

others, so no definitive conclusions about actual age can be reached. If it is a white wine, is it lemon (yellow with a hint of green) or gold (yellow with a hint of orange)? (Green indicates youth; orange and brown indicate age.) For rosé wines, a bright purple-pink indicates youth; orange and brown hints indicate age.

The colour of a wine from any particular region or grape variety depends greatly on the age of the wine, and the winemaking techniques used. As it is impossible to generalise about the appearance of these wines, the descriptions throughout the book limit themselves to describing wines as red, rosé or white, with very few exceptions. The following are examples of more precise descriptions of appearance:

- clear, intense ruby
- clear, medium-intensity, garnet
- clear, pale gold
- dull and cloudy, dark brown

(The last wine would almost certainly be faulty.)

### Nose

The next step is to smell the wine. Swirl it in the glass to release as many aroma molecules as possible, then take a sniff. Make a note of the condition of the nose. Are there any off-notes? The most common fault that can be discovered on the nose is **cork taint**. At low levels, this can strip the wine of its fresh, fruity aromas. At its worst, it can add a pungent, unpleasant damp cardboard or musty smell to the wine. **Out-of-condition** wines will smell dull and stale, and may have excessive oxidative aromas (toffee, caramel or sherry). However, the presence of oxidative aromas does not always indicate a fault: some wines, such as Oloroso Sherry (see Chapter 24), are deliberately oxidised during production.

Assuming the wine is healthy, how intense are the aromas? Are they particularly pronounced, or are they light and hard to detect? (Describing the smell is a more subjective aspect.) It will depend greatly on your previous experiences. Some of the descriptions may sound fanciful at first. However, there are well-understood reasons why aromas such as butter, vanilla, rose or raspberry appear in some wines. Other aromas are less well understood, but wine tasters can be quite consistent in their use. What are the alternatives? Some writers avoid using aroma descriptors, but in order to evoke the wine their tasting notes often use words such as 'feminine', 'elegant', 'clumsy'. These words can be very appropriate, but difficult to define. (A more scientifically

objective approach would involve naming the (particular chemical compounds) which are present, which is almost impossible to do accurately and would be useless to most wine drinkers!

On page 4 we have included a table of suggested aroma/flavour words, and how they might be grouped together. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a very thorough starting point. We recommend that you taste the fruits, vegetables and spices, and smell the flowers, the leather, the bread and so on. Make your aroma-description vocabulary as wide and precise as possible. Always be aware, however, that one purpose of a tasting note is to help describe a wine to someone who has not tasted it. Terms such as 'the back of my garage' or 'the glue we used to use at school', while useful for a private tasting notebook, are unlikely to help describe the wine to many other people.

### Palate

It is often said that tasting is an entirely subjective matter. It is true that our sensitivities to sweetness, acidity, tannins and certain aroma compounds differ. Our private experience of tasting the wines may be entirely different (how could we ever know?). However, even if we have different sensitivities to the components in a wine, we can usually agree which of any pair of wines is sweeter, more acidic, or more tannic. From this, it is a short step (though it requires a lot of tasting experience), before we can say whether a wine has medium, or particularly high or low levels of these components.

Different parts of the mouth have different

