

Rā Tuatahi - Rāpare 17 Mahuru 2026

Day 1 - Thursday 17 September 2026

Wāhanga (session) 1: What is quality in Chardonnay, how do we judge it?



JULIA HARDING MW

What is quality in wine?

Who decides and why does it matter?

Johnny Nash
I Can See Clearly Now



'There are more questions than answers', Johnny Nash, 1972

There are more questions than answers
Pictures in my mind that will not show
There are more questions than answers
And the more I find out the less I know
Yeah, the more I find out the less I know

Our relationship with wine

- ❖ Wine is a living thing: it changes, we change.
- ❖ Connection: paying attention
- ❖ Quality is neither static nor set in stone.

Can you smell quality?

Can you taste quality?

Can you feel quality?

The whole story or what's in the glass?

“I have been fortunate enough to develop strong relationships with some very talented vintners. And when I taste their wines, I can't help but think of them, and of their vineyards.”

Terry Theise: *What makes a wine
worth drinking: in praise of the
sublime*

Is quality extrinsic or intrinsic?

Extrinsic – catalytic

- ❖ climate/weather
- ❖ vineyard
- ❖ viticulture
- ❖ winemaking/ageing
- ❖ winemaker's intent

Is quality extrinsic or intrinsic?

Intrinsic – terminal

❖ aroma

❖ flavour

❖ texture

❖ balance

❖ complexity

❖ length

❖ (longevity)

Changing perspective

Moving from a place of knowing to a place of enquiry

- ❖ How do **you** taste?
- ❖ Do you first take the wine apart or do you experience and enjoy it as a whole?
- ❖ Work or pleasure?

Does knowledge increase pleasure?

WINE 1

The Wine Society 2024 White Burgundy

“The wines come from across the Mâconnais region, from both the north and the south. The goal of sourcing from such a wide area is to achieve a consistent wine that maintains the same style across all vintages.”

Jean-Marc Darbon, Les Vins J M Aujoux





THE SOCIETY'S WHITE BURGUNDY

Mâcon Villages 1983

Appellation Mâcon Villages Contrôlée

Bottled by Jacques Dépaigne à Villefranche (Rhône) · Produce of France · 248

Selected by The Wine Society Stevenage Hertfordshire

75cl e



The Wine Society 2024 White Burgundy

2.5-litre bag in box

- blended by négociant Jacques Dépagneux
- wines from 10–15 long-standing grower-partners (including co-ops)
- limestone with clay or alluvial topsoil, rolling hills
- machine-harvested
- tank-fermented at low temperature with selected yeasts
- 4–6 months on the lees in stainless steel or concrete, stirred weekly
- 12.5% | TA 4.875 g/l | pH 3.43 | RS 1.4 | free SO₂ 33 mg/l | total SO₂ 83 mg/l | DCO₂ 860 mg/l

**How
would you
define
quality in
wine?**

excellence?

typicality?

pleasure?

Dictionary definitions

❖ **Noun:** a degree of excellence

A wine for those who appreciate quality.

❖ **Adjective:** of good quality; excellent

Is this a quality wine?

Quality codified in European wine law

France before 2008

- ❖ vin de table
- ❖ vin de qualité supérieur (VDQS)
- ❖ vin de qualité produit dans une région déterminée (VDQPRD, 1970–2009)
- ❖ vin d'appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC)

France today

- ❖ vin (vin de France)
- ❖ vin d'appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) / vin d'appellation d'origine protégée (AOP)

Is typicality essential for quality?

Typical of what?

- region
- vineyard
- grape variety
- vintage
- producer

Who decides what is typical?

- legislators
- wine writers
- a cohort of winemakers
- consumers
- tradition

Climate change and the crisis of typicality

If temperatures rise or the weather is more extreme:

- ❖ viticulture changes
- ❖ ripeness changes
- ❖ acidity changes
- ❖ alcohol changes
- ❖ flavour profiles change

Grape variety and wine quality

Can any variety be made into quality wine?

- ❖ table grapes
- ❖ PiWi varieties
- ❖ once unfashionable varieties

Is there an ethical – ie extrinsic – dimension to quality? A variety for the environment?

Objective,
subjective
or both?

“I like it but how
do I know if it’s
any good?”



Objective v subjective

Objective

- ❖ externally verifiable
- ❖ measurable
- ❖ inheres in the product itself
- ❖ “It’s good quality therefore I appreciate it.”

Subjective

- ❖ exists in the perception of the consumer
- ❖ influenced by the context
- ❖ tastes change over time
- ❖ fashion / pendulum swings
- ❖ “I like it, therefore it’s good quality.”

“ ‘The quality of a wine is the totality of its properties which render it acceptable or desirable.’ In effect, it is the totally subjective pleasure provided by drinking the wine which conditions judgement.”

“Quality only exists in relation to the individual and then only as far as he [she] has the ability to perceive it and approve it. Quality will depend on his judgement, that is on his taste, his preferences and the pleasure he derives from the wine.”

Émile Peynaud, *The Taste of Wine*, 1983

The professional taster's dilemma

If quality is purely individual,
then those whose profession
involves tasting and evaluating
wines is meaningless. (Charters
& Pettigrew)

But is it?

Objective and subjective: reconciling the paradox

- ❖ start objectively/systematically with a framework of quality indicators or benchmarks
- ❖ conclude subjectively: pleasure and preference regardless of quality indicators
- ❖ “This is good quality but not my preferred style.”
- ❖ “This is flawed but I love it!”

OR ...

- ❖ start subjectively and conclude analytically
- ❖ “This is fantastic and delicious. What makes it so good?”

Can you measure or verify quality?

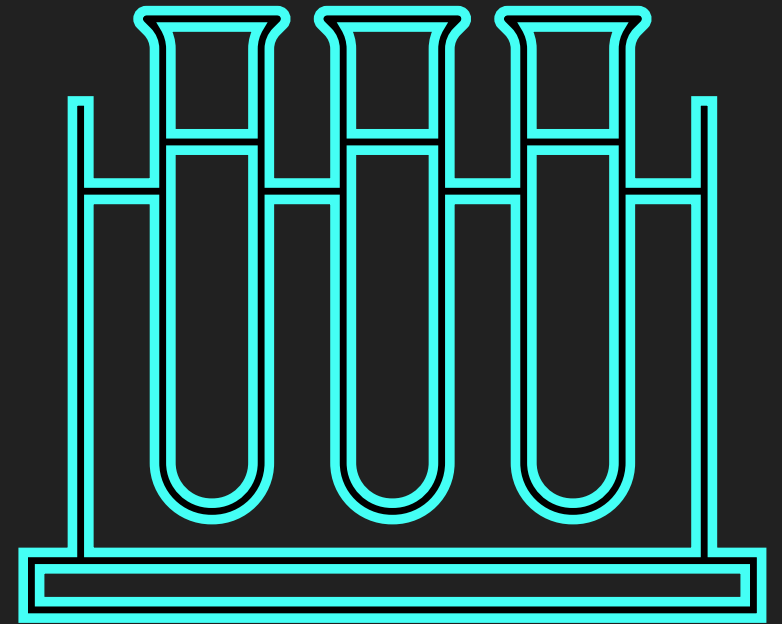
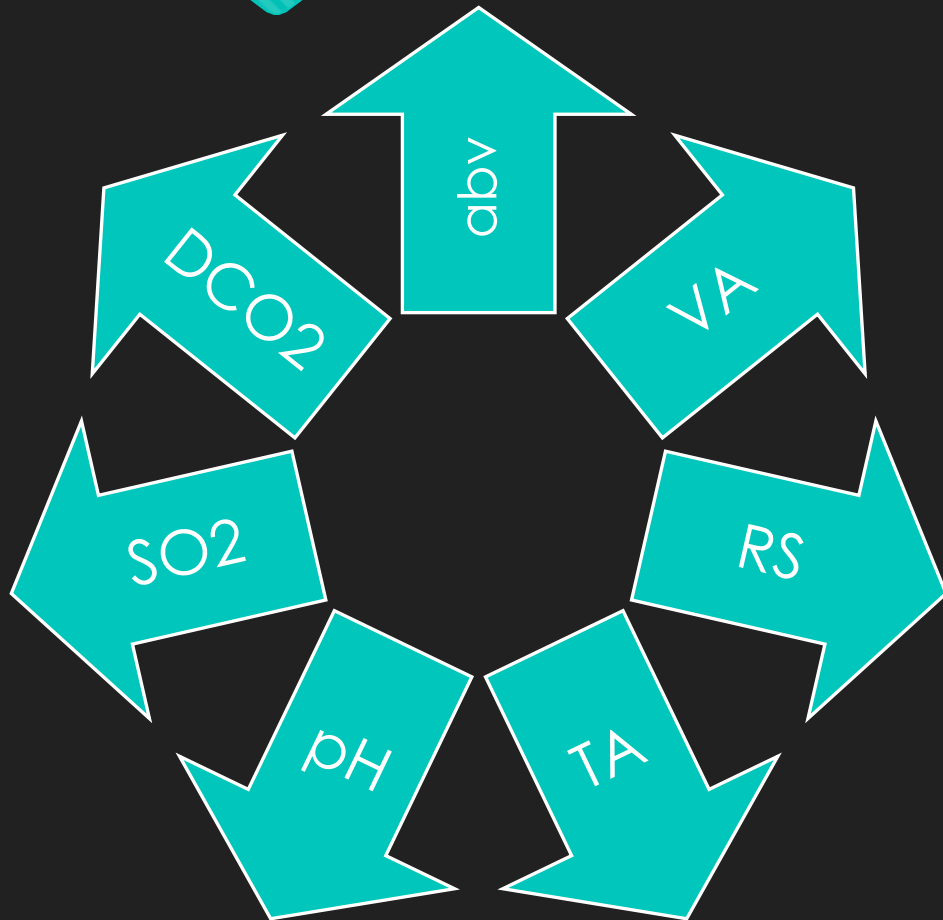
By chemical or sensory analysis?

“Wine quality, as Maynard Amerine once said, is easier to detect than define. This is partially due to quality being primarily subjective, and strongly influenced by extrinsic factors. Correspondingly, defining wine quality in terms of its chemistry will never be more than partially successful.”

Ron Jackson, *Wine Tasting*, 2023



What can we measure in wine?



What chemistry can tell us

origin

authenticity

‘faults’

composition

stability

What chemistry cannot tell us

1947 Château Cheval Blanc

- ❖ “the greatest wine of all time”
- ❖ very high volatile acidity
- ❖ 5 g/l of residual sugar as a result of a stuck fermentation

WINE 2

Zuccardi, Botánico Chardonnay 2024 Gualtallary, Uco Valley, Mendoza

“Chardonnay loves this: cold
climate and calcareous soils.”

Sebastian Zuccardi







Zuccardi, Botánico Chardonnay 2024

Gualtallary, Uco Valley, Mendoza

- vineyards at 1,370 m (4,510 ft)
- small parcels
- arid and windy
- cold – Winkler II, pure sunlight
- surrounded by grasslands, Jarilla herbs, thyme, broom
- alluvial sandy and calcareous soil; layers of caliche, stones
- mild, dry harvest
- direct pressing
- spontaneous fermentation in conical, unlined concrete vessels
- no malo
- aged in concrete
- no racking, no lees stirring
- cork
- 13.5% | TA 7.89 g/l | pH 3.15

WINE 3

Keller, Wachenheimer Rotenberg Chardonnay 2024 Rheinhessen

“Felix grew up with wine – for him it’s like cycling or swimming or breathing – he does not have to think what’s right or wrong. He does 99% the right things automatically. Which is very unusual for such a young grower.”

Klaus Peter Keller





XXXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXXXX



Keller, Wachenheimer Rotenberg Chardonnay 2024

Rheinhessen

- family-owned and run – Felix Keller makes the Chardonnay and fizz
- Rotenberg VDP Erste Lage site since 2023
- iron-rich (hence Rotenberg), clay topsoil with limestone rock underneath
- high-density plantings: 12,500–18,000 vines/ha, yield 28 hl/ha
- hand-harvested, basket-pressed
- fermented with ambient yeast in barrel
- 35% new oak, 65% used once and twice
- 18 months (two winters) in barrel with lees but no stirring
- unfined and unfiltered
- cork
- 12.7% | TA 6.9 g/l | RS 0.3 g/l

**Thank you to all the producers
who kindly gave their wines**