GLOSSARY OF TASTING TERMS

Aftertaste
The flavor that lingers in your mouth after you swallow the wine. The length of the aftertaste is perhaps the single most reliable indicator of wine quality.

Aroma
The primary smell of a young, unevolved wine, consisting of the odors of the grape juice itself, of the fermentation process, and, if relevant, of the oak barrels in which the wine was made or aged.

Astringent
Having mouthpuckering tannins; such a wine may merely need time to soften.

Austere
Tough, dry and unforthcoming, often due to a severe tannic structure or simply to the extreme youth of a wine.

Balance
The ratio of a wine's key components, including fruitiness, sweetness, acidity, tannin and alcoholic strength. A balanced wine shows a harmony of components, with no single element dominating.

Body
The weight of a wine on the palate, determined by its alcoholic strength and level of extract (see Extract). Wines are typically described as ranging from light-bodied to full-bodied.

Bouquet
The richer, more complex fragrances that develop as a wine ages.

Closed
Not especially aromatic, most likely due to recent bottling or to the particular stage of the wine's development.

Corked, Corky
Contaminated by a tainted cork (affected by a mold known as 2,4,6-trichloroanisole), which gives the wine a musty, wet cardboard smell.

Crisp
Refreshing, thanks to sound acidity.

Earthy
Can be a component of complexity deriving from the wine's distinctive soil character or a pejorative description for a rustic wine.
Extract
Essentially the minerals and other trace elements in a wine; sugar-free dry extract is everything in a wine except water, sugar, acids and alcohol. High extract often gives wine a dusty, tactile impression of density. It frequently serves to buffer, or mitigate, high alcohol or strong acidity.

Fat
Rich to the point of being unctuous, with modest balancing acidity.

Finish
The final taste left by a sip of wine after you swallow. Wines can be said to have long or short finishes (see Aftertaste).

Firm
Perceptibly tannic and/or acidic, in a positive way.

Flabby
Lacking acidity and therefore lacking shape.

Fruity
Aromas and flavors that derive from the grape, as opposed to the winemaking process or the barrels in which the wine was aged.

Green
Too acid, raw or herbal; this may be due to underripe grapes or stems but may simply mean the wine needs time to develop.

Grip
An emphatically firm, tactile finish.

Hard
Too tannic or acidic; often a characteristic of a wine that needs more time in bottle.

Jammy
Slightly cooked flavors of jam rather than fresh fruit, often a characteristic of red wines from hot climates.

Lean
Lacking flesh and body. Not necessarily pejorative, as some types of wines are lean by nature.

Middle Palate
The part of the tasting experience between the nose of the wine and its finish. The impact of a wine in the mouth.

Mouth Feel
The physical impression of a wine in the mouth; its texture.
Nose
The aroma or bouquet of a wine.

Oaky
Smell or taste of the oak cask in which the wine was vinified and/or aged; oak notes can include such elements as vanilla, clove, cinnamon, cedar, smoke, toast, bourbon and coffee.

Oxidized
Possessing a tired or stale taste due to excessive exposure to air. An oxidized white wine may have a darker than normal or even brown color.

Powerful
Generally high in alcohol and/or extract.

Sharp
Unpleasantly bitter or hard-edged.

Soft
Low in tannin and/or acidity.

Spritz
The faint prickle on the tongue of carbon dioxide generally found in young, light white wines.

Steely
An almost metallic taste often noted in wines high in acidity and/or made from mineral-rich soil.

Supple
Round and smooth, as opposed to noticeably tannic or acidic.

Sweet
A term applied not just to wines with significant residual sugar but also to those that show outstanding richness or ripeness.

Tart
Noticeably acidic.

Tough
Generally, a red wine that shows excessive tannin.
**Vinous**
Literally wine-like, in terms of liveliness and acidity; but often used to describe the overall impression conveyed by a wine beyond simple fruitiness. This can include subtle flavors that come from the soil that produced the grapes, as well as from the winemaking and aging process.

**Volatile**
Slightly vinegary due to a high level of acetic acid, referred to as volatile acidity (VA).