

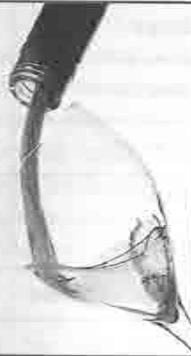
## The Reds—Pinot Noir to Cabernet

### Lecture 6

Poor Merlot. It has generally lived in the shadow of King Cabernet. But merlot makes some of the most beautifully luscious, rich, and concentrated wines in the world.

#### WINES FOR THIS LECTURE:

- A Bourgogne Rouge (or a New World Pinot Noir, but a Bourgogne Rouge is preferable)
- A Northern Rhône Syrah (Crozes-Hermitage, Saint-Joseph, Hermitage, Cornas, or Côte-Rôtie)
- A basic Bordeaux or California Merlot
- A Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon



In addition to the three white-wine grapes we discussed in the previous lecture, there are four red-wine grapes that are considered noble grape varieties: Pinot Noir, Syrah/Shiraz, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Like their white counterparts, they are known for their adaptability, quality, popularity, and sense of place. Being highly adaptable reds, they also age very well. But despite these common features, there is huge variation in the wines they produce—in body, aromatics, and tannins.

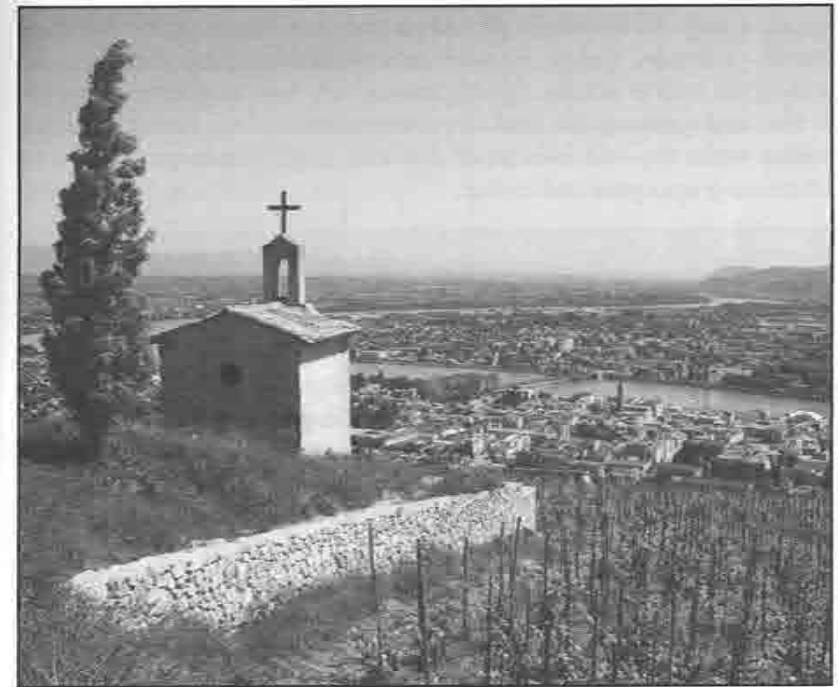
Winemakers call Pinot Noir “the iron fist wrapped in a silk glove,” but they also call it “the headache grape.” The wines it creates are capable of amazing perfume, power, and finesse—it is even used in making vintage Champagne. But it is remarkably difficult to grow and manage well.

Pinot Noir prefers cool climates. It is thin-skinned, so it is susceptible to fungal disease and suffers under manhandling. It is one of the oldest cultivated vines in existence and is today the primary red grape grown in the Côte d’Or in Burgundy.

In the glass, Pinot Noir is pale for a red wine because of the grape’s thin skin, and its body and tannins are correspondingly light. It is so aromatic, red fruit aromas—strawberry, red cherry, and sometimes cranberry—practically jump out of the glass. Because of its preference for cooler climates, it tends to be lower in alcohol than the other noble reds.

The one characteristic that makes Pinot Noir an outstanding food-and-wine-pairing red is its high acidity. This acidity also allows Pinot Noir to age for decades, provided that the other elements—fruit, alcohol, and tannin—are in balance. Its delicacy and finesse allow it to easily show a sense of place.

Syrah (also called Shiraz) is one of the biggest crowd-pleasing reds. Although its origins are shrouded in myth, it likely originated in France,



St. Christopher's Chapel in Tain-l'Hermitage, Rhône Valley, home of Syrah.

and some of the world's finest Syrah vines come from Hermitage in the Northern Rhône Valley. There are two general styles for this grape: Syrah and Shiraz. The Syrah style is typified by Northern Rhône wines—herbal, floral, peppery, smoky. The Shiraz style is the Australian cousin—obvious, upfront, and bold in its fruit.

**You will be able to identify noble grape varieties by using only your palate and what's in the glass.**

Syrah is a fairly thick-skinned variety with a tolerance for both hot and cool climates. Its color can range from inky black, as in Hermitage, or more moderately ruby, as you may see in Southeast Australian Shiraz. It is a bit less pronounced in its aromas than Pinot Noir, but it has rich, concentrated raspberry, black cherry, and blackberry aromas. In some areas, it may show aromas of violets and—especially in the Northern Rhône—rosemary. Unlike the other noble varieties, it also displays spice without the help of oaking. Syrah's tannins vary from moderate and supple to firm and gripping. Its alcohol can be moderate to quite high, and its acidity varies too—all because of the wide range of microenvironments where the grapes grow and thrive.

Merlot, along with Cabernet Sauvignon, is one of the most popular red grapes in the world. Originating in the Bordeaux region of France, it is named for the blackbirds, or *merles*, that steal these sweet grapes off the vines.

Merlot makes some of the most beautifully luscious, rich, and concentrated wines in the world. It is the number one red grape planted in Bordeaux and is now planted anywhere from Chile to Bulgaria. It can make wines ranging from a "Two-Buck Chuck" to bottles worth thousands of dollars.

A thick-skinned variety, Merlot can get quite dark, but its tannins are soft and supple. It is most valued for its plush mid-palate texture, rather than for its aromas, which tend toward dark fruits, and even a touch of black tar. It is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon to fill in Cab's mid-palate gaps. Grown in warm climates, it can get juicy and jammy; in mild climates, it

shows higher acidity and a mineral undertone. Exposure to new oak brings out a chocolate texture and vanilla, spice, and toast notes.

Cabernet Sauvignon is the king of noble grape varieties and is very likely *the* most popular red grape variety on the planet. It is rich and gripping, not delicate, though it can be elegant. Like Merlot, it originated in Bordeaux, the offspring of a natural crossing between Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.

Cabernet Sauvignon grows well in hot and marginal climates; cool climates leave it too green and underripe. It is a late-ripening variety, thanks to its thick skin and tight clusters. The thick skin also lends the wine dark color and opacity, with dense, firm, and gripping tannins. While not as aromatic as Pinot Noir or Syrah, it is notable for aromas of black currants and a similar herbal note to its parent, Sauvignon Blanc. The herbaceous note is more notable in Cabs from Chile, for example, while Cabs from Bordeaux smell of pencil shavings, violets, cedar, and cigar box.

Cabernet Sauvignon is usually drunk with food because its tannins can be overwhelming alone. Foods rich in protein, like steak, are a particularly good match. ■

### Important Terms

**merle:** The French word for blackbird and origin of the name Merlot.

**tannin:** A polyphenol compound found mostly in red wines that creates a velvety or drying sensation and sometimes a bitter taste—ideally a pleasant one—on the palate.

## Tasting Notes

Here we taste the four noble red grape varieties, noting the dramatic differences among them.

	Bourgogne/ Pinot Noir	Syrah	Bordeaux/ Merlot	Cabernet Sauvignon
Grape	100% Pinot Noir	100% Syrah	100% Merlot	100% Cabernet Sauvignon
Region	Burgundy, France	Rhône, France	California or Bordeaux, France	Chile
Color				
Aromas				
Acid				
Tannins				
Body				
Finish/Length				

# Brancott Pinot Noir

**\$11.99**

750ml



Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

**Style Red:** Concentrated, Intense, Fresh, Elegant, Sweet

**Flavors:** Cherry, Strawberry, Raspberry, Blackberry, Plum, Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Acidity:** High, Medium, Low

**Tannins:** Firm Tannins, Ripe Tannins, Soft Tannins, Easy Drinking

**Body:** Light, Medium, Full

Nose Intensity(NI)	Fruit Intensity(FI)	Flavor Characteristics(FC)	Balance(B)	Length(L)		
1- Light	1-10 None	1-2 Undrinkable	1- Off	1- None		
2- Average	11-15 Soft	3-4 Ordinary	2- Slightly Off	2- Fades Quickly		
3- Pleasant	16-18 Ample	5-6 Good	3- Proportional	3- Lingering (30 secs)		
4- Inviting	19-20 Abundant	7-8 Very Good	4- Harmonious	4- Lengthy ( up to 1 minute)		
5- Highly Aromatic	21-23 Bountiful	9-10 Outstanding	5- Perfect	5- Everlasting ( > 1 minute)		
24-25 Powerful						
95-100 Classic	90-94 Outstanding	85-89 Very Good	80-84 Good	76-79 Average	71-75 Below Average	65-70 Poor

Date Tasted: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Total Wine**  
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# Nobles Rives Crozes Hermitage 2011

# \$19.99

750ml



## Rating

Wine Advocate - 88

## Product Highlights

- Cave de Tain Crozes Hermitage is the largest landholder in Hermitage.
- Sell to customers that want elegant, crisper style of Syrah.

## Review

Crozes-Hermitage, Rhone, France - "Exhibits notes of olives, jammy cherries, cedar, fruitcake and underbrush. Medium-bodied and richly fruity, it is best drunk over the next 4-5 years." [BARREL SCORE 86-88]

## Taste Profile

Elegant, Plum, Spice, Medium-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

**Style Red:** Concentrated, Intense, Fresh, Elegant, Sweet

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Date Tasted: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chateau Bellevue Bordeaux

**\$9.99**

750ml



### Product Highlights

- A juicy, medium body blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot that is perfect with grilled meat.

### Review

Bordeaux, France- Rich red fruit flows on and on in this charming little wine. The ripe tannins make it a great wine to bring home for dinner. A harmonious blend of 65% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Cabernet Franc vines that are over 20 years old.

### Taste Profile

Fresh, Cherry, Red Fruit, Light-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

**Style Red:** Concentrated, Intense, Fresh, Elegant, Sweet

**Flavors:** Cherry, Strawberry, Raspberry, Blackberry, Plum, Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Acidity:** High, Medium, Low

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Date Tasted: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Total Wine**  
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## Porta Cabernet Reserva 2014

**\$8.99**

750ml



### Product Highlights

- Delicate and fruity, perfect to serve with pasta and red meat

### Review

Aconcagua Valley, Chile - Bright, clean ruby-red color. The fine interesting aroma profile includes red and black fruit, mint, and spices. Delicate, fruity, and elegant on the palate with good structure and nice ripe tannins. Serve with cheeses, pasta and red meats.

### Taste Profile

Elegant, Blackberry, Mint, Medium-bodied

Vintage	NI (5 pts.)	FI (25 pts.)	FC (10 pts.)	B (5 pts.)	L (5 pts.)	Sum	+ 50	Final

**Style Red:** Concentrated, Intense, Fresh, Elegant, Sweet

**Flavors:** Cherry, Strawberry, Raspberry, Blackberry, Plum, Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Acidity:** High, Medium, Low

**Tannins:** Firm Tannins, Ripe Tannins, Soft Tannins, Easy Drinking

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Date Tasted: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Total Wine**  
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