

## Wine Labels and How to Read Them



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Wine Labels are loaded with valuable information, if you know what to look for. Here we will give a brief overview of what to look for to make your wine selection easier.

**The first thing to look for is the type of wine.** Most wines are named for the varietals that went into making the wine. Some examples of varietals would be Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, or Pinot Noir. Chianti is an example of a wine labeled for a region not a particular grape. Chianti must be made from at least 80% Sangiovese grapes, and usually does not say on the label what is in the bottle besides Chianti. But if it says Chianti it must be from the Chianti region of Italy. Wines from France are generally named for the region where they come from. Examples would be Burgundy, or Champagne. If a vineyard uses grapes grown on their own land they will use the term Estate to identify that the grapes were grown on their land, and the wine was made by them. Wine labels may also list how long the wine was aged where the grapes are from if not the bottling vineyard. By law in the USA if a wine has less than 75% of a particular varietal the contents must be listed on the label. Some states have overridden this law. California's law states 85% and Oregon is 90%.

**Next look for the date.** This is the year the grapes were grown and harvested. If you study wine, or weather this can tell you if a particular vintage year will be better than

another? California really has no bad years, However in some other countries the weather can turn an entire crop into a bad harvest.

**Look for Appellation.** This is where the wine is from. Some wine labels simply say California, where other labels will state Sonoma, or Napa Valley.

Never, never, never just buy a wine because it has a pretty label. Some of the worst wines we have tasted have had the fanciest label with a catchy name. Ask people whose opinion you trust if a particular wine is good. There is an old adage that if you don't like a wine you can cook with it. There is a better adage that states if you're not going to drink it why would you want to eat it. Some foreign wine labels might be hard to understand, because you may not speak the language. But remember these steps.

1. Varietals
2. Date
3. Appellation
4. Awards, or medals the wine has won

If you have any questions about wine ask us.

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The Traveling Vineyard

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