A photograph of a wine bottle floating in clear water. Sunlight filters through the surface, creating shimmering patterns and rays of light. The bottle is dark and partially submerged, with its neck pointing upwards. The overall mood is serene and elegant.

Everything you wanted to know about wine but didn't like to ask... If you've ever been intimidated by a wine snob, sneered at by a sommelier or baffled by the science of winemaking, help is at hand. Dive into wine education with ROBERTA MUIR and you're guaranteed greater enjoyment when it comes to serving, cellaring and of course drinking wine.

Message IN A Bottle

Once upon a time, if you knew that white wine went with white meat and red wine with red meat you could hold your own in most dinner table wine conversations. Today you're likely to be called upon to discuss malolactic fermentation, the newest wine regions, whether you prefer Riesling or Viognier with a Thai curry and the merits of cork versus screw cap closures. And if I've lost you already, you definitely need to read on!

In the last five to ten years there's been an explosion in wine education courses around the country as Australians' thirst for wine wisdom has rocketed, along with their increasing hunger for food knowledge. But, once you're back in the classroom, what is it you're likely to learn?

IN THE BEGINNING

Wine is fermented grape juice and in 2003 Australia produced over one billion litres (1,037,562,000) of it. Man has been making and drinking wine since he first stopped his nomadic wanderings and settled in one place. In past times, when water supplies were uncertain, wine was a safe thirst quencher and as man began to travel, it became a valuable commodity for trade.

Vine cuttings collected from the Cape of Good Hope, en route to Australia in 1788, were unsuccessfully planted in the early Sydney colony. In the 1830s, however, James Busby planted vines brought from Europe in the Hunter Valley, establishing the first successful Australian vineyard and by the mid-19th century an infant wine industry had begun in New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia.

VARIETIES

There are over 3,000 different grape varieties suitable for wine making. In Europe there are strong traditions and regulations dictating which grapes are grown in which areas. Australia, however, has planted a wide range of varieties in each region and is still experimenting to determine which varieties produce the best wine – and where.

A handful of 'noble' varieties have developed an international reputation over many years for producing outstanding wines in a wide variety of areas. These are the most widely planted. Riesling (aromatic, fresh, green apples, often slightly sweet); Chardonnay (stone fruit, melon, rich, buttery, often oak aged); Semillon (citrus, fresh, dry); Sauvignon Blanc (asparagus, grassy, tropical

fruits, fresh, dry); Shiraz (pepper, raspberry, plum, leather, cigar box, chocolate); Cabernet Sauvignon (mint, chocolate, green capsicum, blackcurrants); Merlot (soft, black fruits, raspberry, cherry, plum) and Pinot Noir (mushroom, forest floor, barnyard, gamey)

REGIONS

Since 1993 Australia has officially delineated and named specific wine producing areas under a process known as Geographical Indications (GI). The main purpose is to protect the use of the regional name, limiting its use to wines containing at least 85% fruit grown within that GI. GI's can be either zones, regions or sub-regions and many are still being determined. Some of the main regions already designated are: South Australia: Barossa Valley, Eden Valley, McLaren Vale, Coonawarra, Adelaide Hills, Clare Valley. New South Wales: Riverina, Mudgee, Orange, Hunter, Southern Highlands, Tumbarumba. Victoria: Heathcote, Beechworth, Rutherglen, Mornington Peninsula, Yarra Valley, Grampians. Western Australia: Swan District, Great Southern, Margaret River. Queensland: Granite Belt and South Burnett are the only two regions to be designated to date.

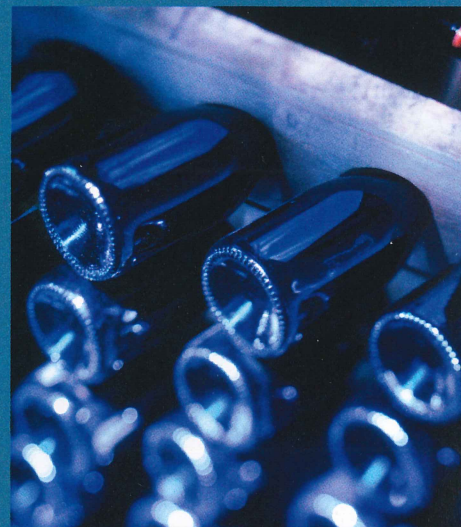
Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory are official zones, without any specific regions yet designated.

STYLES

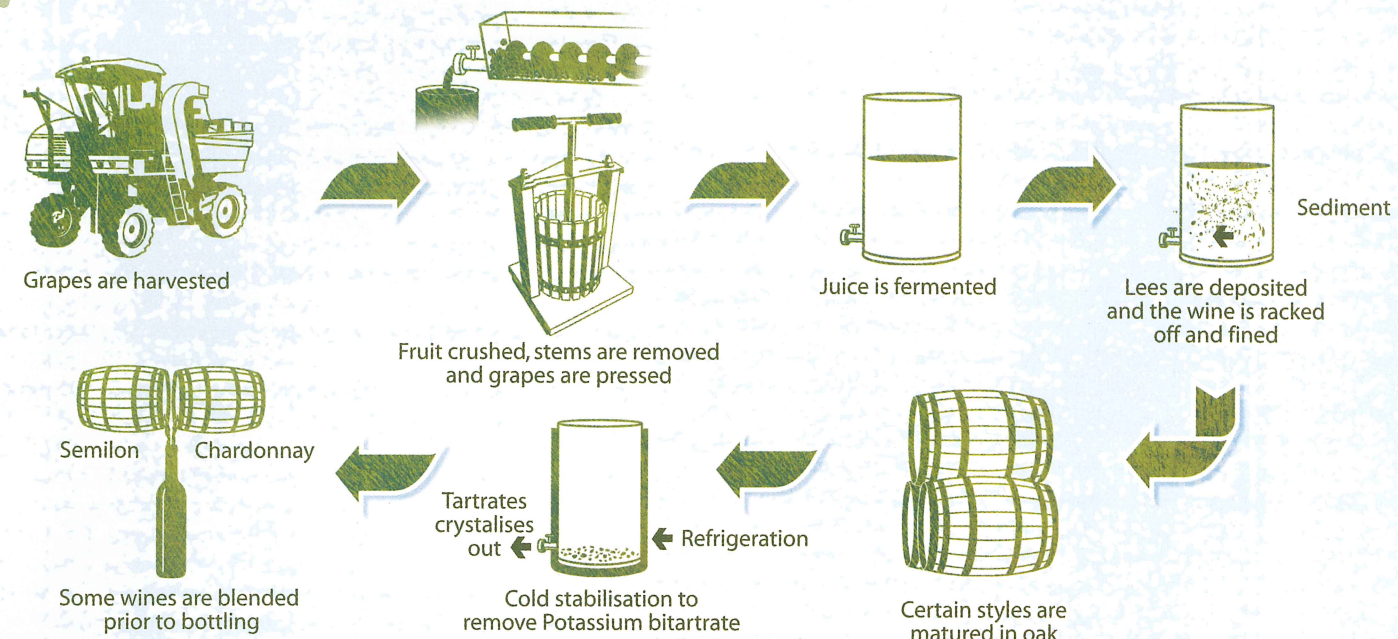
Wines, even those made from the same grape variety, come in many different styles. There are a number of factors that combine to determine a wine's style: grape variety, climate, soil type, how the vine is grown (viticulture) and how the wine is made (vinification). A wine's style is usually described in terms of its level of sweetness (dry, medium, sweet); its colour (white, red, rosé) and certain wine making processes (sparkling, fortified).

WINEMAKING

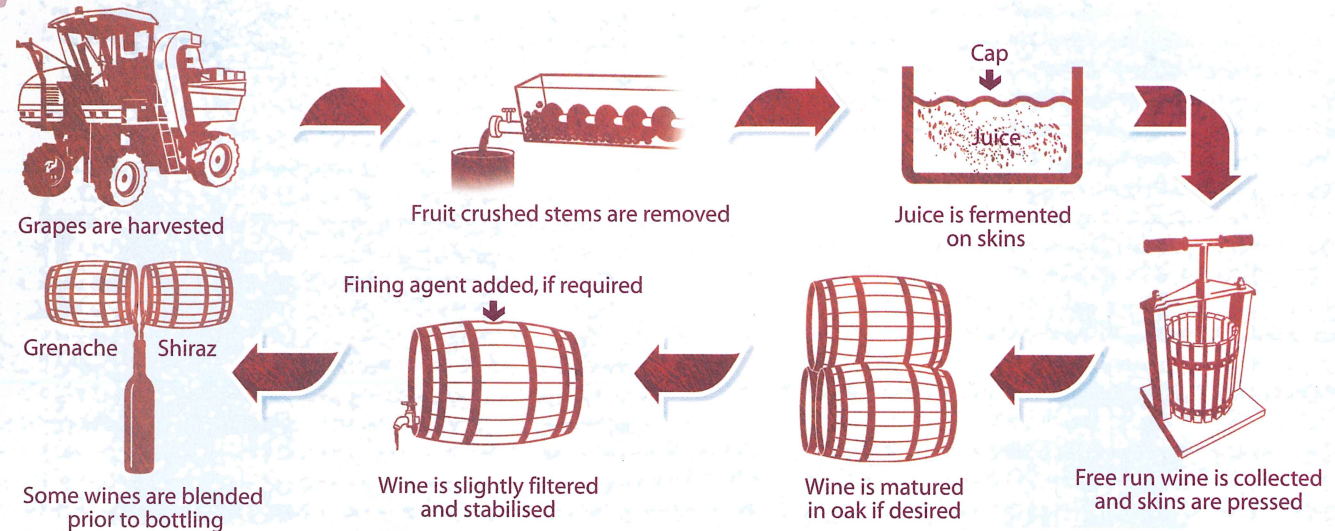
The key to wine making is fermentation, which occurs when yeast feeds on sugar, producing alcohol and carbon dioxide. You've probably noticed a dull white film on the skin of ripe grapes; this is called the bloom and is where airborne yeasts attach to the fruit. When the grape is split and the yeast comes into contact with the sweet juices inside, they begin to feast on these and produce carbon dioxide (which makes fermenting liquids bubble) and alcohol.



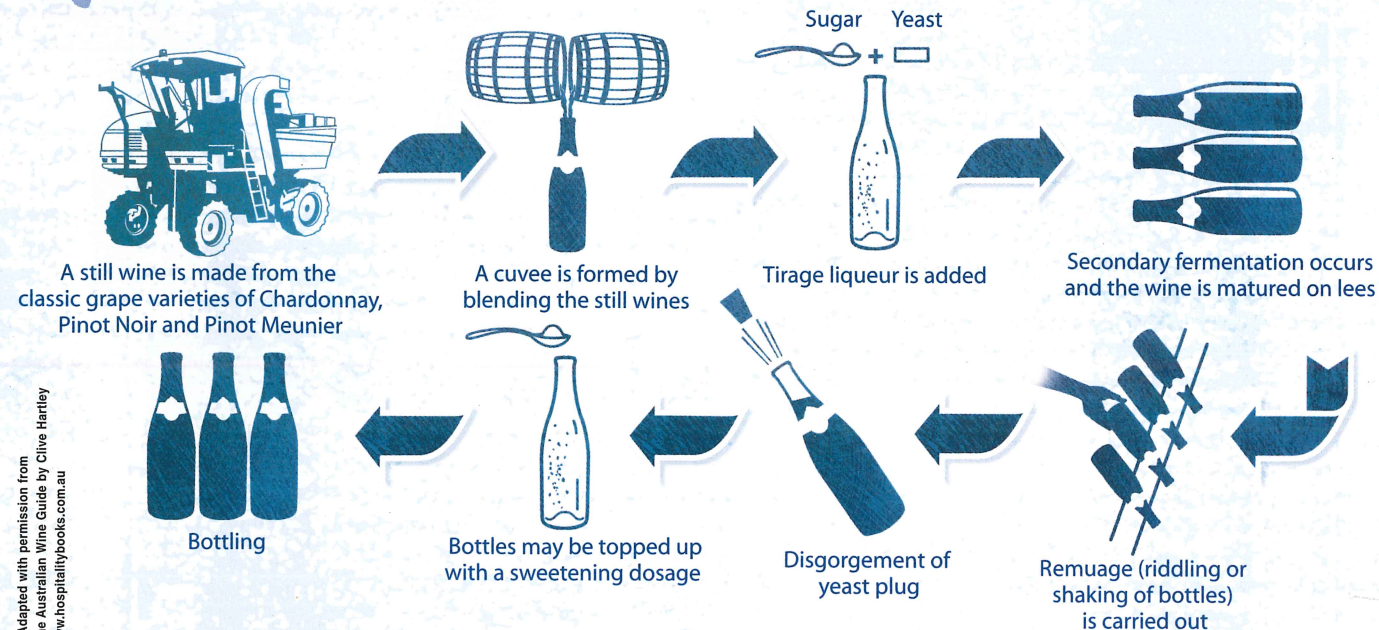
White Wine Production



Red Wine Production



Methode Champenoise



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The yeast will continue to convert sugar to alcohol until it runs out of sugar (producing a very dry wine) or until the alcohol content becomes so high that it kills the yeast (around 15%). This natural process has been harnessed by man to make fermented foods and drinks since ancient times.

Since Louis Pasteur discovered how fermentation works in the 19th century, modern winemakers have been able to manipulate the process to achieve specific wine styles.

Our diagram on page 11 shows the steps taken in modern wine making – from the harvesting of the grapes through to bottling. It clearly highlights the differences in the fermentation and stabilisation methods between white, red and sparkling wines.

HOW TO TASTE WINE

When wine is assessed by professional wine tasters it is judged (and marked out of 20) on three criteria: appearance (3 points), nose or smell (7 points) and palate or taste (10 points). Each gives indications as to the wine's age, quality, variety and even the region in which it was grown. In a wine show, wines awarded 15.5 to 16.9 points receive a Bronze medal, 17 to 18.4 a Silver and 18.5 to 20 are awarded a Gold.

When tasting wine use a clean, clear, stemmed glass, which is only one third full.

Appearance: When assessing a wine visually look at its clarity (cloudy or bright), intensity (deep or pale), and colour (this is best done by tilting the glass against a white background and noting the colour especially at the rim of the wine).

Aroma: Next, give the wine a good swirl around the glass. This does more than make you look like you know what you're doing, it allows the aromatic compounds to escape from the wine and rise up out of the glass so you can smell them better. Note any unpleasant aromas (musty, sulphurous or dirty smells) and the intensity of the aroma. Then try to describe what the smell reminds you of. For most people this is the hardest part because they're afraid of being wrong; remember there are no wrong answers, and whatever first comes to mind is obviously what that wine has reminded

you of. Some common descriptors are: grape (not so silly), apples, pineapple, citrus, violets, blackcurrant, honey, nuts, butter, oak, vanilla, coconut, smoke, mushrooms.

Taste: Now it's time to take a small mouthful of the wine and, again, look like an expert by swirling the wine around your mouth (allowing it to come into contact with different parts of the mouth) and sucking some air in through your teeth while holding the wine in your mouth (a large part of taste is actually smell and this air allows the wine's aroma molecules

to be carried to the back of the mouth and up into the nose). You can now assess the wine's sweetness (most noticeable on the front of the tongue); acidity (a very acid wine will make the mouth pucker, but some acid is necessary to balance the sweetness); tannins (best felt as a dry sensation on the gums and teeth, similar to that from strong black tea); weight (feeling light, or heavy and mouth filling); fruit (what the wine actually tastes like, again the first descriptor that comes to mind is often the best answer). Now spit the wine out and determine the wine's length (how long the flavour lingers once the wine is gone).

WINE FAULTS

Wine is susceptible to a number of faults that can occur during or after the winemaking process. That's why it's always a good idea to smell and taste a small amount of wine before pouring it all out.

Cork taint is the most common fault, affecting between 5% and 20% of all wines (depending on which sources you believe).

Depending on the level of taint the

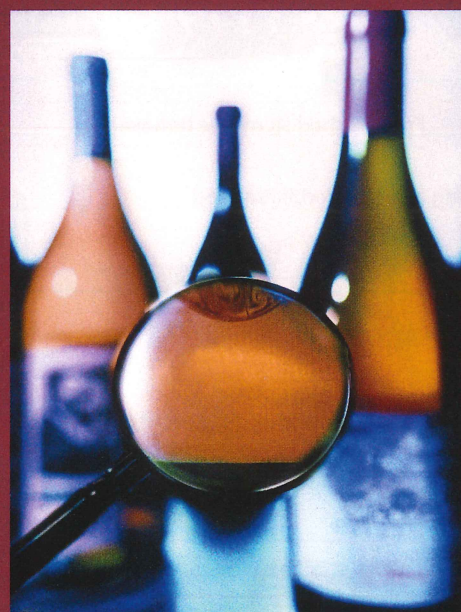
wine can smell musty (like the inside of a damp cupboard) or just be a little 'flat' without much aroma or fruit flavour at all.

Cork taint is the result of a complex chemical reaction between the chlorine used to disinfect cork and moulds growing in the cork. Screw cap closures alleviate this problem.

Acetobacter is a bacteria that can enter wine and turn it into vinegar. It is controlled by the use of small quantities of sulphur dioxide.

Brettanomyces, often referred to as 'Brett', is a yeast that can occur naturally on grapes, producing unpleasant flavours

'Australians' thirst for wine wisdom has rocketed, along with their increasing hunger for food knowledge'



in wines, often referred to as 'mousy', and also some metallic flavours. It is also controlled with sulphur dioxide and, interestingly, some people consider a low level of Brett enhances the flavour of some wines.

Oxidation occurs when wine is exposed to excessive amounts of oxygen. Winemakers take great care to minimise and control exposure during winemaking and storage. A good seal, whether with cork or screw cap, should prevent excessive oxygen reaching the wine once bottled. Oxidised wine will be a dark, brown colour without vibrancy. Wines that are aged also develop darker colours as minute amounts of oxygen do penetrate corks and even screw cap closures; this is part of the natural ageing process.

Wine education courses, of course, give students the chance to taste while they learn, not only different grape varieties from different regions but also to experience wine faults first hand.

There's no doubt that experiencing and sharing with other like-minded wine lovers is the most enjoyable way of learning!

WHERE TO GO FOR WINE EDUCATION

Australian Wine Selectors' Introduction to Wine is a one-day fun and informative course held in Australian capital cities during 2005 hosted by either wine educator, Chris Barnes, or winemaker and Chairman of the Tasting Panel, Karl Stockhausen. Prices are currently \$99 (members) and \$109 (non-members) and include extensive notes, morning tea, lunch and all wines.

Australian Wine Selectors' More About Wine is an advanced one-day course also being held throughout Australia in 2005. This course covers sparkling and fortified wine, how wines age and how they cellar. They are hosted by either Karl Stockhausen or Chris Barnes and prices are \$99/\$109 inclusive of extensive notes, morning tea, lunch and all wine.

Australian Wine Selectors' Members Tastings are held in capital cities and regional areas and are a fun way to taste (and even buy) the Panel's current favourites. Snacks and tasting booklets are included in the current price of \$15/\$20.

Australian Wine Selectors' Vintage Education Tour is held every vintage. A wine expert/maker guides a day tour around the vineyards. The day includes transport, visits to a number of vineyards, wine tastings, lunch and the opportunity to purchase tasted wine at a discount.

For Australian Wine Selectors' course bookings and information call the Customer Service Team on 1300 303 307 or visit www.wineselectors.com.au

OTHER USEFUL WEB SITES

- **Australian Society of Wine Education** - www.aswe.org.au
- **Wine Diva** - www.winediva.com.au
- **WSET** - www.wset.co.uk
- **Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation** - www.awbc.com.au

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