

Steve Charters



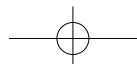
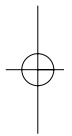
# wine & society

the social and cultural context of a drink





# Wine and Society



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# Wine and Society

## The Social and Cultural Context of a Drink

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# Preface

This book is the result of a long-term interest in the way in which we create and use wine throughout the world. My interest has been developed first as a keen consumer, then as a member of the wine industry, and now as an academic involved in teaching others about wine and its marketing. Wine is a product which by its very complexity can keep people enthralled, but I also think that the way we view it and imbue it with meaning adds to the enjoyment it can offer. Additionally, wine is a drink with a great history and part of its fascination is the fact that the way it was viewed and consumed many thousand years ago – from the time it was first produced – still informs our attitudes to it now. Yet at the same time many of those attitudes go unremarked not only by consumers but even by those involved in making, marketing, selling and writing about wine; what I am attempting to do here is to expose the origins of our views about wine as well as consider how, in the modern world, the way that we treat the drink may be evolving.

This book is designed primarily as a text for higher-level undergraduate and postgraduate students, including those involved in wine marketing, tourism, hospitality, leisure and oenology. I have also, however, tried to make it accessible for the general wine lover, who may have no academic impetus to think about the place of wine in society and how cultures shape its use, but is nevertheless interested in these things.

This book analyses the motivation and perspectives of both those who make and those who drink wine. It uses insights from anthropology, sociology and psychology to deconstruct the meaning wine offers, especially its symbolic function, and in doing that it may appear to be cold and objective about the product itself. But wine offers great pleasure, excitement and fun; it stimulates, consoles and thrills, and in the academic dissection of its place in society this should never be forgotten. It is enjoyment rather than cold analysis, after all, which brings us to wine in the first place and continues to provide its fascination. Nevertheless, I think that with all its complexity this fascination can be piqued and enhanced by a deeper understanding of how we use it. I believe that knowledge enhances rather than impedes enjoyment.

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# Acknowledgements

My interest in the subject of the relationship of wine to the societies which produce and consume it was originally given shape in a series of seminars run by Prof. Tim Unwin at Edith Cowan University. Whilst my ideas have developed since then, much of what I explore in this book owes its genesis to Tim's enthusiasm for and insight into the subject, and I am grateful to him for sparking some of the themes which have been expanded on here. What I have written also builds on both my research and teaching over the last 7 years, particularly one course which tries to help students consider the social and cultural context of wine. I am grateful to the thought-provoking input of my students over the years, which has helped to shape this more than they would realize.

The wine industry is one of the most co-operative and open industries in the world; its members love to share their passion and ideas, and that makes it one of the most enjoyable products to be involved with. Crucially, I must acknowledge the contribution of Dr Patrick Farrell M.W., who wrote much of Chapter 12 and gave the key medical and scientific background to it, something which I could never have done, and who responded with great patience and courtesy to my persistent requests for details. A number of people provided information whilst I was researching this book. I am grateful to Mike and Mireille Oakes for giving me a lot of time in Fitou, with great hospitality and stimulating discussion. Jean-Pierre, Sylvain and Bernadette Faixo offered forthright views and a great tasting in the same place, as did Katie Jones. Sue Birch from Wines of South Africa and Lynne Sherriff M.W. facilitated my collection of much of the information about South Africa and the development of its industry. Mike Beverland has helped my understanding of authenticity, and Tuomas Meriluoto has given insight into wine distribution in Finland. Even before I began to write this others have assisted my research, especially Nicholas Maillet, Drew Noon M.W., Sharon Wild, Jim Smith, Peter Leske, Kate Loughton, and Craig and Carolyn Drummond. Particular thanks are due to Simone Pettigrew for hours of support and assistance on consumer behaviour-related topics and for incisive discussions about a number of the issues raised

## Acknowledgements

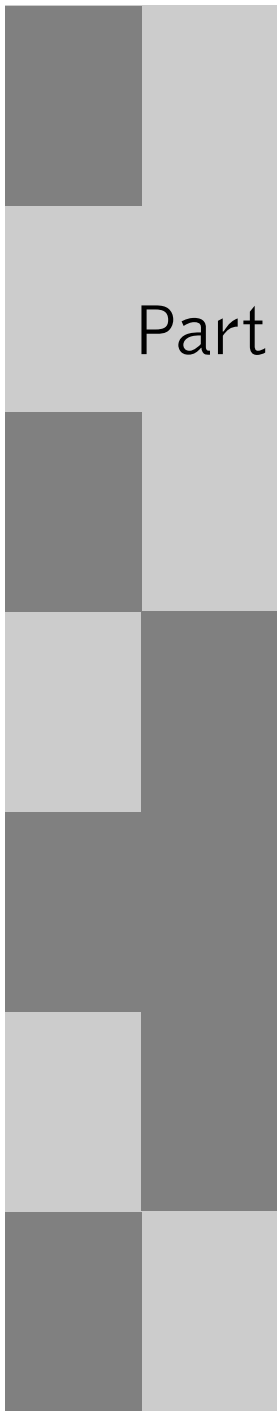
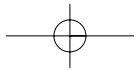
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in this book. Many others in the wine industry have given time and information over the years which has informed what I write, and more importantly they have shared great bottles of wine with me which I have enjoyed. Additionally, Mike Beverland, Tim Unwin, Mike Oakes, Craig Drummond and Cathy van Zyl M.W. have read parts of the book and I appreciate the comments they have made on it. The greatest thanks, however, must go to my family who put up with the fermentation of this project then had to endure a lengthy *élevage*, and particularly my partner Anita who now knows far more about wine and society than she ever wanted to and has added intelligently throughout the whole process.

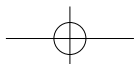
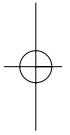
Some of the chapters here make use of qualitative research that I have conducted with consumers and the wine industry. Qualitative research depends substantially on the time and input of its informants and, though they are pseudonymous when quoted, I am indebted to them for the time they gave up to help me.

Part of Chapter 3 and occasional allusions elsewhere are drawn substantially from a paper given at the Bacchus to the Future conference at Brock University in 2002. The section on involvement in Chapter 7 is based on a co-authored paper published by the *Journal of Research for Consumers*, Issue 5, in 2003. Additionally, some of the consumer quotations used in the section on aesthetic consumption in Chapter 9 are taken from a paper previously published in the *Journal of Wine Research*, Issue 2 of Volume 16, in 2005. I appreciate the respective editors' permission to incorporate extracts from those papers here.

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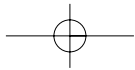


# Part One: Context



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# Introduction

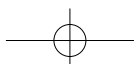
Consider the following documents. The first is the back label of a Robert Mondavi Wines' cabernet sauvignon:

**Napa Valley**  
**CABERNET SAUVIGNON**

Wine has been with us since the beginning of civilization. It is the temperate, civilized, sacred, romantic, mealtime beverage recommended in the Bible. Wine has been praised for centuries by statesmen, philosophers, poets and scholars. Wine in moderation is an integral part of our culture, heritage and the gracious way of life.

Taken from Fuller (1996).

The following comes from an online press notice from 2005 sent out by the wine magazine, *Decanter*:





<http://www.decanter.com/news/62288.html>

### **Latest News**

#### **Bomb blast damages La Baume**

*March 11, 2005*

*Adam Lechmere*

A bomb was detonated at La Baume winery in the Languedoc on Monday night, in an apparent protest against the power of large companies.

There were no injuries and no stock was affected but the blast damaged the barrel cellar and roof.

It is alleged a group called Comite Regional d'Action Viticole (CRAV) took responsibility for the attack, in the form of a scrawled message on the wall of the chai.

The bomb – a stick of dynamite – was detonated by means of a crude timing device. Tim North, UK director of Les Grands Chais de France, which owns La Baume, blamed 'a small minority of extremists' who had 'not moved with the times' and had 'strong feelings against global companies.'

'Many people in that part of France understand the world is changing and people are no longer content to drink cheap *vin de pays*. But there are others who have not moved with the times and they have strong feelings against global companies.'

Les Grands Chais de France is the country's biggest wine exporter and its second biggest wine company. Its biggest brand is JP Chenet. In the past 12 months the company has massively expanded its portfolio.

North also said 'one or two' other sites had been targeted by CRAV that night.

Meanwhile, two thousand years ago the Roman author, Pliny wrote:

Even in the most favourable circumstances, the intoxicated never see the sunrise and so shorten their lives. This is the reason for pale faces, hanging jowls, sore eyes and trembling hands that spill the contents of full vessels; this the reason for the swift retribution consisting of horrendous nightmares

and for restless lust and pleasure in excess. The morning after, the breath reeks of the wine-jar and everything is forgotten – the memory is dead. This is what people call ‘enjoying life’; but while other men daily lose their yesterdays, these people also lose their tomorrows (Pliny the Elder, n.d./1991).

All of these refer to the same product – wine, yet they reveal such different views about it. The first extract lauds the civilized nature of wine and its contribution to a ‘gracious way of life’. In the second case its significance to a group of grape-growers in the south of France is such that they will attack and bomb those they think are threatening its role in their life. Meanwhile the third comment warns against its dangers and the retribution it can bring on the drinker. Meanwhile the value of wine in international trade has now reached \$111 000 000 000 per annum – so that consumers spend more on it each year than cosmetics, and three times as much as recorded music (Anon., 2005d). It is thus not merely a product which stirs strong passions, but one which is economically of great importance.

Wine has been giving pleasure to people for over 8000 years. Indeed, it may have been significant in human life even before bread was being made (McGovern, 2003). But wine does not just give pleasure. It is, perhaps more than any other drink (with the possible exception of tea), a product which has a substantial and far-ranging symbolic significance. Some of the associations with which we imbue wine date back the full 8000 years to the dawn of its production. Others may be of more recent origin yet are still fundamental to how and why we consume, and to the selection of wines which we make. For those who wish to understand wine – because they have to market and sell it, or because they are wine producers, or merely because they enjoy drinking it – knowing about these issues is a necessary precursor to a more effective engagement with the product. Pleasure and meaning are the starting point of the process of exploration.

The relationship of wine to society – to the culture of those who make it, to the consumer, and in the wider context of wine’s place in the community – is a vast topic and this study can do no more than introduce some of its key aspects. This chapter will introduce the topic. Critically it explains the aim of this book: how it is structured, its key themes, and some definitional issues.

### The aim of this book

This is not a marketing text nor is it a study of the consumer behaviour of wine consumption – although both the marketing and consumer practices in relation to wine figure large throughout. There are other texts which may be more

focused on the marketing of wine *per se*. Neither is this a book about the structure of nor international trade in wine – although much of what is discussed here has an impact on wine commerce and the ebb and flow of different wine styles. It is, perhaps, best seen as a precursor to a text on wine marketing, focusing as it does on how the production of wine itself shapes perceptions about the product, how the consumer may gain from it a range of meanings, and how society tries to control it. It has the aim of helping the reader to understand some of the cultural forces which have shaped both how wine is made and the way in which it is consumed. This is relevant to those who wish to understand the nature of wine consumption, who may market wine, or who may be involved in ancillary activities such as wine tourism or the hospitality industry – and it is to these people that this book is primarily addressed.

A number of key themes permeate the book. Most of these will be expanded substantially in the following chapters, but a few core ideas are best established at the outset, so that the reader is clear about the author's own perspectives – perhaps biases – on the subject. These themes include the following:

- The core of wine production and consumption is shaped by historical, geographical and cultural factors. The way producers approach their wine is moulded by where they have learnt how to make it and, crucially, the understanding their culture has of what wine is and how it should be made. Consumers, likewise, drink wine with varying attitudes which are shaped by those myriad features which shape consumer behaviour around the world, from climate through religion to food – as well as a range of symbolic factors.
- That wine takes different forms in its production, and is made by individuals and organizations which have very varied ideas about the nature of what they are producing. The type of organization the wine-maker works for, therefore, has an impact on how the product is understood and thus how it is made.
- That the motivation to consume wine is multifaceted; it is more than just the pursuit of 'a drink that tastes good'. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 7.
- That there is a substantial 'mythology' surrounding the production and consumption of wine. We attach a range of meanings to wine, and tell various 'stories' about it which legitimize consumption, and explain its importance to us and – in the case of winemaking – justify much of what is done to the wine.
- That there is a great deal of ambivalence surrounding wine and its use. Broadly – as the extracts at the start of this chapter exemplify – wine

is significant and enjoyable but it contains a negative side which cannot be ignored and the connotations it conveys are finely nuanced.

- That all of these factors give wine a substantial social and political relevance, although the outworking of this is culturally variable.

### The structure of this book

The book is divided into five parts. The first – this chapter and the following one – sets the context for the study, outlining the core themes that are considered, and summarizing briefly the history of wine, viticulture and the trade in wine. Although this is not a historical work many of the factors which frame our consumption of wine stem from how it was made and consumed in the past – often the distant past. Each chapter will feature, to a greater or lesser extent, a historical dimension and consequently it is necessary for the reader to have a broad understanding of the historical spread of the vine and wine at the outset.

The second part (Chapters 3–6) deals with the social and cultural aspects of the production of wine. This includes an analysis of how the production of wine itself, as a cultural object, can vary from place to place. It also considers how different organizational structures shape varying attitudes to winemaking. A distinctive feature of wine production is also how it is categorized, both by attempts to classify its quality, or to fix it in the place where the grapes were grown; those factors, with the linked idea of terroir, are covered. This part finishes with a review of how attitudes to wine production are changing in the modern world, and how those changes have an impact on how wine – as a cultural object – is made.

Part Three (Chapters 7–10) focuses on the consumer. It starts by considering what motivates the consumer to drink wine – the experiential, symbolic and utilitarian benefits which wine offers. The symbolic benefits are particularly complex, and the two subsequent chapters in this part examine some of the specific meanings that may be attached to wine; the related issues of religion, fertility and sex along with the idea that wine can be used to establish status, and then the concept that wine can be the marker of a civilized life – a complex notion, which includes a number of issues often seen today to relate to lifestyle. The final chapter in this part again looks at changing wine in the modern world – but in this case from the perspective of the consumer, rather than the producer.

The fourth part of this book (Chapters 11–14) moves from the consumer as an individual to the wider perspective of society as a whole. It considers the

nature of wine fraud, how it is perpetrated and how it is controlled – including, at times, how what is misleading may be legalized. The important issues of health and the abuse of wine are also dealt with (in a chapter co-authored with Dr Patrick Farrell M. W.). Stemming directly from this is an examination into the motivations and methods of those who are opposed to wine, and would like to see its consumption strictly limited, or even abolished. These issues are then brought together in a chapter on the politics of wine; how states use, control and protect it. The whole book is then pulled together in Chapter 15 with a conclusion.

Each chapter features a number of detailed examples of specific points, as well as case studies and illustrative extracts from relevant research. These items are clearly boxed and are included to develop specific ideas and add flesh to some of the theoretical discussion. The reader who merely wishes to follow the argument or who has some detailed knowledge of the specific topics can skip those boxed materials and still maintain the sense of the argument. In some cases the illustrative material is based on the author's own research output (which has generally been qualitative) and therefore features the particular perspective of individual wine drinkers. In those instances it comes with the usual academic caveat about qualitative research that it should be trustworthy but may not necessarily be generalizable across a full range of consumers (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). Additionally, each chapter ends with a bibliographical note which will recommend further reading for those who wish to explore the issues raised in more depth.

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### Some qualifications and definitions

One caveat is important at this stage. This is a book about the wine industry. The wine industry, however, differs from country to country. In wine-producing countries (France or Australia, for instance) it is very much considered to be those involved in growing grapes and making wine. In non-producing countries, such as the United Kingdom or Sweden, the industry comprises those involved in distribution. In the United States and Germany it is more confused, as both producers (particularly in California and South-Western Germany) and distributors are significant. In all of these countries wine writers, critics and retailers are important.

A second qualification is that the study assumes a basic knowledge about how wine is made and about the geography of wine. If readers wish to further their knowledge in this field then the bibliographical note at the end of this part contains recommendations on further reading in wine generally.

One definitional issue is also relevant. In common speech the term 'table wine' normally refers to a wine which is not fortified or sparkling. However, in European legal parlance table wine has a different interpretation, used to distinguish it from what is considered to be a quality wine (explained in more detail in Chapter 2). To avoid confusion the term table wine is used throughout in this very strict definition. The term 'light wine' is used to define a wine which is neither fortified nor sparkling.

A number of abbreviations are used throughout. Generally these are defined in the text. Table 1.1 gives details of common abbreviations related to area or volume in the wine industry and used in this book.

**Table 1.1 Abbreviations**

a.b.v.	Alcohol by volume
hL	Hectolitre (100L)
ha	Hectare (an area of 100 m by 100 m)
hL/ha	Hectolitre per hectare (used to measure the amount of wine from a specified area of vineyard)
g/L	Grammes per litre
mL	Millilitres

### Bibliographical note

There are a series of excellent books which can offer an introduction to the world of wine. *Hugh Johnson's Wine Companion* (Johnson, 1997) and *Jancis Robinson's Wine Course* (Robinson, 2003) are elegantly written primers. More substantial encyclopaedias on the geography of wine include *The Global Encyclopedia of Wine* (Forrestal, 2000) and *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia* (Stevenson, 2005). In Australia one of the best introductions – both simple and clear – to how wine is made and why it tastes the way it does is *Australian Wine: Styles and Tastes* (Iland & Gago, 2002). There are many detailed outlines of the specific wine-producing countries and regions of the world – the most comprehensive set is the Mitchell Beazley Classic Wine Library. For those who want to understand more about winemaking then *The Art and Science of Wine* (published as *The Vintner's Art* in the United States) by James Halliday and Hugh Johnson (1992) is the most accessible starting point. If the reader only ever has one book, however, it must be *The Oxford Companion to Wine* (Robinson, 1999). The next edition is due out in 2006 and this book is the closest to a single work which details everything about wine it is possible to know.

# 2

## The history of wine

As noted previously, this is not a text on the history of wine. However, much of the context in what follows is historical, so it is therefore useful to preface the main part of the book with a brief overview of the spread of wine and the development of the wine industry. This chapter will give an outline of the history of wine since it was first made – perhaps about 6000 BC – to the present. The aim of this is not so much to convey a mass of information (all of which is available elsewhere) as to raise issues that will be relevant in later chapters. This chapter will also focus on key social and technological changes which had an impact on the societies which produced wine and the ways in which it was viewed and consumed.

In order to aid in the understanding of the time scales involved in the history of wine and to help readers place the timing of various developments outlined through the course of this chapter, there follows a time chart of the last 9000 years (see Figure 2.1). This shows both general developments in world history alongside changes in the production of and trade in wine. Later Figures (2.3 and 2.4)

**Figure 2.1** Nine millennia of the history of wine.

<i>Date</i>	<i>World history</i>	<i>Viticulture and Winemaking</i>
7000 BC	Neolithic period	
6000	Pottery vessels first made	?Vines first cultivated
5000		Wine in the Zagros mountains Resinated wine produced
4000		
	<b><i>Bronze Age in the near east</i></b>	Wine drunk in Mesopotamia Wine recorded in Egypt



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