

## WINE BOTTLE SIZES

As is the case with many fields, the wine industry has its own, specialized vocabulary that has evolved over the centuries. This certainly is the case when it comes to wine bottles and their sizes.

In the earliest days of winemaking in Mesopotamia and Egypt, wines were stored in *amphorae*, which were clay flasks. Just as winemakers do today, ancient winemakers labeled the *amphorae* with information about the wine – the vineyard's name, the vintage, type of wine, etc. In those days there were no paper labels, so the information was stamped on the *amphorae*.

Thousands of years later the Romans developed glassmaking, and soon glass was a preferred medium for wine storage. It had many advantages over the old *amphorae*, especially since the glass did not react with the wine, and one could see into the bottle.

The only disadvantage with the Roman wine bottles was that because they were hand-blown, they varied widely in size. Purchasers had little idea of exactly how much they were buying from a wine merchant, and in time it became illegal to sell wine in bottles. Consumers would bring their own containers to the wine merchant and would buy a measured amount of wine that would be put into their container.

The earliest wine bottles were onion-shaped because that was an easy shape to blow. However that shape was not easy to store – more desirable was a long narrow or flat shape that could be laid on its side for convenient stacking. That shape also facilitated keeping the cork moist.

As different shaped bottles were coming on the scene, so were different colored glass bottles. By the 1800s many winemaking regions began to settle on a "standard" size and color of bottle. Nonetheless the size could vary within the region, so some were 700 ml while others were 750 ml or 800 ml, as was the case for Burgundy and Champagne style bottles.

In 1979 as part of the push to become "metric," the United States implemented a standard requirement that all wine bottles be exactly 750 ml in volume, although they could vary in shape. Multiples or fractions of the 750 ml volume also were approved. That size was chosen because it contained approximately the same volume as the "American Fifth" (a fifth of a gallon) whether it was wine or hard spirits. The fifth had been invented by the spirits industry many years before to avoid being taxed, since taxes were assessed for quarts or larger volumes of wine or spirits.

The European Union standardized its usual wine bottle at the same 750 ml volume to facilitate European winemakers shipping their wines to the United States.

The Jeroboam bottle size came into use in 1725 in Bordeaux. In time the other, larger, bottles were created. Nowadays they usually are seen at special occasions and at large parties.

While the 750 ml bottle has become the “standard” wine bottle, there are a number of other wine bottles sizes in use. The following are wine bottle sizes that are legal in the United States:

Name	Size	Notes
Pony, Split or Picolo	187 ml	
Half Bottle or Demi	375 ml	
Standard Bottle	750 ml	
Magnum	2 bottles, 1.5 L	The Latin term for “large
Double Magnum	4 bottles, 3 L	From 1800s
Jeroboam	4 bottles, 3 L	In use circa 1725 for sparkling wine
Jeroboam or Rehoboam	6 bottles, 4.5 L	Usually used for red wine
Imperial	8 bottles, 6 L	
Methuselah	8 bottles, 6 L	Usually used for sparkling wine
Balthazar	16 bottles, 12 L	Usually used for sparkling wine
Melchior	24 bottles, 18 L	
Solomon	28 bottles, 20 L	
Melchizedek	40 bottles, 30 L	

## WINE BOTTLE SHAPES

While wine bottles come in many shapes, colors and sizes, there is some standard usage, although none of the usage described below is official:

### Bordeaux

The Bordeaux-shaped bottle is high-shouldered, straight-sided, and made of dark green glass. This is the standard of Bordeaux red wines, and the shape also is used in other countries for wines associated with Bordeaux – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, high quality Chianti, Australian Syrah, and Zinfandel.

A similarly shaped bottle in light green or clear glass is used for Bordeaux white wines and for wines made from Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillion. Clear Bordeaux-shaped bottles are used in the United States for blush wines.

The Bordeaux shape is excellent for wines that throw a lot of sediment, since the steep shoulders act as a dam for the sediments while the wine is poured.

## **Burgundy**

The Burgundy-shaped bottle has shallow, gently sloping shoulders, and can be made either in light green or clear glass. This style bottle is used for wines made from grapes associated with Burgundy and the Rhône, such as Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah. Some Italian and Spanish wines also come in this shape.

## **Flutes or Rhine Bottles**

Flutes or Rhine bottles are tall and slender brown or green bottles, used for Rhine wines and wines associated with Germany, such as Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer. Clear flute or Rhine bottles also are used for European Rosé wines.

## **CORKS**

The early Greeks used the bark of the cork oak (*Quercus suber*) that is native to the Mediterranean region, as stoppers for wine vessels. In the 1600s the French monk, Dom Pérignon, realized that the traditional method of closing sparkling wine bottles with wooden stoppers wrapped in olive oil-soaked hemp was not effective because the wooden stoppers often popped out. He substituted the use of cork, and that made history!

The first cork stopper factory opened in Anguine, Spain, around 1750 to accommodate the wide-spread use of corks in glass bottles. The early corks were tapered to fit more easily in bottles. More modern corks are straight-sided – even champagne corks start out with straight-sides and only develop their mushroom shape after they are jammed in the bottle.

Corks are used to prevent oxygen from getting into the wine. Corks also can reveal several other things. For instance most corks used in bottles of fine wine are marked to specify where the cork was produced, but also with the name of the winery that bottled the wine. Narrow and misshapen corks give an indication that they have been in the bottle a long time.

Recently a number of wineries have turned to synthetic corks in an effort to solve the problem of mold that sometimes develops on “real” corks. The synthetic corks have the same sealing properties as natural cork, but do not harbor mold.

## **AGING WINES PROPERLY**

The question of whether or not to age, or “cellar,” wines often is a confusing one. There are many factors that impact how long a wine should be held before drinking, including type of grapes use, how the wine was produced, and storage conditions.

As a general rule, wines gain complexity, and lose fruitiness as they age. Wines today often are judged by their fruity character – if you value and enjoy

fruitiness, then drink wine as soon as possible. If one of the main quality criteria of a given wine is its “fruitiness,” then aging would not be beneficial, since aging encourages a loss of fruitiness.

Wines with high levels of tannins mellow and become softer (change in “mouthfeel”) as they age. Usually different types of grapes have different aging profiles.

Typically more expensive wines were designed to improve with aging, while inexpensive wines show no benefit from aging. In fact, more than 90% of wines are designed to be consumed within two years of their bottling.

How a wine is stored while it ages also impacts the optimum length of aging. The preferred temperature for storing wine is at a constant 50-55° F., with humidity around 70%. A recent study confirmed that aging wine at 59° F aged a wine 50% faster than aging it at 55° F.

The wine bottle should be stored lying down, so the cork remains moist. The storage area also should be free of vibrations and any items that have a strong odor. The more closely these ideal conditions are achieved will affect how the wines age.

If you are unsure how long a wine should be aged, refer to the winemaker’s notes on the bottle, or contact the winery.

The following wine aging table has been created by CellarNotes (see [www.cellarnotes.net](http://www.cellarnotes.net)), and is used with permission. The chart is intended only as a guideline – consult the winery or a local vintner for specific suggestions and additional information.

RED WINES		
<b>Beaujolais</b>	Beaujolais is made from the Gamay grape, which usually produces easy drinking, low tannin, fruity wines.	
	Up to \$12	These light fruity wines are at their best when served quite young.
	\$12 to \$25	The Cru Beaujolais (from individual villages) fall into this category. They tend to be at their best 3-5 years old.
<b>Bordeaux (Medoc)</b>	These wines are made predominantly from Cabernet Sauvignon and have the same aging profile.	
	Up to \$12	Drink in the short term. Hold for a few months or even a year, but these are usually ready to drink when purchased.

	\$12 to \$25	Accessible when they are purchased but these wines should improve for a few years (5-6 years from the vintage date).
	\$25 and up	These wines are likely to improve with age. Depending on the wine, look for 7-15 years of improvement. A few special wines will age for decades.
<b>Cabernet Sauvignon</b>		
	Up to \$12	Drink in the short term. Hold for a few months or even a year, but these usually are ready to drink when you get them.
	\$12 to \$25	Accessible when they are purchased, but these wines may improve for a few years (5-6 years from the vintage date).
	\$25 and up	These wines are likely to improve with age. Depending on the wine, look for 7-15 years of improvement. A few special wines will age much longer.
<b>Merlot</b>	Merlot is a close cousin of Cabernet Sauvignon. It has a similar aging profile, but matures more quickly	
	Up to \$12	Drink in the short term. Hold for a few months or even a year, but these usually are ready to drink when you get them.
	\$12 to \$25	Accessible when they are purchased, but these wines may improve for a few years (3-4 years from the vintage date).
	\$25 and up	These wines are likely to improve with age. Depending on the wine, look for 5-12 years of improvement. A few special wines will age much longer.
<b>Pinot Noir</b>	Pinot Noir loses much of its fruitiness as it ages and gains complexity. Not everyone appreciates this. It also may go through 'dump' phases where the aromas and flavors seem to disappear for months.	
	Up to \$12	Drink short term. A year or less is reasonable.
	\$12 to \$25	Accessible at purchase but will age and gain complexity with 2-4 years of age.

	\$25 and up	These are usually bigger wines that can benefit from age. 5-8 years is reasonable, depending on the wine. Some special wines (Grand Cru Burgundies) may age for many years.
<b>Syrah/Shiraz</b>	Most new wine drinkers know Shiraz as an Australian product. It usually is made there in a soft fruity style although exceptions do exist. More experienced drinkers know that the grape has long been used in the Rhône Valley of France, where it usually is made in a bigger style and blended with other grapes	
	Up to \$12	Easy drinking wines that should be consumed within 1-2 years of purchase. No benefit from aging.
	\$12 to \$25	More robust wines should benefit from 3-5 years of age.
	\$25 and up	Special wines like the Grange from Australia can benefit from a decade or more of age.
<b>WHITE WINES</b>		
<b>Chardonnay</b>	Most Chardonnay is designed for consumption while the wine is young. Special vineyards can produce special wines with aging potential.	
	Up to \$12	Drink up. No benefit from cellaring these wines.
	\$12 to \$25	Drink at 3-5 years from the vintage date.
	\$25 and up	These wines can age for 4-8 years depending on the wine. Be aware that Chardonnays that have fully gone through malolactic fermentation have greatly reduced life spans. Malolactic Chardonnays have a smell of butter and usually golden color when young.
<b>Chenin Blanc</b>	Chenin Blanc has high acids and can produce wines that age well – they can, but usually do not. Most Chenin Blancs that you will find are not designed to age over long periods.	
	Up to \$12	Drink within 3 years from the vintage date.
	\$12 to \$25	Drink within 5 years of the vintage date.

<b>Riesling</b>	Most people discover Riesling in the lower to middle grade of German wines. It can be one of the best white wine grapes for aging, but only the best (and most expensive) Rieslings age well.	
	Up to \$12	Probably a German Qualitätswein or warm weather California Riesling. Drink it within 3-4 years of vintage.
	\$12 to \$25	Better German wines or moderate wines of Alsace. Drink young or age to 6-8 years.
	\$25 and up	The best sweet German wines or dry Rieslings like Trimbach 'Clo Ste. Hune' can age and develop for decades if stored properly.
<b>Vouvray</b>	Most Vouvray is best consumed when it is young and fruity. There are special bottlings that can age for several years, but they are not commonly found. Consume Vouvray when young as a general rule.	