

Week 1 - French Wine Laws

The first attempts at putting some order into the chaos of the post-phylloxera French wine business came in 1905. The desperate situations that prevailed in many of the countries wine regions created increasing numbers of adulterated and sometimes fraudulent wine. In order to restore consumer confidence a wine law was created which recognized that some areas were superior to others for wine production. This was as obvious to drinkers as it was to producers, but had never before been officially codified.

Unfortunately, because only geography was specified, the law was not as successful as it could have been. Subsequent refinements, which recognized the importance of grape variety and traditional winemaking, paved the way for the first AOC to be created in 1935.

Vins de France

This is the base of the pyramid. Wine must be bottled in France to carry this designation, and may state vintage or varietal. Replaced the old Vin de Table in 2012, which forbid mention of vintage or varietal.

Vins de Pays

This is a growing category for French wines. Divided into regional, departmental, and local tiers. Wines must be made from approved varietals, as well as meet minimal standards of yield and ripeness. This is meant to foster a sense of individuality in the producers, as they attempt to produce wines that reflect the specific conditions of their area. In the process of being renamed IGP.

VDQS

Originally intended as a halfway house for wines too important to be Vins de Tables, but not up to the standards of AOC. This role was assumed by Vins de Pays, and this category has disappeared as of 2011. Many of the original VDQS wines were promoted to the more profitable rank of AOC. The last stages of this transition have now been completed.

AOC

The roots of French wine law can be found in the Appellation Controlee system, first introduced in 1935. This was the world's first countrywide wine law system, and it's first appellation was Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape. There are six main elements controlled in Appellation Controlee, and these are;

- Grape Variety
- Geographical Boundaries
- Viticultural Methods
- Harvest and Yield Restrictions
- Minimum Alcoholic Content
- Winemaking Techniques

In theory, all AOC wines must meet the criteria set for their specific region, and then pass a tasting panel. In practise, only very obviously flawed wines are rejected by the panels, which are usually comprised of many of the same people who made the wines! In the process of being renamed AOP.