



PURE CHABLIS

One grape

One region

One of a kind

Press release

Only from France

Minerality: The Enigmatic Symbol of Chablis

The word “Chablis” has become inexorably linked the idea of “minerality,” a concept that evokes images of the chalky, mineral-rich clays that lay underfoot the region’s most coveted vineyards. Purity, expressiveness and transparency embody a glass of Chablis.

This is a wine that reflects its environment like nowhere else on earth. Chardonnay does not merely tell the story of its origins, Chardonnay becomes Chablis. Yet when we refer to “minerality” in wine, its origins are mysterious. We know that minerality is not a simple transference from place to taste, a much more complex and holistic transformation takes place. There is no direct correlation from rock to glass, yet soils are the foundation of all great wine regions. Flavours such as granite, slate, limestone or flint in wine are not a product of the uptake by vines of their weathered, elemental selves. Instead, we must look at these soils as the birthplace of the process that transforms fruit into an image of its substratum.

Terroir and Winemaking

Even though Chardonnay is made all over the world, when it is grown in Chablis, that spark of minerality is uniquely potent. If you have had the opportunity to visit Chablis, the remarkably chalky soils and the scent of wet organic matter seem very much in line with what can be sensed in the glass. Soils are distinctive in their varying abilities to retain humidity, in allowing roots to penetrate in their depths and in their propensity for nutrient extraction. The nutrient poor soils of Chablis are one of many properties that play an indirect role in creating the characteristic impression of minerality.

In Chablis, two distinctive soil types influence the wine’s foundational elements: those of Kimmeridgian and Portlandian origin. The older soils are Kimmeridgian and they contain the highest degree of mineral-rich clay along with marine fossils resulting in high chalky content. The “minerality” of Chablis, Chablis Premier Cru and Chablis Grand Cru has traditionally been linked to Kimmeridgian soils. Most of Chablis’ growers would agree that the “mineral” component of their resulting wine is related to the Kimmeridgian soils and its interaction with the Chardonnay grown. The imprint of this terroir is notably apparent in their Chardonnay of distinctive purity. It is commonly understood in Chablis that the type of minerality apparent is as variegated as the multitude of nuanced “Climats”.

It is Chablis' naturally cool climate that allows the expression of minerality. The purity of the resulting wine is uncompromised by overly mature grape flavours. In order to show this particularity of terroir, new wood is sparingly used. Winemakers in Chablis have long expressed that this "minerality" begins to show itself during vinification and subsequent maturity dependent on the methods of elaboration used. Research has shown that malolactic fermentation plays an important role in that expression of minerality. In particular, fine lees during maturation, regardless of in barrel or vat, are responsible for the progressive "mineralization" of the wine. There is thus an important focus on following that genesis of minerality through the élevage.

Understanding this enigma has researchers fascinated and although mapping the full picture of minerality has yet to be accomplished and may never be, studies continue to give us new leads. Research on many aromatic compounds such as benzenemethanethiol, contributing an expression of flint and gunsmoke when present in white wines, may be yet another piece of the puzzle. Glutamic acid present in Chardonnay may also play a role in our sensory perception of minerality in Chablis. Successive studies have shown that this perception of "minerality" is more dominant in wines with high levels of acidity such as those that come from this northern Burgundian climate. Due to this cooler climate foundation, a lack both ripe fruity components and terpenes tends to enhance an impression of minerality. Reductive winemaking is also likely to play a role in mineral flavours due to the formation of volatile sulphur compounds. Regardless of how that minerality takes hold or what mysteries we have yet to solve, there is no doubt that the wine of Chablis provokes a range of mineral taste sensations.

Semantic Origins

What then is this mysterious "mineral" taste that only recently appeared in the context of wine? Wine critics didn't use the term "minerality" much before the 2000s but now tend to use the term with regularity when describing high acid, unoaked whites and most notably with the wines of Chablis. Go back a few decades, and the term does not appear in the significant canons of wine tasting such as Emile Peynaud's "The Taste of Wine" (1983), or the Oxford Companion to Wine (until 2015), or even in Ann Noble's Aroma Wheel of 1984. André Jullien's 1836 guide "Manuel du Sommelier" makes mention of "flint" in the wines of Chablis, something we would now think of as a mineral descriptor, but that might well be a reflection of the 19th century predilection for hitting silica-based stones together to light the spark of can non powder.

Describing "Minerality" in Chablis Wines

Minerality can be described in many ways using culturally-derived terms from around the globe. As varied as they may be, people tend to use both textural and aromatic descriptors when explaining "minerality". Personal perceptions also play a key role. Thresholds for individual detection of minerality vary and so do the adjectives used. In terms of Chablis, we can identify three categories of sensations, those derived from the earth, the sea and those that are smoky:

Marine	Terrene	Smoky
Iodine Brine Oyster shell Sea breeze Sea salt	Chalk Flint Gunpowder Wet Stone Damp soil/organic	Sulfur (matchstick) Smoky (smoked black tea)

Intriguingly, the mouth-watering aspect of acidity seems to be at odds with descriptors of minerality that are mouth-drying sensations such as "salty" or "chalky". Yet acidity seems to be the constant descriptor present when wines are described as "mineral". From a textural perspective, acidity trills while salinity tickles and teases the tongue, resulting in a frenzy of nervy tension. In this sense, acidity and minerality intensify each other's influence. This notable textural sensation dominates the wines of Chablis.

Classification Tiers

Four classification levels exist among the vineyards of Chablis, starting at the highest end: **Chablis Grand Cru, Chablis Premier Cru, Chablis** and **Petit Chablis**.

Petit Chablis: On the more eroded sites at the top of the plateau above Chablis, inexorably stressed vines make up the appellation of Petit Chablis on 1030 hectares. The wines are fresh and friendly with a delicate fruity character.

Chablis: The most vast and productive is the appellation of Chablis, with 3564 hectares, created in 1938 whose Kimmeridgian soils give Chablis its telltale minerality.

Chablis Premier Cru: A subdivision of Chablis into 40 Climats who are historically significant in their ability to generate wines of superior quality. 783 hectares are planted.

Chablis Grand Cru: Only 102 hectares of vines are planted in Grand Cru designated territories all on the south-western facing slopes in the eastern extremity of the town of Chablis. Many of these wines are aged in oak barrels, primarily older wood, to contribute to complexity while still leaving room for the gleaming minerality.

The Inexorable Connection

Minerality in Chablis is a complex enigma involving diverse Climats, two distinctive soil types and a wealth of cultural and chemical interactions. We may not have a complete explanation at present but in the meantime, who doesn't love a good mystery? Regardless of its surreptitious connection to place, minerality is iconically represented in Chablis. It may be that our visceral perceptions of minerality in Chablis are tethered to our romantic notions but there is certainly more. This resulting minerality is thus due to a delicate balance of elements from environment to winemaking that are unique to Chablis.

###

About Chablis Wines

The Chablis Commission, part of the Bourgogne Wine Board, manages the worldwide promotion of the wines of Chablis. Located only 2 hours from Paris, Chablis is the most northern of the 5 wine-producing regions in Bourgogne, Chardonnay's birthplace. Chablis' vineyards are composed of 5479 hectares spread-out in 384 enterprises (négoce, co-op, estates). Elegantly simple, Chablis wines can only come from France. Divided into four different appellations (Petit Chablis, Chablis, Chablis Premier Cru, Chablis Grand Cru), these 100% Chardonnay based wines call for an invite to purity and minerality. With around 32 million bottles produced each year, Chablis wines represent 16% of Bourgogne wines offerings and export annually over 66%.

www.chablis-wines.com | Follow Chablis Wines @ [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Youtube](#) | #purechablis

For media queries, please contact:

Mai NGUYEN

Sopexa Canada

mai.nguyen@sopexa.com

+1 514-288-5802