

# BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

## CLASS C4 - OTHER DRY WHITE

December 2018

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### FOCUS: CHENIN BLANC - OLD AND NEW WORLD WINE STYLES

#### AFTER COMPLETING THIS SESSION YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- The characteristics of a Chenin Blanc made in the New World wine style;
- The characteristics of a Chenin Blanc made in the Old World wine style;
- The areas in which Old World style Chenin Blanc are grown;
- The areas in which New World style Chenin Blanc are grown;
- The BCAWA Class description of Other Dry White

#### DESCRIPTION: CLASS C4 – OTHER DRY WHITE

This class contains all other white wines, either varietals or blends, which do not fit the descriptions of Classes C1 (Chardonnay), C5 (White Pinot), or C2 (Aromatic White Vinifera). A white wine to be consumed with food.

Varietal vinifera wines in this class must contain 85% or more of vinifera varieties such as Auxerrois, Chasselas, **Chenin Blanc**, Colombard, Grüner Veltliner, Madeleine Angevine, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, or Trebbiano. The remaining 15% may be any ingredient. Blends in this class must not fit the definitions of C1, C5, or C2. Wines that include interspecific hybrid grapes are acceptable in this class and their ingredient percentages must be specified so their eligibility in the appropriate AWC class can be determined.

Aromatic white grape varieties are acceptable in blends provided their impact is subdued. Non-grape dry white table wines belong in either this class or J1 (Country Table).

#### Technical Characteristics:

Alcohol: 9% - 13.5%.

Colour: Pale bronze or bronze-pink to pale straw to light gold. No amber, brown or grey tinges.

Sugar: 0.0% - 1.5%.

Specific Gravity: 0.990 - 0.998.

Acidity: 6.0g/L - 7.5g/L.

PH: 3.0 – 3.7.

#### DEFINING OF DRY WINE

Wine grapes have varying degrees of natural sugars depending on the varietal, how late in the season the grape was harvested, and the level of concentration of the juices. During the fermentation process, yeast converts sugars from grape juice into alcohol. When a majority of the sugar is converted and residual sugar is less than one percent of the wine's volume (four grams of sugar per Liter), the wine is considered dry.

#### HISTORY

The French ampelographer Pierre Gale has theorized that Chenin blanc originated in the Anjou wine region sometime in the 9th century and from there traveled to Touraine by at least the 15th century. The grape may have been the variety described in two royal land grants of Charles the Bald in 845 detailed in the records of the abbey of Glanfeuil as growing on the left bank of the Loire river in vineyards belonging to individuals with the name of Soulangé and Bessé.

When Thomas Bohier purchased vineyard land around Chenonceaux on January 3, 1496, several grape varieties were brought in from the Burgundy wine region of Beaune, the Jura wine region of Arbois and nearby Orléans and Anjou. One of these varieties, a white grape known as Plant d'Anjou was later planted between 1520 and 1535 at a nearby site known as Mont Chenin in Touraine by the Lord of Château de Chenonceau and his brother in law, Denis Briçonnet, the abbot of Cormery. Ampelographers believe that Plant d'Anjou was like Chenin blanc with the grape eventually taking on the name from Mont Chenin.

From France the grape spread to South Africa where it was most likely included among the vine cuttings sent to Jan van Riebeeck in the Cape Colony by the Dutch East India Company.

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER GRAPES

In 1999, DNA analysis has shown that Chenin blanc has a parent-offspring relationship with the Jura wine grape Savagnin. Additional DNA evidence shows that Chenin blanc shares a sibling relationship with Trousseau and Sauvignon Blanc (both grapes the likely offspring of Savagnin) which strongly suggest that it is Chenin blanc that is the offspring and Savagnin is the parent variety. Through Chenin's half-sibling relationship with Sauvignon blanc, the grape is related as an aunt/uncle variety to the Bordeaux wine grape Cabernet Sauvignon which is the offspring of Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Franc.

Other DNA research has shown that a crossing of Chenin blanc and the Hunnic grape Gouais blanc produced several varieties including Balzac blanc, Colombard and Meslier-Saint-François. In South Africa, the grape was crossed with the Italian wine grape Trebbiano to produce Weldra and Chenel.

Over the years, Chenin blanc has also been frequently confused with other grape varieties with whom it does not seem to have a close genetic relationship. This includes the Portuguese wine grape Verdelho grown on the island of Madeira Machupiclait and in the Azores as well as the Spanish wine grape Albillo which was confused for Chenin blanc in Australia.

## GROWING AREAS:

In the presented wine flight of December 2018, we are exploring wines from the growing areas of the **Loire Valley, France** (specifically in the three regions of Saumur, Touraine and Savennieres) and the area of **Cape Winelands, South Africa** (specifically in the region of Franschoek Valley and the foot of the Stellenbosch mountains) as well as the **Napa Valley, California, USA** (specifically the Stags Leap District),

## TERROIR and TASTING NOTES:

### Loire Valley, France

The Loire Valley vineyards are distinctive for the diversity of their natural environments, a result of the wide range of soils and subsoils present. Between Angers and Saumur we see the transition between the older bedrock to the west and the sedimentary basin to the east. The wines from this area shows a little citrus, a lot of peach, and a dusting of minerals. Bone dry and crisp. In the Saumurois and Touraine, the subsoil is made up of tuffeau limestone, sand and siliceous clay from the Paris Basin. The wines from this area is soft and approachable, with fresh fruit aromas of pears and white flowers. In Anjou the subsoil is mainly slate, sandstone and carboniferous schist as well as volcanic rock, all originating from the Massif Armoricaïn. The wines from this area have aromas of lime, flower, aniseed, grapefruit and minerals.

### Cape Winelands, South Africa

Soils in Franschoek area South Africa are largely made up of alluvial sandstone, although there are deposits of granite on the slopes of the mountains in the north. While heavy soils closer to the river have some water-retaining qualities, the sandy soils on the lower slopes drain rapidly. This means that despite the reasonable amount of rainfall in the area during winter, some irrigation is still required. Wines from this area show Green apricot, pear drop and tangerine fruit aromas with a somewhat shy nose while other wines show a nose with hints of baked pineapple and green melon. On the palate there is pear, vanilla, honey, toasty oak and citrus. Granite and sandstone soils are found throughout Stellenbosch. The high clay content means free draining and excellent water-retention properties. Sufficient rainfall in winter allows growers to keep irrigation to a minimum. The wines from this area show lemon, melon, mango, pineapple, honey and minerals.

### Napa Valley, California

The Napa Volcanics California is a collection of rock types such as volcanic ash (tuff) glass lava flows, pyroclastic deposits, volcanic mudflows, and rocks. Found mostly along the west central part of the Napa Valley AVA, the broad band of volcanics also forms the underlying foundation of the northern one-third of the Mayacamas Mountains. In addition, virtually all of the hills and knobs within the valley are formed of Napa Volcanics, except for the Pine Ridge knob, which is underlain by Great Valley sequence strata. The Stags Leap District, marked by a dramatic outcropping of rock that flanks Napa Valley's east side, was one of the first areas to be designated an appellation based on the distinctiveness of its soils. Four vineyards here—Pine Ridge Estate, Locked Horns Vineyard, Cornerstone Vineyard, and Circle Hill Vineyard—

feature soils that range from well-draining rock and sand to clay loam. The palisades high above help heat the district during the day; at night, vineyards cool down quickly under the influence of breezes from the nearby San Pablo Bay. The wines from this area show, oroblanco blossoms, honeysuckle, citrus, tropical fruit, and fresh cut green herbs.

**NOTE:** Typical Aromas of a Chenin Blanc wine:

<b>Fruity:</b>	Apricot, Melon, Green Apple, Green Plum, Pear, Quince, Lemon, Lime, Grapefruit, Greengage (a light green plum popular in France and England)
<b>Floral/Herbal:</b>	Orange Blossom, Wildflowers, Perfume, Honey, Honeysuckle, Acacia, Grass, Hay, Angelica (an herb that smells somewhat like celery, is often candied, and is used to flavor Chartreuse)
<b>Nutty:</b>	Almond, Marzipan
<b>Mineral:</b>	Flint, Smoke, "Steely", Chalk,

## Geographic Regions

The Chenin blanc grapevine buds early in the growing season and ripens mid to late in the harvest year. However, in warm years, the balance between the Loire's marginal climate and the warmth needed to attain full ripeness has the potential of producing wines with some depth of complexity and finesse. The age of the vine can have an influence on wine quality, with older vines producing naturally lower yields. When infected by noble rot, which also lowers yields and adds and intensifies certain flavors, the wines develop less overtly floral aroma notes but more depth and layers.

## Soil, Climate, Weather Effect On Style Of Wine

The climate of a wine region will largely dictate whether Chenin blanc is produced in a predominately sweet or dry manner, while the vineyard soil type will generally influence the overall style of the wine.

Heavy clay based soils, paired with the right climate, is favorable to the development of weighty, botrytized dessert wines that need time to age and mature. Well-drained and less organic, predominately sandy soils tend to produce lighter styles of wine that mature more quickly. Chenin blanc planted in soils with a high silex content will produce wines with distinctive mineral notes, while limestone based soils will encourage wines with sharp acidity.

In Vouvray the soil is predominately argilo-calcaire or calcareous clay, which produces rounded wines with both acidity and weight. In areas where schist is plentiful in the soil, Chenin blanc grapes will generally ripen earlier than in vineyards with predominately clay based soils.

Among the viticultural hazards to which Chenin blanc is susceptible (apart from botrytis in less than ideal conditions) are damage from spring time frost, powdery mildew, and fungal disease (such as Dead arm of grapevine) that affect the wood structures of the grape vine. Some of these hazards can be managed with integrated pest management and rootstock selection.

## YIELDS AND HARVESTS

While true for most wine grape varieties, the quality of Chenin blanc wine is intimately connected to the care taken in the vineyard. If the grapes are harvested too soon, before they ripen, the high acidity of the resulting wine will be (according to wine expert Oz Clarke) "one of the nastiest wines possible". If the grapes are harvested at too high of a yield, the grapes will not retain any of Chenin blanc's distinctive character notes.

### Yields

In the **Loire Valley**, French regulations mandate that yields be kept low (40-50 hl/ha). At these levels, more of Chenin Blanc's varietal characteristics of floral, honeyed aromas are exhibited.

When the grape is harvested at high yields, such as the **California Central Valley** average of 10 tons per acre (175 hl/ha), Chenin's Blanc's flavors become more bland and neutral.

The vine is naturally vigorous and prone to overcropping if not kept in check. In fertile soils, as in parts of **South Africa**, Chenin Blanc can easily produce yields of 240 hl/ha.

To keep yields in check, vineyard managers may choose to graft Chenin vines with less vigorous rootstock from **Vitis riparia** (riverbank grape or frost grape) or **Vitis rupestris** (mountain grape) vines. During the growing season, they may also elect to do a green harvest where excess grape clusters are removed.

## Harvests

With optimal ripeness and balance between acidity and sugars being such a viticultural priority for Chenin blanc, many growers (such as those in the Loire Valley) will harvest the grapes in tries or successive pickings through the vineyards. During each series of picking only the ripest clusters or individual grapes are harvested by hand during a period that could last four to six weeks and include three to six passes through the vineyard.

For the production of sweet botrytized wines, pickers will look for the grapes that have achieved the necessary amount of the noble rot. In hot and dry years where no noble rot occurs, pickers may leave ripened grapes on the vine long enough to shrivel, or passerillé, where it could later be effected by noble rot.

In areas that experience a lot of vintage variation, winemakers may decide on a day by day basis what style and dryness of Chenin blanc they could make, with the grapes harvested during each tries going to different styles of wine.

For some producers in Vouvray, which may have up to six tries during harvest, the first few tries could go to sparkling and dry wine production while the later tries could go towards sweet wine production.

## WINE REGIONS

The term “**Old World**” references countries or regions where winemaking (with *Vitis vinifera* grapes) first originated. Old World wine countries include: France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Hungary, and Germany. Also, based on the definition, countries like Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova can also be considered old world wine regions.

The term “**New World**” references countries or regions where winemaking (and *Vitis vinifera* grapes) were imported during (and after) the age of exploration. New World wine countries include: the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, and New Zealand. Also, based on the definition, China, India, South Africa, and Japan are considered New World wine regions.

While Chenin blanc is planted across the globe from China to New Zealand, Canada, and Argentina, it is considered a "major" planting in only a few locations. Though France is the viticultural home of Chenin Blanc, by the turn of the 21st century there was twice as much Chenin Blanc planted in South Africa as there was in France. The grape's versatility and ability to reflect terroir causes it to lead, what Jancis Robinson describes as, a "double life".

In the Loire Valley of France, it is prized as a premium quality wine grape able to produce world class wines, while in many New World wine regions it used as a "workhorse variety", contributing acidity to bulk white blends and showing more neutral flavors rather than terroir. Throughout all its manifestations, Chenin Blanc's characteristic acidity is found almost universally in all wine regions.

## WINEMAKING

Wine expert Jancis Robinson has noted that Chenin Blanc is probably the world's most versatile grape, being able to produce quality wines of various sweetness, including dessert wines noted for their aging ability, as well as sparkling made according to the méthode champenoise and fortified wines. The grape can distinguish itself as a single varietal wine, or it can add acidity as a blending component. Its ability to be crafted into premium quality wines across a wide spectrum of dry and sweetness levels invites the comparison to German Rieslings, with Robinson noting that in many ways Chenin blanc is France's answer to the German Riesling.

One of the major differences between Old world and New world styles of Chenin blanc is the fermentation temperature. Old World style producers in the Loire tend to ferment their Chenin blanc at higher temperatures, 60-68°F (16-20°C), than New World producers in South Africa and elsewhere, usually fermenting their whites at temperatures around 50-54°F (10-12°C).

## WINE STYLES

**Old World** wine producers tend not to put a premium on the tropical fruit flavors and aromas that come out more vividly with cooler fermentation temperatures. Chenin blanc can accommodate some skin contact and maceration which will allow extraction of phenolic compounds that could add to the complexity of the wine. Two of the aromas that skin contact can bring out is the characteristic greengage and angelica notes of Chenin blanc.

The grape's characteristic acidity can be softened by malolactic fermentation, which will give the wine a creamier or "fattier" texture as would a period spent aging on the lees. The use of wood or oak aging is up to each individual producer. Old World producers tend to shy away from the use of new oak barrels in order to avoid flavors of vanilla, spice, and toastiness.

Typically an Old World style Chenin Blanc will impart aromas and flavours of citrus, peach, and some minerality; it can also be bone dry and crisp.

In Savennières there is a tradition of using acacia and chestnut barrels for aging; though acacia can impart a yellow tint to the wine, and chestnut barrels may add some buttery notes.

**New World** wine producers, although far more Chenin Blanc is planted in both California and South Africa than in France, tend not to use it with serious intent. California's vast acreage of Chenin Blanc came to the wine industry's aid in the 1970s and early 1980s when it had a serious shortage of other white grapes, but now that there is a Chardonnay lake Chenin Blanc is generally reviled as a rather bland, off-dry wine suitable only for the bottom end of the wine market. This is largely because it is irrigated to produce such high yields in California's Central Valley - up to four times as high as in the Loire - that it really does taste not unlike sugar water. But it need not be, as some more conscientious vinifiers of fruit grown in Clarksburg in the Sacramento Delta have proved. New World wine producers that consider Chenin Blanc with serious intent can produce wines which can be fresh and fruity, offering tropical fruit and aromas of spice and toastiness.

The South African wine industry is even more dependent on Chenin Blanc, which represents about one vine in five. Today it lacks the glamour of more recent European imports such as Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc but some producers have managed to coax serious wines out of some of the older, dry-farmed bush vines. Chief among these is Ken Forrester who has managed to produce a full range of well-made Chenins from the exceptionally good-value Scholtzenhof Petit Chenin right up to a Noble Late Harvest (much improved since Forrester did a vintage in the Loire and realised that you don't have to pick all the nobly rotten grapes at the same time).

**Note:** At times you may taste a wine from a "New World" country that has been made in the "Old World" wine style.

## FOOD PAIRINGS

New World style wines obviously vary in taste from Old World wine styles. Therefore the foods you pair with each of these wine styles will differ. Here are suggestions for Old World style Chenin Blanc wines:

- **New World** style Chenin Blanc pairs well with: charcuterie, ricotta frittata, foods with some spice (Thai, Chinese, Mexican) smoked salmon, terrine, pâte, gruyere cheese
- **Old World** style Chenin Blanc pairs well with: shellfish, white fish (with lemon), salad, veal, turkey, pork chop, guinea fowl, shellfish, whitefish, trout, pork, duck, roast chicken, herb-cruste goat cheeses and triple-cream brie

## THE FLIGHT

The flight was selected to expose our Guild members to both Old World and New World style Chenin Blancs. There are wines in the flight from France, South Africa and California . . . are you able to identify the wines by area?

## REFERENCES

Janice Robinson's The Oxford Companion To Wine  
What To Drink With What You Eat by Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page  
On Line: Wikipedia  
On Line: Wine-fully