

Going the full bottle

A CHIANTI VINEYARD NEAR BARBERINO VAL D'ELSA

(DAVID NOTTON / GETTY IMAGES)

I DO love the vagaries of wine, but a real bugbear is the Old World and its assumption that we all know what's in the bottle of regional wines.

All major European wine regions have strict rules about what types of grape can be grown in a particular region and even what percentages of grapes can go into a wine – but they don't bother telling the drinker what's in the bottle.

It can be bloody confusing, as well as intimidating, and I reckon it's part of the reason New World wines such as ours, which proudly display their contents on the front, are so popular in places such as the UK.

This week I thought I'd break down what goes into some of the more famous wine regions and review an Aussie-made counterpart.

France: Bordeaux

Almost all Bordeaux wines are blends. A typical blend consists of various percentages of merlot, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc, often with small additions of petit verdot and malbec. The Bordeaux region is split in two by the Garonne River, with merlot dominant on the right bank and cabernet sauvignon on the left. The region's whites are predominantly made from sémillon and sauvignon blends.

France: Burgundy

The most famous wines produced here, and often just referred to as red or white Burgundy, are pinot noir and chardonnay. Chablis (chardonnay) and Beaujolais (gamay) are also part of Burgundy, but are usually referred to by their own names.

France: Rhône

The Rhône is divided into two distinct areas, the north and the south. The north produces great shiraz, sometimes with a small percentage of white grapes, usually viognier, blended in. The southern Rhône produces an array of red, white and rosé wines, often from blends of several grapes including shiraz, grenache, mourvèdre and cinsault. Viognier, marsanne and roussanne are the main whites of the Rhône.

Spain: Rioja

The best-known and most widely planted variety is tempranillo. It forms the base of most Riojas, and is often blended with substantial quantities of grenache, along with graciano, and mazuelo. Cabernet sauvignon and merlot also find their way into some of the modern blends.

Italy: Chianti

The Italians aren't big on rules (if you've ever driven in Italy you'll know what I mean) and it's only in the past 15 years or so that strict guidelines have applied to Chianti. These Tuscan wines must contain a minimum of 75 per cent sangiovese, up to 10 per cent canaiolo and up to 20 per cent of any other approved grape variety such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot or shiraz. You don't see them often any more, but the squat bottle with the straw basket is called a fiasco. \

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LOVE A BARGAIN? **HODDLES CREEK CHARDONNAY 2009** (Yarra Valley) \$19; 13.2% ★★★★★½
Food match: Celeriac remoulade. Hoddles Creek Chardonnay is a favourite in our house and this new release is up there with the best I've tried. It's an elegant wine with smells of white peach, melon, hints of tropical fruit and some funky aromas. It has an excellent balance between acid and fruit and is quite linear on the palate. It has an excellent creamy mouthfeel with intense peach, grapefruit and mineral flavours along with an almond nuttiness. This is released early to keep the price down and will only get better, so stock up and enjoy over the next few years.

PONDALOWIE VINEYARDS MT TEMPRANILLO 2008

(Bendigo) \$24; 13.5% a/v ★★½

Food match: Pork migas

Tempranillo is still finding its feet in Australia and Pondalowie has been growing it longer than most. This smells of red cherries, strawberries, raspberries and clove spice. It is almost full-bodied, with mouth-filling flavours of red berries and cola, with just a hint of orange rind. The balance is good, with silky tannins draped around a nice acid backbone. Watch out for Aussie tempranillo – it's got a bright future here.

PIZZINI SANGIOVESE 2008

(King Valley) \$25; 13.9% a/v ★★★★★

Food match: Osso bucco

This is just one of a range of top Italian varietals in the Pizzini range. This smells of cherries, raspberries with a hint of dried herbs. It's light in colour (similar to a pinot noir) and has a nice sweet and sour balance with flavours of strawberry and sour cherry with a nice earthy finish along with light tannins. All of which adds up to a really drinkable wine.

PICARDY SHIRAZ 2008

(Pemberton) \$25; 14% a/v ★★★★★½

Food match: Grilled steak with Café de Paris butter

One of my favourite reds of the year, and quite a bargain, this shiraz also has 2 per cent each of viognier and malbec blended in. It needs a bit of time in the decanter to flourish, but when it does there are floral aromas of cherries and plums along with funky, meaty notes and some smokey oak. It's a wine built around a great structure rather than power, with subtle flavours of plum and red berries, as well as pepper, that linger in the mouth for a long time.

BLUE POLES ALLOURAN 2007

(Margaret River) \$25; 14% ★★★★★½

Food match: Slow-cooked lamb shoulder with pommes boulangère

This is a classic right-bank Bordeaux blend of merlot (66 per cent) and cabernet franc. It displays complex aromas of plums, redcurrants and blackcurrants, roses and tobacco with a hint of cedar oak. It's dark in colour and fills the mouth with fleshy and rich red fruit flavours. It's savoury, too, and has firm, fine-grained tannins supporting the fruit flavours and well-balanced acid. This is a super wine that gets better the longer it's open.

5★ OUTSTANDING 4★ REALLY GOOD 3★ GOOD 2★ OK 1★ NOT WORTH IT

