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## Blind tastings help us to understand terroir wines

*Les dégustations à l'aveugle nous aident à comprendre les vins de terroir*

15 December 2021.

**Jorge Ricardo Ducati**

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PREO

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## **Introduction**

- 1 The perception of wine is an experience that mainly operates through those human senses which were called “proximal” senses, like taste, smell, and tact, as opposed to the “upper senses” that work at a distance, like vision or hearing<sup>1</sup>. This makes wine tasting a much more personal, subjective experience<sup>2</sup>, if compared, for example, with vision, which can be considered a public perception. Stated in other words, due to the fact that to taste wine we have to bring the information carriers to the inside of our bodies, the sharing of perceptions with other individuals is not so straightforward. In an effort to allow communication, a large ensemble of fairly objective sensorial descriptors has been developed; the number of publications on these descriptors is very large, but the interested reader can find valuable

information, for example, in Peynaud and Blouin<sup>3</sup> or in OIV<sup>4</sup>. Many descriptors are expressions of physico-chemical properties detected by smell, taste and touch, as alcohol, molecules, and tannins content. Regarding these descriptors and their mutual balance, in due time a mainstream sense was established, being functional to describe a wine and, even, to assess quality or hedonic attributes. Through training, a person can build capabilities to join this mainstream awareness, characterized by “an alignment of sensory concepts”<sup>5</sup>, and then the tasting experience becomes less personal and more objective, more public in the sense defined by Russell<sup>6</sup>. Even in blind tastings, communication of those perceptions to other people is possible.

- 2 In this work, we want to discuss the relation of wine perception with a most prized wine feature, which is terroir. As an initial guide to our discussion, we will take terroir-defining texts. In 2010 a definition of terroir was formulated by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) through her resolution OIV/VITI 333/2010 (OIV, 2010), which states :

“Vitivicultural “terroir” is a concept which refers to an area in which collective knowledge of the interactions between the identifiable physical and biological environment and applied vitivicultural practices develops, providing distinctive characteristics for the products originating from this area.”

- 3 However, the discussion on the terroir concept included an earlier version. It is the definition proposed at the Montpellier session of the VI International Terroir Congress in 2006, being presented by Jacques Fanet and associates as an eventual suggestion from the Congress to be submitted to OIV. However, the text was not voted by the Assembly on grounds that, from that definition, many New World wines from new viticultural regions would never be terroir ones. This early definition stated that:

“Terroir is a restricted geographical space, where a human community constructs, along his History, a collective knowledge for production, based on a system of interactions between the physical and biological environments, and an ensemble of human factors. The

technical paths involved reveal originality, give typicity, and give reputation to a product originating from this geographical space”.

- 4 While, obviously, we will comply with the official, exhaustingly discussed definition, we feel that for the sake of this paper some elements of the early text deserve attention. This position is justified by the long tradition of associating to the terroir concept certain elements linked to the human tradition and to the landscape; some synthesis in favor of this position can be found, for example, in Vaudour<sup>7</sup> and van Leeuwen and Seguin<sup>8</sup>.
- 5 From this perspective, the terroir component includes data on: the production region, its traditions and landscape; the vineyard and its history; the winemaker’s persona; winemaking culture and winemaking methods; and data on the wine’s geochemical background. With the possible exception of the two last items, the other ones are not physico-chemical, and for the sake of this paper, we treat them as carriers of “metaphysical” information, where this word is presently employed not in a theological or spiritual sense, but to express data processed using symbolical cognitive constructions. Other words could be “immaterial”, “subjective”, “symbolic” or “non-physical”, but hereafter we’ll use the first one. Concerning words, in an approach to terroir components or descriptors, Wilson et al.<sup>9</sup> sent questionnaires to 4000 wine consumers in France, asking about which words would be more important to qualify a wine as being a terroir one. A choice of 16 words was offered, and not surprisingly, physico-chemical descriptors as soil, relief, region, climate and grape variety were the overwhelming majority of choices. What we presently call “metaphysical” parameters like local culture, *savoir faire* and history received much less votes, and the two proposed descriptors of a terroir wine that possibly would survive as descriptors in a blind tasting, which were “goût de terroir” and wine quality, received very few votes. These last two descriptors, both of them, can be considered as having a subjective component. From this introductory discussion, we suggest that the terroir concept has double bases, being respectively the physico-chemical ones, and the subjective, “metaphysical” bases as well.
- 6 The subjects we want to discuss in this article are that, if accepting the terroir concept is partially of subjective nature, how this fact

would impact people who approach wine through blind tastings, and if there is a special kind of wine amateur regarding terroir. Accordingly, this study is organized as follows: in Section 2 we explore some points which attracted our attention concerning the physico-chemical attributes contained in the above definitions of terroir; in Section 3 we present how a series of blind tastings took place. In Section 4 we discuss the “metaphysical” attributes of terroir, arriving to Conclusions in Section 5.

## Terroir concept, physico-chemical aspects

- 7 Taking as line of analysis the terroir definitions given in Section 1, we start from the physico-chemical perspective, which should better be expressed as the bio-physico-chemical view, in the light of what was reported by Bokulich et al.<sup>10</sup> concerning the biota associated to specific viticultural regions or methods<sup>11</sup>; however, this broader perception is relatively new and still lacks further studies, and we will, therefore, limit ourselves to the first perspective. The initial perception is that the link terroir-wine is a difficult concept. We start with the soil component, in the mineral sense. Opinions on connections between soil (geochemical) and wine range between those openly positive, giving crucial importance to soil<sup>12</sup>, passing by a receptive position, to those plainly skeptical<sup>13</sup>, who doubts this connection and asks if terroir would not be a myth motivated by commercial interests.
- 8 The point is the connection, if any exists, of soil and its sensorial impact. From one side, it has been said that the *goût de terroir* “is mineral, stony, chalky, earthy,” suggesting soil attributes, more seldom fruity ones<sup>14</sup>, while at the opposite side, from geochemical considerations, it has been stated that the *goût de terroir*, defined as “being able to taste the vineyard geology in the wine”, is scientifically impossible<sup>15</sup>. However, in some way the soils express themselves into wine quality, a perception dating from Cistercian times and being supported even by studies based on satellite images<sup>16</sup>. But descriptors for a terroir wine are often ill-defined<sup>17</sup>, and some descriptive analysis have been strongly criticized<sup>18</sup>. Can we talk of a sensorial failure?

- 9 From an analytical approach linking soils and wines, this sensorial failure is in strong contrast to the fact that terroir *does* imprint geochemical marks in wine: elements and molecules can be analytically detected in wines, and their content and relative concentrations are markers of geographical origin<sup>19</sup>. Recently, a quantitative analysis suggested that aroma compounds and other possible terroir features can be measured<sup>20</sup>. Anyway, a researcher who persists in reviewing the literature can be lead to utter confusion, related to blind tastings and typicity.
- 10 A trivial difficulty is what exactly a terroir wine is, sensorially. In blind tastings conducted by Gonzaga et al.<sup>21</sup>, well-established Old World (Bordeaux) wines tend to reveal more “earthy” typicity than New World (Australia) wines, which tend to display floral or fruity attributes; the arising perception is that, among terroir wines, some would be more terroir than others. However, a more moderate position would be to consider some regions as “paradigmatic”, like those first presented in extensive studies like those of Johnson<sup>22</sup>, Vaudour<sup>23</sup> or Fanet<sup>24</sup>.
- 11 From one side, blind tastings gave positive results to separate Sauvignon Blanc wines from France, New Zealand and Austria<sup>25</sup>, even if it is not certain that tasters would say “this wine is French!”. At the opposite side, blind tastings by Bordeaux and Burgundy professionals failed to identify Burgundian “vins de garde”<sup>26</sup>.
- 12 The next point to analyse from the definitions of terroir given at Section 1 concerns the words “distinctive”, “typicity”, “area” and “geographical”. Here we are led to approach the paradigm in terroir and typicity concepts, the Burgundian vineyard. Intriguingly, even inside well-known appellations, contained in limited surfaces, like Échezeaux or Clos Vougeot, variations do occur, and in blind tastings by panels of local professionals, several wines of both appellations were reported to be different<sup>27</sup>, with samples of some producers being reported as “more typical” than others. The same happened with another respected Burgundian appellation, Vosne-Romanée, where a tasting of twenty samples by twenty experts revealed a gradient of typicality<sup>28</sup>. In a more ample perspective, if a reader analyses the tastings reported by Coates<sup>29</sup> in his classical text on Burgundy wines, he or she will readily gather that the vintner style is a

very important component in defining a Burgundy wine, a conclusion that perhaps would be in conflict with what is stated by Kramer<sup>30</sup>.

- 13 Perhaps typicity should be viewed in a more ample perspective, at least geographically. This was done, for example, by Perrin et al.<sup>31</sup>, where “the verification of a sensorial space characteristic of a category”, that is, a typicity, was tested using samples of Loire wines blindly tasted by professionals acting in the region, meaning that they in principle knew these wines well. Results were mixed, in the sense that white wines had confusion in typicity, while red ones had their typicity recognized. In a review of blind tastings of terroir wines, Ballester<sup>32</sup> concluded that “it is quite difficult to prove scientifically that each terroir (...) has its own sensory identity”. Still geographically, and from a viticultural point-of-view, we quote Matthews<sup>33</sup>, who states that “the grapevine has no sense of political boundaries, tribal skirmishes or wine style conventions”.
- 14 But all this doesn't mean that terroir wines are intrinsically good or better, that is, that their “reputation” adds sensorial value or quality. We can bring as an example a very popular wine in south Brazil made from grapes of American origin as Isabella and Niagara since the beginning of the Italian presence at the Serra Gaúcha region in the 1870s<sup>34</sup>. Some existing vineyards are 130 years old, a time that spans over about five generations; there is a collective knowledge, and this wine undoubtedly qualifies as a terroir wine since it is associated with a region, a landscape shaped by vineyards, has a geographical identity, and has a human tradition. Prices are quite affordable and from a technical approach quality levels vary. For consumers more acquainted with wines from *vinifera* these *labrusca* wines can be almost undrinkable, but, however, this is a matter of preference; for what it presently matters, they are terroir wines.
- 15 Collective knowledges have been constructed in new viticultural regions. This stems from the fact that skilled winemakers, in many places all over the world, succeed in producing very good, exception wines, translating to their regions the “savoir faire” from traditional terroirs. It would seem, from this analysis, that almost all wines could qualify to be terroir ones. However, we feel that the traditional Old World perception still holds, and that some paradigmatic regions still are, with all due respect to other (newer) regions, more terroir. This

is slowly changing, as newer regions accumulate collective knowledge and the landscape is quantitatively described and shaped by vineyards, in a trend towards wine typicity. We cite as examples of how these studies have been developed the papers by Pogue<sup>35</sup> concerning AVAs in the Columbia Basin, USA, and of Tonietto et al.<sup>36</sup> on Geographical Indications in Brazil.

- 16 This expansion in wine diversity is so large that for most wine amateurs, and perhaps even for some wine professionals, keeping a global perspective becomes difficult, if not impossible, in special if it is necessary to keep an adequate record in memory, not in written notes, as it is the case of blind tastings; the solution tends to be to specialize, leading to a loss of the global perspective. We have just cited some experiments<sup>37</sup> where panels of blind tasters were composed of local specialists. When blind tastings have as focus the identification of terroir wines, globally, things become much more difficult.
- 17 If wine tasting can be considered a problem-solving task<sup>38</sup>, blind tasting would be a harder challenge. It is not the focus of this article to discuss blind tastings; the interested reader can find a discussion, for example, in Burton and Flewellen<sup>39</sup>. However, it is our perception that the practice of blind tasting is relatively rare in wine appreciation. It received little space in the classical book by Peynaud and Blouin<sup>40</sup>, and is not praised by specialists<sup>41</sup> or philosophers<sup>42</sup>. However, in some circumstances blind tastings are very didactical and act as lessons of humility<sup>43</sup>.
- 18 This discussion set the problem that we want to study in this paper. The questions we want to debate are whether terroir wines are recognizable, if they are in some way outstanding, and what motivates a person to look for a terroir wine. In the next Section we shall present our approach.

## **A continuous series of wine tastings**

- 19 A series of blind tastings took place at the tasting room of the Brazilian Society of Friends of Wine (Sociedade Brasileira dos Amigos do Vinho - Regional Sul - SBAV/RS), at its chapter in the city of Porto Alegre. This society is a brotherhood founded in 1982, focused on



studying wines of all countries; the Society has access to a large number of international wines, thanks to the extreme diversity of the Brazilian market; besides, many special wines are brought by associates from their travels abroad. Although not being professionals in the wine business, these people benefit from many years in wine studies. In which measure this involvement with wine turned the members of this group in reliable tasters? We know from the research of Castriota-Scanderberg et al.<sup>44</sup> that in wine tastings the brains of trained sommeliers are activated in different ways than the brains of common tasters; the differences were due to alterations in the sommeliers' brain processing induced by learning on the stimulus vector, the wine. This above-mentioned study didn't report which alterations would exist in non-professional persons that study wine for long periods; presently we will accept that the cognitive strategies of these non-wine-professionals, compared with the general wine drinker are, at least, more sophisticated. The number of tasters involved in the blind tasting sessions was typically about ten persons of both sexes with ages between 40 and 70 years; the group gathered weekly, and many sessions were and still are dedicated to studies of wine identity. Other sessions, in fact the majority of them, had open labels and served as training exercises for learning on regions, grape varieties, aging and other subjects. In several aspects, this group is similar and operates like the one described in Quandt<sup>45</sup>.

20 The database was assembled from a set of 41 blind tasting sessions specifically focused on wine identity, which took place from March 2005 to September 2019. Typically, five or six different wines were simultaneously served. For each session, an effort was made to select wines of approximately the same age and price range. At the beginning of each session some information was passed, as:

- “these are monovarietals from this or that grape variety; one comes from the place of origin of the grape” (for instance, six malbec, being one from Cahors; or six tempranillo, being one from Rioja);
- “of these six wines, one is from a paradigmatic terroir” (for instance, six pinot noir, but only one from Burgundy; or five Bordeaux-style blends, being one from Bordeaux);
- “only one wine is not from a famed terroir” (five sparkling wines, one not Champagne).

- 21 Tasters have to answer questions like “which is the wine that better expresses that grape variety?”, or “which wine presents (or doesn’t) some typicality?”, and, obviously, “which wine do you prefer?”. In looking for answers the tasters can benefit from their memories of the open-labels sessions. Afterwards, labels were revealed, and questions were “now that you know, do you recognize the terroir wine?”, “the best wine was a terroir wine?”, or “that Burgundian chardonnay was typical Burgundian, and was typical chardonnay?”. It must be stressed that, even if during the tastings considerations were made on wine attributes as balance, alcohol, tannins or acidity, the present analysis was not about these attributes; from the revision made in the preceding Section we believe that there are indications that what characterizes terroir wines and distinguishes them from other wines are not these attributes. Support to answer the questions above came only from the memories accumulated during hundreds of open-labels tastings. In these 41 blind sessions, about 240 wines from 12 countries and dozens of viticultural regions were tasted. Each tasting session originated a report; the entire collection of tasting reports can be accessed at [www.sbav.com.br](http://www.sbav.com.br) or is available from the author. A general descriptive analysis was performed on this database to look for and to quantify terroir recognition; specifically, each report was analysed to verify if, among the samples, terroir wines were identified and valued. This survey, as presently explained, is fundamentally different of the kind of surveys like the one reported by Charters and Pettigrew<sup>46</sup>, not only in the sense that real tastings took place, but also that the focus is on a specific kind of wine, the terroir wine. Specifically, in each report we looked for information on: a) if the terroir wine was recognized; b) how the terroir wine was classified among the session’s wine selection; c) if, in terms of typicality (of grape variety or region), the terroir wine was more, or less, typical, or, if typicality was difficult to assess, if it separated itself from the others.
- 22 This large set of experiments produced the following results:
1. Did the terroir wines were identified?  
Identification of terroir wines or attributes was inside the range of aleatory correct answers.
  2. Did the terroir wines were considered as of outstanding quality?  
In general, terroir wines were not distinguished from other wines, and definitely were *not* considered as being the best.

3. Did the terroir wines were characterized by some kind of typicality?

In general, the terroir wines did not display special sensorial attributes, be they typicality or other descriptor, which distinguished them from the other wines.

## Discussion

23 In Section 2 we presented evidences on the difficulty of sustaining the idea of a physico-chemical typicality of terroir wines; the experiments reported in Section 3 add support, in our opinion, to this perception. Now we want to discuss the component we called “meta-physical”.

24 We reported results from a group of tasters that is not specialized on wines from a restricted terroir; on the contrary, the group, during several years of systematic blind tasting sessions, is confronted with the task of recognizing typicality and terroir. Such a challenge can become a problem: no communication at all, no prior information, only the descriptors made public by training during the open-labels sessions; the physico-chemical terroir descriptors are elusive and recognition becomes a difficult task.

25 The task is further complicated by the fact that the industry is now capable of delivering good wines. Here, the word “industry” is deliberately used, related to wines that technically, from an oenological reference, can be recognized as good or at least with no defects, even if suffering from mass production and de-localization. They come from vast vineyards, or from grapes coming from more than one region, and are processed in refinery-like facilities. Winemaking methods are elaborate and fine-tuned to satisfy specific classes of consumers, and prices vary accordingly. It has been observed that, more frequently than would be expected or desired, those non-terroir wines perform well in blind tastings. A recent incident cast light on a somewhat different possibility<sup>47</sup> which, however, illustrates this discussion. So, even with industrial bias, some de-localized wines can give significant pleasure, and can be not recognized as such, with the possible exception of being tasted by skilled professionals. Especially in blind tastings the memory problem arises, since the access to written notes does not exist. It seems that the dichotomy between the physico-chemical descriptors of a wine, and what we have called the

metaphysical attributes, the “goût de terroir” or the “taste of place”, now deserves to be discussed. How to insert them in this study?

- 26 We feel that this insertion can be made by considering wine drinking as an aesthetical experience, and the tasting a terroir wine as an enlarged aesthetical experience. The aesthetical nature of wine consumption has already been discussed elsewhere<sup>48</sup> and presently will not be retaken. However, we argue that not only wine tasting is an aesthetic experience, but the supplementary information brought along with a terroir wine is an added-value to this experience. In our support we cite Charters and Pettigrew<sup>49</sup>: “...some of the major aesthetic debates centre (...) in the nature of the aesthetic response, including the concentration required, the nature of pleasure in the experience and whether or not it is primarily cognitive, emotional or sensory”. We note the importance that is given to the cognitive part of the experience, that is, to the information associated to the object of contemplation. In our case, taking wine as the object of contemplation, we place terroir wines in a “much wider symbolic context rather than merely as artworks or capable of aesthetic evaluation. They have a symbolic function that extends beyond even the most sophisticated savoring”<sup>50</sup>.
- 27 Information is important, if not fundamental, for the appreciation of a piece of art, and for the level of the aesthetical experience that comes along. Let’s indulge in a little exercise. We will take the second definition of terroir given in Section 1, at the part which states “reveal originality, give typicity, and give reputation”. Related with these three words we’ll take three examples from what in Section 1 we called the “upper senses” (vision and hearing), starting with painting, choosing Rembrandt’s “Aristotle contemplating the bust of Homer”. For the casual visitor among the crowd at the museum, it possibly will be sensed as a beautiful painting, providing an aesthetical experience; but an informed viewer will feel the piece with deeper perceptions, coming from the originality of the theme chosen by Rembrandt in response to a demand from a client; there is an added-value to the aesthetical experience. Now we take music. That music gives an aesthetic experience is not disputed, even if for many pieces there is no clear meaning associated: the sounds are simply enjoyed by the listener. However, some pieces carry additional information which potentially can increase the listener sensitivity. For example, for the

majority of listeners Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture is a fine piece; but we claim that listeners which know that parts of the piece contains references to traditional Russian songs would have increased aesthetic perceptions. This additional information on typicality (the Russian land) does not come along with the music, and in the sense presently used, is metaphysical. Finally, for reputation, in sculpture we could mention Jeff Koons work, "Balloon Dog". The incidental visitor can like it or not, and perhaps his/her aesthetical experience will be brief; even experts can be dubious about its value, but, however, for an experienced art scholar there is a whole meaning behind the piece which can be even greater than the piece itself.

- 28 The above reflexions suggest that wine, being an artwork or not, may be approached by a variety of attitudes. Wines were described as "stimulants that have mind-altering effects which are in some way internally related to the experience of consuming them"<sup>51</sup>. We already have mentioned that wine ingestion influences brain processes<sup>52</sup> in ways that vary as a function of the type of subject. The general attitude derived from mind-altering effects would come from what we presently call the *wine consumer*, going up to the *wine connoisseur*; they know and like wine, and drink it as a hedonistic or aesthetical experience, focusing in the physico-chemical attributes (colour, taste, aroma, texture; or tannins, acidity, alcohol). In a different level, be it superior or not, there would be what presently we call the *terroir wine lover*, who wants additional values: not only he/she enjoys the aesthetical experience, but in addition they long for associated *metaphysical information*, meaning data on the production region, its traditions and landscape, the vineyard, winemaking methods and culture, and on the winemaker's persona.
- 29 We argue that what the terroir wine lover looks for is closely associated with the concept of terroir, either the official definition that was laboriously constructed by the International Organization of Vine and Wine<sup>53</sup>, or, perhaps even more, with the preliminary definition cited in Section 1. In the examples described above, art can be simply consumed<sup>54</sup> or more deeply perceived, and we suggest that a similar reasoning can be applied to a product to be felt by the "lower senses", that is, to wine, when we think of the terroir attributes. Sometimes the story behind a wine can be greater than the wine, provided that the (metaphysical) information associated to the wine is known, gen-

erating a synergy which enables an enriched appreciation of the ensemble. This perception is expressed by Scruton<sup>55</sup>, in spite of his skeptical attitude towards the aesthetical nature of wine, when he states: “in savouring it we are knowing – by acquaintance, as it were – the history, geography, and customs of a community”; from the context we understand that he’s writing about a terroir wine. In other words, knowledge on a wine increases, or at least changes, the pleasure of drinking it<sup>56</sup>, by changing the ways the brain evaluates the wine or the product being ingested<sup>57</sup>.

30 In passing, we have to mention another kind of people interested in wine, with an attitude or interest that is not properly metaphysical in the sense we are presently using: they are the wealthy consumers that buy expensive wines, which frequently happen to be terroir wines (mainly Bordeaux, Burgundy) for the reason of having the status, and the pleasure, of being the owner of a prized bottle; in general they haven’t the faintest idea of the terroir (landscape, wine-makers, methods). The “metaphysical” information associated to the wine is, in this case, its price. In this paper we are not discussing this kind of association.

31 In the above categorization, it is not mandatory that, for the terroir wine lover, physico-chemical attributes and raw pleasure come first or are *sine qua non* conditions, prior to the enjoyment of the metaphysical attributes which are typical of terroir. It’s a situation where one has to consider the weight of the assertion “Avant d’être bon, un vin doit être vrai”<sup>58</sup>. But, presently, the focus of our discussion was if in blind tastings the “metaphysical” part survives. The question was: “In blind tastings, terroir can be recognized, or valued”? From the experiments described in Section 3, and the ensuing discussion, it follows that most, if not all, terroir attributes are lost in blind tastings; in these experiments, terroir and non-terroir wines would be all the same.

## Conclusions

32 Blind tastings at SBAV/RS have been performed by a stable group for fifteen years. Regardless of the specific theme, a perception was established from the beginning, and remains: blind tastings are lessons of humility, lessons that apply both to the presumed knowledge of

tasters, and to the performance of famed wines. This idea is amplified within a group of tasters which have ample access to wines from all over the world, and that, therefore, do not have a focus on wines from specific regions, including those which are examples of traditional viticultural terroirs. In these conditions, there is clearly a difficulty to memorize such a large number of wines (terroirs and styles). Furthermore, given the large choice available, a certain wine will be tasted twice with years between the first bottle and the second; this is especially true for iconic terroir wines which are often the standards for a class, like, for example, whites from the Puligny area or Bordeaux Grand Cru Classés, but also applies to wines in general.

- 33 Good local wines are increasingly available worldwide. Passionate winemakers in many locations and countries invest a large effort to produce small amounts of exception wines, frequently with enlightened knowledge brought from traditional terroir regions. These “author wines” attract local fame and visitors, with the result that the taste of place and the winemaker’s persona may play the dominant role in an appreciation that extends beyond the sensorial perception. This enlarged perception can explain an experience very well known for wine consumers, the fact that, when tasting wine at the production region, they are taken by enthusiasm and buy several bottles; only to discover that, when tasting the wine later at home, with other luminosity and landscape, the wine has lost its original appeal. This is more prone to happen, however, to the person we have called a wine consumer; if terroir memory is preserved, which would be the case for a terroir wine lover, this original appeal would remain.
- 34 Blind tastings are prone to be a problem to the terroir idea. Terroir wine lovers start their journey from the basic condition that a wine should be good, but as the terroir perception evolves this condition eventually loses some strength. From the above discussion we argue that, in the terroir debate, the question it’s not if terroir wines must be the better ones. For the terroir wine lover, terroir is an added value that only is enjoyed when there is associated information; he longs for this added value, which carries imaginative or representational attributes that we are calling metaphysical. In fact, we argue that terroir is *the* metaphysical parameter, which is lost in blind tastings. If we bring, for this discussion’s purposes, the often used metaphor that describes wine as a living being, terroir gives something

unique to a wine: it gives it a soul, a word that obviously is used symbolically, with no literal or theological sense, and presently carrying a broader meaning, in our opinion, than the soul of wine as described by Graham<sup>59</sup>. For a terroir wine, being good is not enough, and perhaps, keeping a citation already mentioned<sup>60</sup>, being good is not the main attribute; a terroir wine must bear its deep origin, its truth, meaning its soul, which either reveals itself at its origin or is kept in memory.

- 35 A final comment concerns the dichotomy wine consumer *versus* terroir wine lover. Wines are generally perceived as products that are consumed; the wine business operates this way. However, for all that was argued above, terroir wines carry a difference, one that involves its relation with a drinker which is a terroir wine lover. This person is not a mere consumer, we have argued, and therefore a terroir wine is not consumed; more than that, a terroir wine is confronted with memories. We also argue that a terroir wine is not a mere product; it is an accomplishment that raises specific awareness, being felt as an expression of its terroir.

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## English

The nature of terroir wines as a separated, well-defined kind of wine is analysed from their definitions by the International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV) and an alternative source. The analysis is divided in a first part focused on physico-chemical attributes, from which it is suggested that terroir wines cannot be recognized from such attributes; the reality of such perception was confirmed by a series of 41 blind tasting sessions, where terroir and non-terroir wines were not distinguished. In discussing these results we suggest that a terroir wine carries a second class of attributes which are not recognized in the wine itself, which are information. A common consumer not interested on terroir will not benefit from the associated information. We argue that the consumption of a terroir wine by an informed person adds value to the tasting experience; in a blind tasting this information is not available and the extra gain does not exist. The comparison between the two experiences help us to understand the nature of terroir wines.



## Français

La nature des vins de terroir en tant que type de vin distinct et bien défini est analysée à partir de leurs définitions par l'Organisation internationale de la vigne et du vin (OIV) et une source alternative. L'analyse est divisée en une première partie axée sur les attributs physico-chimiques, à partir de laquelle il est suggéré que les vins de terroir ne peuvent être reconnus à partir de ces attributs ; la réalité de cette perception a été confirmée par une série de 41 séances de dégustation à l'aveugle, où les vins de terroir et les autres n'ont pas été distingués. En discutant ces résultats, nous suggérons qu'un vin de terroir porte une deuxième classe d'attributs qui ne sont pas reconnus dans le vin lui-même, et qui sont des informations. Un consommateur *lambda* non intéressé par le terroir ne bénéficiera pas des informations associées. Nous soutenons que la consommation d'un vin de terroir par une personne informée ajoute de la valeur à l'expérience de dégustation ; dans une dégustation à l'aveugle, cette information n'est pas disponible et le gain supplémentaire n'existe pas. La comparaison entre ces deux expériences nous aide à comprendre la nature des vins de terroir.

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## Mots-clés

vins de terroirs, goût de terroir, dégustation du lieu, dégustation à l'aveugle

## Keywords

terroir wines, taste of terroir, taste of place, blind tastings

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