

French Wine Scholar (FWS) Detailed Curriculum

The French Wine Scholar program presents each French wine region as an integrated whole by explaining the impact of history, the significance of geological events, the importance of topographical markers and the influence of climatic factors on the wine the glass. No topic is discussed in isolation in order to give students a working knowledge of the material at hand.

FUNDAMENTALS:

In order for French Wine Scholar candidates to study the wine regions of France from a position of strength, Unit One covers French history, terroir and climate, grape varieties, viticulture and winemaking, and wine law in depth. It merits reading, even by advanced students of wine, as the French vinous landscape is constantly evolving.

THE NORTH

ALSACE:

In Alsace, the diversity of soil types, grape varieties and wine styles makes for a complicated sensory landscape. Do you know the difference between Klevner and Klevener? The relationship between Gewurztraminer, Savagnin Rose and Savagnin Blanc? Can you explain the difference between a Vendanges Tardives and a Sélection de Grains Nobles? This class takes Alsace beyond the basics.

CHAMPAGNE:

The art of capturing the bubble in the bottle took decades to perfect. Find out how the champagne method developed from an inexpert and uncontrolled phenomenon to the precise and polished process of today. Learn why Champagne is unique among the world's sparkling wine-producing regions and why it has become the world-class luxury good that it is.

BOURGOGNE:

In Bourgogne, an ancient and fractured geology delivers wines of distinction and distinctiveness. Learn how soil, topography, and climate create enough variability to craft 84 different AOCs within this region's borders! Discover the history and historic precedent behind such subtle and nuanced fractionalization.

BEAUJOLAIS:

Discover the multi-faceted nature of Beaujolais as expressed through its different soil types and vinification techniques. Learn how carbonic maceration and traditional fermentation changes the flavors in the glass. Find out how varying trace elements in the granitic soils of the Crus Beaujolais create wines of different character and age-ability. Beaujolais may be a light-hearted quaff, but the subject is far from simple.

JURA:

The Jura lies tucked between Bourgogne and Switzerland and represents the eastern uplift of the Saône graben. Although the wines are rarely found outside the Jura itself, it produces some unique wine products from non-mainstream grape varieties that merit attention. The region is famous for Vin Jaune, but Jura has given birth to some notable wine talent also. Pasteur, responsible for ground-breaking work in fermentation science, and Millardet, responsible for both “Bordeaux Mixture” and the grafted-grapevine solution to phylloxera were born here! But that’s not all! The Arbois zone of production was one of the first to be granted AOC status in 1936. The region is a dynamo!

SAVOIE:

Savoie is an Alpine region just south of Jura. Very little wine is exported; most of the production is consumed by tourists who visit for skiing and other winter sports. The wines, however, are as colorful as the grapes that go into them--Jacquère, Altesse, Gringet, Molette, Mondeuse Noire, Persan—and they are as fun to study as they are to drink... if you are so lucky.

LOIRE VALLEY:

Did you know that the Sauvignon Blanc vineyards of Menetou-Salon, Reuilly and Quincy are all on Kimmeridgian marl? That one of the longest-lived white wines in the world is Savennières? Are you familiar with the Crus Communaux? It’s time to explore a wine culture as long and wide as the river itself. Learn about the undiscovered treasures of this region and explore its diversity of grape varieties and wine styles.

THE SOUTH

BORDEAUX:

The Bordeaux region embodies structure and strength. This is made manifest in the way its wine industry is organized and in the way its wines are made. Explore Bordeaux’s distinctive terroirs in order to better understand the nature of the blend, then discover how and why the red blend has changed over the past 150 years while maintaining character and quality. Find out how Bordeaux white wine styles continue to evolve. Bordeaux, like the sea that flanks it, is in perpetual motion.

SOUTH-WEST:

Viticulture was established in Gascony before Bordeaux was planted to the vine. Magdeleine Noire des Charentes, the parent of both Merlot and Malbec, is believed to have originated here. The grapes are interesting and high-quality, the wines are good, but the region languished in obscurity because Bordeaux blocked South-Ouest’s access to the global wine market by curtailing access to its port. Landlocked for centuries, this region is finally and justifiably making a name for itself. This cluster of growing regions has adopted an “all for one and one for all” face to the wine world. And why not? D’Artagnan, the fourth of the three Musketeers hailed from Gascony and coined the phrase!

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON:

Although Languedoc and Roussillon were administratively joined in 1972, they are historically, culturally, and topographically two distinct regions. Roussillon produces 80% of France's Vins Doux Naturels crafted from old-vine Spanish grape varieties. Yet today, it also crafts many dry blockbuster reds from those same old vines. Languedoc represents a cornucopia of vines that have historically gone into varietally labeled IGP products or simple Vin de France. Today, Languedoc re-discovers its terroir and its grape legacy with new AOCs and a collective drive for quality. Together, Languedoc-Roussillon represents the last wine frontier in France. Things have changed here. Keep current!

RHÔNE:

The Rhône River serves as the gravitational axis around which its two halves revolve; the northern half clings tightly, the southern half expands outward and experiences less pull to the riverbanks. These two different wine cultures possess distinctive soils and topographies, and they craft vastly disparate wines with unique personalities. It's one region, but two brave new worlds. Explore them both.

PROVENCE:

Did you know that Provence is the oldest wine region in France? It is also the only region in France and the only region in the world to focus primarily on the production of rosé. In fact, the local vignerons have been perfecting the craft for over 2,600 years! Learn all about Provence's path to pink as well as its stellar production of dry reds and whites. It's not all sunflowers and lavender in this sun-drenched part of France!

CORSICA:

The island of Corse has a long and colorful past. Throughout the millennia, it has been ruled by no less than six different nations and each of them have left their mark. However, many of the region's winemaking traditions and grape varieties are Italian due to the island's close proximity to that country. Today, Corse is indeed French with an Italian accent.