

# HOW TO READ A FRENCH WINE LABEL

French wine labels can be challenging, from the place names to the lack of easy varietal clarity. As with all Old World wines, the label holds important information that will help you choose a wine that appeals to you, so spend a moment to look closely and learn about the wine behind the colorful label.

The French believe strongly that where a wine comes from is more important than what grape is used to make it. The concept of *terroir*, a combination of soil, climate and place, is uniquely French and is a major reason for confusion for US consumers looking for the name of a grape on the label. (In this case, Petrus is almost completely Merlot, and Echezeaux is entirely Pinot Noir.)

## A CLASSIC RED BORDEAUX



What's missing?  
(There is no actual physical château on the property, so the label cannot say "Château Petrus.")

The vintage (85% of the wine must come from the indicated year.)

The producer's name

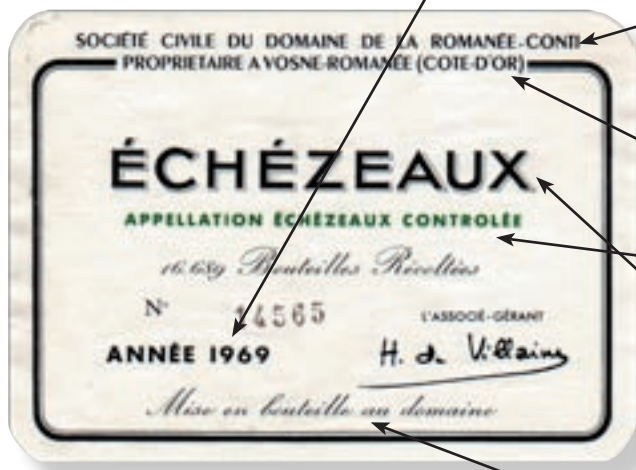
The region (Bordeaux has many regions and sub-regions, while Burgundy's Côte d'Or is divided into only two sub-regions.)

A single vineyard (This owner does not own all of this vineyard, and cultivates rows of vines beside other owners.)

Official government approval (Highly regulated by the French government and a model for the rest of the world.)

Estate-bottled

## A CLASSIC RED BURGUNDY



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## The Four Levels of French Wine Quality

1. **Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AC or AOC)**  
This is the highest level that a French wine can attain.
2. **Vins Delimités de Qualité Supérieure (VDQS)**  
Established in 1949 as a stepping stone to Appellation Contrôlée
3. **Vin de Pays**  
Established by decree in September 1979 as a result of an initiative on the part of the wine trade, to give added value to certain vins de table.
4. **Vins de Table**  
Forty per cent of the wine produced in France falls into this category. Vins de table can be produced anywhere in the country with no restriction as to the grape variety, though the wine may not be chaptalised.

*Pictures:* For appellation wines, if there is a picture of a château on a label it must accurately represent a building on the property. Fictional enhancement is not allowed.

