple/ruby-red hue when young, and the wine starts to change color already after the 2nd to 3rd year. Good mature wines develop an orange brick-colored rim already around their 5th to 6th year.

The Nose:

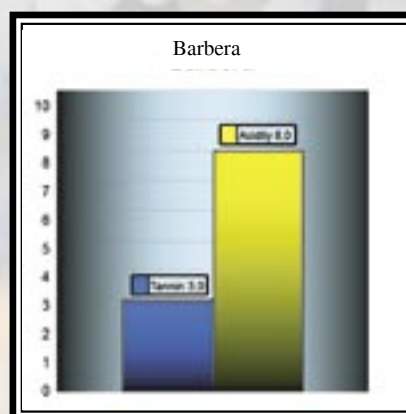
Barbera has a fruity acid character of cherry, strawberry, and even some blackcurrant and raspberry when young. Can be aged in oak.

The Palate:

Known for its high acid content Barbera has usually very little but soft 'fine tannins' and balanced as per the ratio chart (3/10 for tannin and 8/10 for acid). The alcohol levels range from 11% to 12.5%. A volatile aroma of plums is usually evident in the aftertaste.

Excellent Food Combinations:

Barbera combines perfectly with fatty or creamy foods. It can also be served with light meat dishes and even a variety of shell-fish, fish, and chicken, pâté and quiche plates.



Typical Aroma	Red Berry
	Cherry
	Strawberry
	Blackcurrant
	Raspberry
	Acidic charc.
	Plums
Tannin	3
Acidity	8
Sweetness	0
Bitterness	
Weight	4
Alcohol	11-12.5%

Fig. 7.2. Barbera Tannin to Acid sensory ratios. Fig. 7.3. Barbera sensory summary.