

## John Jonna's Wine Facts

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Do you prefer screw caps or old fashion cork as a closure in wine? Well, there is a controversy brewing, because screw caps are on the rise to deal with the problem of tainted cork which is also on the rise. Strange bacteria from tainted cork, called TCA, although completely harmless, can cause wines of every kind to exude an aroma of wet newspaper, wet basement, and wet dog.

New screw caps, called Stelvins, were developed in Australia and have been found to be the most effective in alleviating the "corked" problem. The jury is still out on how these caps will affect the long term aging of wine. In general, wines that are consumed in 5 years from vintage date do just fine with screw caps, longer term results are yet to be decided.



Almost everyone is familiar with popular Pinot Grigio of Italy, but what about Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc? Well, Pinot Gris is just another name for Pinot Grigio, while Pinot Blanc - a cousin of Chardonnay - produces an elegant off-dry wine with ample amounts of peachy and pineapple aromas.

Best new areas for Pinot Gris are Oregon and *surprise*, Michigan. Michigan has just the right cool weather climate that emulates the growing conditions of northern Italy, with its own twist on this excellent varietal. Look to the western side of the state at [Old Shore Vineyards](#) for some exciting new releases.



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Southern Italy has long been neglected by the wine world, but lesser known ancient grape varieties are now being rejuvenated. One variety in particular, the Negroamaro, from Puglia, develops a lovely, rich, and soft finishing style that is quite appealing to current consumers looking for something between Malbec and Shiraz. Southern Italian wines tend to be slightly higher in alcohol due to warmer climate, but this is balanced by dense fruit with lower tannic acid and a full-flavored lingering finish. This type of style is quite amenable to easy drinking and rich foods. These wines are well priced and now becoming more available.



The words "reserve or riserva" on a bottle of wine can be confusing, but they do have meaning, legally in Europe, but not so in the US. In Spain and Italy, these terms on a label mean that a wine must be aged in wood or bottle for a specified time -- usually one to two years in wood and another year in bottle before being released for sale. The exact requirements will vary from country to country and sometimes even from region to region, but in general the minimum one year in wood applies. These rules do not extend to the American winemakers, but quality producers will use it to specify their best lots or best barrels.



Wines contain acid, that's for sure, and without acid wine would be flat and have the feel of plain water. The important element is how much and what kind of acid the wine has. The three primary acids in wine are 1) tannic, the wine that makes your mouth feel dry and cottony, 2) malic acid, the green apple feel, and 3) citric acid the lemon-lime feel so common in New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Acid is an important and necessary component to balance wine and make the perfect contrast to rich foods. Wine makers fret continuously to make sure the acids balance in the wine with the fruit and alcohol, so that the flavors all become harmonious on the palette. Before picking a wine, ask about acid levels to suit your taste.

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Champagne is a beautiful and expensive product, so you should know what you are buying. Here are the facts: it's all about the sparkle and how it gets there. The French have a patent on the word Champagne, because they invented the method for getting the bubbles in that bottle - which only took about 400 years. Any sparkling wine using this process should and can be labeled *Méthode Champenoise*, traditional method, or classic french method, and should use one or all of these grapes: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and [Pinot Meunier](#). Everything else made from other methods, can be good, but is and should be called sparkling wine. If you have to make a choice and it comes down to cheap sparkling, don't drink it.



When it comes time to buy a good sparkling wine or champagne, here are the words on the label you should look for: doux (sweet dessert style), demi-sec (slightly sweet), extra dry, off dry, brut (quite dry), and high acid, ultra brut (very dry toasty oaky). The next most important consideration is house style, as each company attempts to lure you in their "stable" with a specific style that clearly identifies them. The large French companies expend considerable effort in this using yeast strains, blending grape components, acid levels, and packaging. Whatever you choose, know the background and history of the producer.



What makes white wine white and the red wine red? The juice? No, it's the skin of the grape, with no skin contact all wines would be white or rose. Extended skin contact with dark grapes such as cabernet, zinfandel, or syrah will result in the familiar shades

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and hues. As a general rule, the darker the color the more intense the wine, the higher the alcohol, the warmer the climate, and the better the health benefits. Research has shown that dark colors help lower cholesterol, prevent heart disease, and reduce anxiety. The deepest colors of red wine come from the zinfandel, cabernet, and syrah.



One of the best values and most versatile grape varieties I can recommend is the Grenache, proliferating all over the world – driving down the steep mountains of Sardinia, through the mistral dominated Rhone valley, trudging through the extreme heat of southern Spain, and landing gently in the sunny hills of Southern California.

The vines of this amazing grape can live up to 100 years, still producing rustic, earthy, and spicy wines that compliment almost any kind of country food. Begin in the Cote du Rhone, work your way around the world and you aren't likely to find a better friend.