

Friday 9 October 2026

The theme this evening is comparing wines from France and the Americas. It will be a blind tasting of four varieties of grapes, one from each area. Following the tasting the group will be asked to decide which wine is from which area and the price.

Wines from the Americas (New World) and France (Old World) differ primarily in their climate, labelling traditions, and flavour profiles.

Climate and Taste

- **France:** Cooler or temperate climates produce lighter-bodied wines with higher acidity, lower alcohol (typically 12.5%–14% ABV), and prominent earthy, mineral, or savoury notes.
- **The Americas:** Warmer growing regions yield riper, fuller-bodied wines with higher alcohol levels (often 14%–15% ABV or higher), bolder fruit flavours, and a smoother finish.

European wines tend to be less manipulated, with minimal intervention in the winemaking process. This approach often results in wines that are more subtle and complex, but also more variable from vintage to vintage. In Europe, it's about the story of the land, not just the flavour in the bottle. European wines tend to be more interesting and inspiring compared to more homogeneous wines in America. American winemaking has a different cultural origin. It's less about tradition and more about entrepreneurship. The American wine industry is young and driven by satisfying consumer demand. As a result, American winemakers often prioritise experimentation in their laboratories and bold flavours over subtlety, creating wines versus growing them.

While the American wine industry may have a reputation for prioritising speed and volume over tradition and nuance, there are exceptions to this rule. Many small, estate-grown wineries are producing exceptional wines using organic or biodynamic methods. These winemakers often take inspiration from European traditions, focusing on low-intervention practices and letting the grapes' natural characteristics shine. However, producing high-quality, organically grown wine can be costly. The land, labour, and attention to detail required to farm organically are substantial, and these costs are often reflected in the price of the wine. Estate-grown, organic American wines tend to be far more expensive than their conventionally farmed counterparts, making them less accessible to the average consumer. The American government does not encourage organic practices, making it costly for farmers to convert to organic and become certified. They do, however, subsidise large farmers and producers who use glyphosate and other harmful herbicides and pesticides that degrade the soils and contaminate watersheds.

In contrast, organic and biodynamic practices are more commonplace in parts of Europe, where many winemakers have been using these methods for centuries, often without the fanfare or high price tags seen in America. This cultural difference is one reason why you may find a bottle of organic French wine for less than an equivalent American wine from a small, sustainable producer.

If you appreciate subtlety, nuance, and a deep connection to place, European wines are more your style. If you love bold, full-bodied flavours and wines that make a statement right away, New World wines, especially from America, will likely appeal to your palate.

And for those seeking the best of both worlds, there are American winemakers producing stunning estate-grown and organic wines. While they may come with a much higher price

tag, these wines reflect a growing shift towards sustainability and craftsmanship in the American wine scene—offering a glimpse of winemaking could be headed in the future.

Philosophy and Labelling

- **France:** Emphasises *terroir*—the specific geographic location, soil, and tradition of the land—and labels bottles by region (such as Burgundy or Bordeaux) under strict appellation laws.
- **The Americas:** Focuses heavily on the specific grape variety (like Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay) and winemaker innovation within flexible regional guidelines.

Food Pairing

- **France:** Higher acidity and lower alcohol make these wines exceptionally food-friendly, designed to complement meals.
- **The Americas:** Bolder, fruit-forward profiles mean many styles are crafted to be enjoyed easily on their own.

1. Edna Valley Chardonnay 2022-23, Central Coast USA

Majestic

£18.50 (£14.50 for 6)

14%

With over 100,000 acres in production, Chardonnay claims more acreage than any other wine grape in California, and reigns supreme as the most popular wine consumed in the US (that's including reds and whites).

Edna Valley's vineyards are just a stone's throw from the Californian coast, an area that's famous for its top-quality Chardonnay. You'll find big names like Napa and Sonoma nearby, but Edna Valley Vineyard choose to work within lesser-known wine regions instead – meaning they're where to go for quality and value.

This is an easy-drinking traditional American chardonnay with lots of flavour. It is well-crafted with sweetish flavour and acidity to balance.

Aroma: White peach, apricot, melon, quince, pear, lemon flower and toasted marshmallow with hints of spice.

Palate: Ripe stone fruit with tropical melon balanced by crisp acidity, creamy texture and a touch of vanilla or toasted oak. The flavours are seriously ripe, but it's still deliciously crisp and refreshing.

Pairings: Buttery pumpkin ravioli, or creamy pasta dishes, poultry dishes or fresh fish.

2. Domaine Louis Moreau 2025 Chablis, France

Waitrose

£20.00 (on offer at £16.00)

12.5%

Chablis is a Chardonnay making wine region in the north-west corner of Burgundy. Unlike other Chardonnay wines, Chablis rarely uses oak-aging, resulting in a very different style and taste profile.

A 50-hectare family estate based in Beines, in the heart of Chablis, France. The Moreau family has roots in the region dating back to 1814. They are one of the most highly esteemed wine proprietors thanks to their quality wines from vineyards in the most prestigious appellations. No oak is used in their wine, either during vinification or in ageing, so is a typical example of a quality Chablis Premier Cru.

Aroma: Mineral, flinty with hints of citrus and subtle buttery notes

Palate: Lemony grapefruit and fresh tropical fruit flavours with a steely finish

Pairings: Poultry, fish or stir fry, or good on its' own

3. Bread & Butter Sauvignon Blanc 2023-24, California USA

Majestic

£16.25 (£12.50 each for a box of 6)

13%

Bread & Butter is a Californian wine brand that produce over 1.5m cases per year sourcing grapes from across California. The region may be more associated with Chardonnay, but in the right setting, Sauvignon also thrives in California. This is produced from grapes grown in the north, where the climate remains sunny but is much cooler than further south. If you love a tropical style of Sauvignon like many New Zealand bottlings, this will be right up your street. This is an easy drinking sauvignon blanc. It has the dryness and minerality you would expect from Sauvignon without the acidity so drinks more like a good quality pinot grigio.

Aroma: Citrus, green apple and exotic fruits

Palate: Citrus and mineral notes with a hint of dryness. Crisp and zesty.

Pairings: Fish and shellfish

4. Les Clos du Matin Pouilly-Fume, France 2024

Waitrose

£18.50 (on offer at £15.50)

14.22%

Dry white wine from the Loire region made with the Sauvignon Blanc grape matured on oak. It is made by Christophe Deno and his team in the village cellar of Pouilly-sur-Loire. The vineyard is set on chalky slopes looking across the Loire to the hill of Sancerre. This is a perfectly balanced Pouilly-Fumé from one of the classic homes in the heart of the Loire Valley and is a classic example of Sauvignon Blanc. It is harvested at night with the grapes pressed early in the morning. The vines benefit from great terroir and a micro-climate.

Aroma: White flowers, citrus

Palate: Rich and fresh with a long, full finish

Pairings: Shellfish or fish, especially Dover Sole

5. Montes Outer Limits 2022 Apalta Vineyard, Chile

Waitrose

£24.25 (15% off 6 bottles or more)

14%

This is a full bodied wine from the Colchagua Valley in Chile made up of Carignan Grenache Noir (50%), Garnacha (30%) and Mourvedre (20%) grapes. Garnacha has been substituted for Syrah to give a different flavour profile. It is a blend that showcases the unique terroir of the Apalta Valley. It is recommended to allow this wine time to breathe.

Montes is one of Chile's largest and respected wineries. It has a gravity flow cellar which incorporates feng shui design principles and plays Gregorian chants to the aging barrels. It was one of the first vineyards in the Apalta Valley.

Aroma: Ripe red fruit, wild blackberries, dried figs, brambly berries, vanilla, nutmeg, cinnamon, and subtle herbal or liquorice touches from French oak aging.

Palate: Fresh acidity, smooth and juicy tannins, rich fruit flavours and earthy notes, balanced structure, and an elegant finish.

Pairings: Ideal with grilled lamb, beef stew, or rich red-meat dishes.

6. Clos Saint Michel Chateauneuf-du-Pape, France 2022

Waitrose

£27.00 (£22.00 on offer)

14.5%

Clos Saint-Michel is a charming and rich red wine that showcases the best of the Rhone Valley. Made with a combination of Grenache Noir/Garnacha (40%), Syrah (30%) and Mourvedre (30%) grapes from the Rhone region.

Olivier and Franck Mousset, fourth generation winemakers, have been making wines to represent the true character of the Rhone Valley in France. With the sea close by and an abundant presence of pebbles in the soil this wine reflects the fertile nature of the terroir. They produce some of the most consistent and best-value wines in this appellation. This wine can be laid down.

Aromas: Notes of liquorice, smoke, black raspberries, sweet kirsch, forest floor, and subtle spice and a touch of oak

Palate: Soft, polished, and fruity with lush black cherries, pepper, garrigue herbs (herbs refer to the wild, low-lying aromatic plants that grow naturally in the sun-scorched, limestone scrublands of the Mediterranean basin, particularly in Southern France) and fine-grained, smooth tannins.

Pairings: Hearty dishes, roast lamb or game and cheese

7. The Federalist Pinot Noir, 2023 USA

Waitrose

£21.25 (15% off 6 bottles or more)

14.8%

Warm days and cool and breezy afternoons and nights lead to ideal conditions to grow Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir has the well deserved reputation of being a finicky and difficult grape to cultivate. It thrives in cooler climates like Burgundy and the Willamette Valley in Oregon, but is also widely planted throughout sun-drenched California. Pinot Noir from warmer regions such as this are fuller wines with higher alcohol content.

A small batch boutique production process brings bold and bright flavours to the wine. Named after the influential American group, the Federalists, who fought for the adoption of the US Constitution in the late 18th century, the company combines a taste for history with the art of viniculture. The grapes are sourced from a single vineyard in the Central Coast region of California and are a limited production wine. They employ sustainable farming

practices. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks for approximately twelve days then spends eight months in oak barrels.

Aroma: Cranberry, pomegranate, hibiscus, white pepper, graphite and a hint of blood orange

Palate: Dark fruit flavours and rich cherries with floral and oak notes

Pairings: Red meats and vegetarian dishes

8. Domaine Begude Esprit Organic Pinot Noir 2023/24, Limoux France

Majestic

£20 (£18 for a box of 6)

13%

Domaine Begude is an award-winning organic vineyard of 25 hectares in the foothills of the Pyrenees at 300m altitude. The area benefits from the region's long cool growing season. Even though it's located in the warm Languedoc, the cooler, high-altitude Limoux appellation can grow thin-skinned grapes that you'd normally find in Burgundy.

The wine is matured in the barrel with demi-muid ageing adding structure and soft tannins. It has been praised by Jancis Robinson as an "interesting and refined" Pinot Noir reminiscent of red Burgundy at a fraction of the cost.

Aroma: Bright red fruits like fresh raspberries and cherries, dried herbs and savoury notes from barrel ageing

Palate:

Pairings: Roasted or pan fried duck breast. Great as an aperitif or with lighter dishes

Wines of the night:

White Wine: Wine 2 - Domaine Louis Moreau 2025 Chablis, France

Red Wine: Wine 5 - Montes Outer Limits 2022 Apalta Vineyard, Chile (This was the overall winner of the night)