CLS 96 W, EXPLORING WINE’S CONNECTION TO PLACE AND CULTURE: STORIES IN A BOTTLE
Fall 2021
Instructor Karen MacNeil

Special Note on the Wines for this Course.
You’ll be asked to purchase wines for this course. The suggested wine list for the entire course will be presented before the course starts, so that you can purchase the wines all at once if you’d like. Please buy a current vintage of each wine except for Weeks 4 and 6 for which you can buy an older wine if you’d like.

In each class, one or two wines will be tasted. Please use a generously sized wine glass. White wines should be chilled ahead of class and both white and red wines should be opened ahead of class. Instructor expects each student to use a spit cup (a paper coffee cup will do) for spitting out wines tasted during class.

The wines suggested for each class are widely available in retail stores and from online retailers like wine.com and vivino. The prices I have given are approximate. In many cases, you’ll be able to find good wines at a price lower than what I’ve listed.

TENTATIVE ZOOM TIME:
Wednesdays 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM (Pacific)
Zoom sessions will be recorded for students unable to attend live.

GRADE OPTIONS:
-No Grade Requested: No work will be required. No proof of course completion will be provided.
-Credit/No Credit: Grade will be based on participation in Zoom sessions and/or online discussions on Canvas
WEEK 1

Title
The Search for Perfection: What Makes Great Wine Great?

Overview
This week, we’ll begin by examining the question of subjectivity in wine. An old phrase has it that “a wine is good if you like it.” But is that really the case? How do we form connections to and preferences for certain wines? Are their criteria by which wines can be judged objectively? What are the characteristics that make great wine great?

Objectives
Name the last wine you drank and describe it.
Describe the ways in which your own connections to certain wines formed.
Describe what is meant by Charles Spence’s thesis “The pleasures of the table reside mainly in the mind, not in the mouth.”

Discussion
What are the factors that cause a wine drinker to like a wine or not?
Were any of the Nine Attributes applicable to the wines you chose to taste?
Can you learn to like a wine that you previously disliked, or are perceptions and taste preferences fixed?

Class Meeting/Zoom Session
Instructor will present the Nine Attributes of Greatness and the idea of “Rite of passage wines”
Discuss greatness/repulsiveness—the intellectual conundrum of wine

Wines
A basic Italian Pinot Grigio $10 to $15
A Riesling from the Mosel region of Germany. The Riesling should be labeled trocken which means dry. Under $25
WEEK 2

Title
Wine as an Expression of Place and Culture and Place

Overview
This week, we will look at two different definitions of terroir and consider the concept of “somewhereness.” We’ll also consider how wine manifests culture and is shaped by it. The examples presented in class will come from Australia, Argentina, California, Germany, Spain, and other countries.

Objectives
Come to the class prepared with an example of how a wine you drank revealed something about the culture where you drank it or where it was made.
Discuss how the culture of a country predisposes you to want to buy a wine (or not).

Discussion
Should all fine wine reveal its culture and its place?
Is wine that does not reveal its culture and place, “beverage alcohol” but not fine wine?

Class Meeting/Zoom Session
Instructor will provide current definitions about terroir and the importance of place, present multiple stories from different countries demonstrating how wine reveals culture.
Class discussion regarding beverage alcohol vs fine wine and the necessity (or not) of revealing culture and place.

Wines
A manzanilla or fino Sherry from Spain. Under $20 (a half bottle is fine)
A Chianti Classico (or Chianti Classico Riserva) from Italy. Under $28

WEEK 3

Title
Wine as a Reflection of History and Religion

Overview
In this class, we will telescope down to the Middle Ages in Burgundy, France, and discover how history and religion intersected with wine, culture, and place. We will learn
how the foundational concept of terroir had its roots in religion, and how the system of evaluating wine began as a religious exercise.

**Objectives**

Explain the relationship between Burgundy's monks and the concept of terroir.

Describe why the concept of terroir was dependent on centuries of vineyard ownership by the Catholic church.

Discuss the role of wine in monastic life.

**Discussion**

Discuss the role of wine in monastic life.

Discuss why Burgundy’s monks were central to the evolution of the concept of terroir.

Discuss the phrase “music isn’t better because you play it louder” as it relates to wine.

**Class Meeting/Zoom Session**

Instructor will explain the role of religion and monastic life during the Middle Ages and how it shaped the history of wine, including providing the concept of terroir and laying the framework by which wines are evaluated.

Instructor will also discuss why Pinot Noir was critical as the “vehicle” the monks worked with in their discovery and development of terroir, as well as describe the definition of vigneron vs the title winemaker.

**Wines**

Red Burgundy is one of the world’s most expensive wines. If buying two wines is not feasible, please buy just one wine. A basic red Burgundy at a “Village” level should cost about $40 and up. If you can purchase a second wine, please buy a Premier Cru Red Burgundy. About $80 and up.

**WEEK 4**

**Title**

Wine and Emotion: Wine's Ability to Move Us

**Overview**

Wine is the beverage of emotion (how many people do you know who fell in love over orange juice?). In this class, we’ll look at how and why wine moves us emotionally. What is it about wine—as opposed to any other intoxicant—that gives it such power?
Objectives
Discuss how, in terms of emotion, wine is different from other intoxicants.
Describe why wine's communal aspect may play a role in its emotional appeal.
Explain what it means to get "bitten by the wine bug," and why no one gets "unbitten."
Describe how the wine you got for today's class made you feel.

Discussion
Think about the emotional difference between drinking spirits and drinking wine. Is there a difference?
What it means to get "bitten by the wine bug?"
Why is wine related to romance and falling in love?

Class Meeting/Zoom Session
Instructor will describe wine's emotional allure and to posit possible reasons for it, and will share winemakers' views on the emotional "compellingness" of wine.

Wines
Just one wine is required for today's class. Please get a half bottle of any of the following: an eiswein from Canada or Germany; a Sauternes from France; a passito (made from dried grapes) sweet wine from Sicily; or a Pedro Ximenez wine from Spain. All of these wines are sweet wines.

WEEK 5
Title
Wine and Language: Why is Wine So Hard to Describe?

Overview
Talking about the characteristics of a wine is often so difficult that people resort to a simple binary: "I like it/ I don’t like it" description. In this class, we'll explore why, and talk about the fact that unlike food, wine is not its own inherent language. We'll also talk about culturally sensitive wine descriptions. Can wine be masculine? Feminine? Exotic? Sexy?

Objectives
Explain why it's so hard to describe wine.
Explain the idea that wine is not its own language.
Describe the objection to using terms like masculine and feminine to describe wine.

Discussion
If flavor is flavor, why are solid flavors (food), easier to describe than liquid flavors (wine)?
Are wine descriptions like “feminine” or “masculine” useful or offensive?
Describe the wine you are tasting today in class.

Class Meeting/Zoom Session
Instructor will describe idea that wine is not its own inherent language, describe semantic field theory, and will present opposing views on feminine/masculine and other similar terms.

Wines
A California or New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. $18 to $25
A Rioja Riserva from Rioja, Spain. $20 and up.

WEEK 6
Title
Is Wine an Art?
Overview
In this final class and in light of everything we’ve learned, we’ll consider whether or not wine can be called an art. We’ll discuss the role of intuition in winemaking. We’ll also explore the concept of a wine’s potential beauty, and discuss how a wine’s age relates to its aesthetic and sensory appeal.

Objectives
Explain why a wine can be—and cannot be—considered an art.
Explain how a mature wine that has been aged a long time takes on a special beauty and why.
Describe why a winemaker might rely more on intuition than science in making a wine.
Explain why you believe your favorite wine is/is not a form of art.

Discussion
If wine is consumed—and therefore has a finite life—can it also be considered an art? Are there artistic principles—harmony, balance, tension, and symmetry—that wine possesses? What does it mean for a wine to be called beautiful?

**Class Meeting/Zoom Session**

Instructor will present leading thinking on the question of wine as art, explain the roles of balance and harmony in winemaking, and describe what happens to a wine as it ages and why that can be considered a form of beauty.

**Wines**

Please purchase a wine that you’ve had before—a wine that you thought was extraordinary and possibly a form of art. This can be any style of wine from anywhere in the world. $25 and up.