

There is no one definition of natural wine, which is confusing and great all at the same time. There is no “natural wine certification” label out there either, although producers can become certified organic or biodynamic.

Let's start with the obvious - what does Natural Wine mean? this question is hotly debated...

The most broad definition of natural wine is wine that is made using less chemical inputs than conventional or “grocery-store” wine. Less chemical inputs means:

1. less chemicals sprayed in the vineyard
2. less chemical/non-wine additives in the wine.
 - a. If you want to see the full list of additives, [click here](#) - crazy stuff. Legally, wineries are not required to list on the label that their wine has any of these additives in it.

Generally, the idea is that since natural wine doesn't have chemicals messing with the plants or chemicals altering the wine to fit the winemaker's taste, it should reflect more of the **terroir** than conventional wine does. Terroir is a french word for “the complete natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including factors such as the soil, topography, humans, and climate”

Natural wine, as I see it, is a little more focused than the broad definition from above. Natural wine should be farming focused - the farming is more important than any technique employed in the cellar, since without awesome grapes, awesome wine doesn't exist. The farming should seek to integrate the vineyard into its surrounding ecosystem, and facilitate the natural processes of life, encouraging biodiversity and balance. The farming should be based on data - data collected with human senses, and applicable technology for recording weather and climate.

In the cellar, natural wine should have the freedom to express itself without imposing too much of our ideas about what we think it should taste like. A tricky thing, to be sure... what Deirdre teaches is that the grapes want to be wine, and it is up to the wine maker to taste them and use specific techniques to allow the grapes to become the wine they want to be.

conventional wine can be compared to baking: technical, recipe-oriented. natural wine can be compared to be cooking: technique-driven, intuitive. both conventional and natural winemakers make wine that tastes good AND shitty, so there isn't really a 'right way' to make wine - what matters is that the winemaker's values and the drinker's values are aligned; another way of saying this is ensuring the wine is getting to the right consumer who will appreciate it for what it is.

Let's explore wine making techniques! It's important to note that these techniques can be employed by either conventional or natural producers - just because the wine is a pet-nat or was made with carbonic maceration, doesn't make it a natural wine per se - you can do both with conventional fruit. There are some techniques that natural producers favor and vice versa, and you will see them noted below.

Technique	How does it work?	What is the outcome?	Who uses it?
wild/native/ spontaneous fermentation	no lab/industrial yeasts added to freshly crushed grapes	naturally occurring yeasts on grapes/in winery/on winemakers ferment wine, resulting in more complex wines	required for natural wine, some conventional experiment with it
maceration	after destemming/crushing, leaving the skins and seeds (and sometimes stems) in contact with the juice	juice picks up phenols, aroma, color, and tannin from skins/seeds/stems, resulting in increased complexity and depth.	both natural and conventional producers. Red wine: always macerated Rose: red grapes macerated for a short period of time, or red grapes directly pressed without maceration White wine: rarely macerated, when maceration does occur, white wine comes out amber colored or “orange”
carbonic maceration	a tank is filled with whole grape clusters. The weight of the grapes crushes 1/3 of grapes at bottom, starting alcoholic fermentation, which produces CO2. CO2 rises through middle 1/3 of grapes and creates an anerobic environment, can't escape because trapped by top 1/3 grapes.	fermentation begins in each individual berry within the anerobic middle 1/3 of the tank, fermenting up to 3% alcohol before bursting. this method highlights fruitiness in wine	originated in the French wine region of Beaujolais, now practiced around the world. Both natural and conventional producers use this technique, typically used to make light, fruity red wines but can also be used with whites
pressing	grapes are pressed through a screen to produce juice. depending on how forcefully the grapes are pressed, the resulting juice can be barely pressed to highly extracted.	juice, no more skins, seeds, or stems. there a few ways to press: free run: the juice that flows from the press while it is being loaded & not yet started to press. free run is considered the best quality juice for wine by some producers slow press: slowly increasing pressure in press to more gently extract juice and phenols from skins hard/extractive press: fast, high-pressure press for maximum juice yield and max extraction of flavor	most winemakers press their grapes, whether they are natural or conventional. Some producers only use free run juice (!) to produce wine, others bottle free run as a separate cuvee from pressed juice.

Technique	How does it work?	What is the outcome?	Who uses it?
Petillant Naturel aka: Pet Nat Ancestral method	wine and/or cider from current vintage is bottled while fermentation is still in progress. the bottle is capped and fermentation finishes in the bottle, where the conversion of sugar to alcohol produces CO ₂ . the CO ₂ can't escape the bottle, and so naturally sparkles the wine	lightly sparkling, easy-to-make wine that is fast to market, as it takes generally 2-3 months for the wine to be sparkling	both natural and conventional producers, although mostly used by natural producers. some pet nats are riddled, a process that concentrates dead yeast cells in the neck of the bottle. these riddled bottles are then disgorged, a process that expels the dead yeast cells from the bottle and leaves the wine clear
Champagne method aka: traditional method	wine from current vintage is fermented dry, often blended with other wines from different vintages. a small amount of sugar and yeast is added to the blend to restart fermentation, called tirage, and the bottle is capped. then, the bottle is riddled and disgorged (see above), more yeast and sugar are added, called dosage, and the bottle is corked and ready for sale	more strong sparkling character than pet nat, a wine that can take longer and be more expensive to create. generally, champagne method wines are able to be aged longer than pet nats, because they have added sugar to produce more bubbles	mostly conventional producers, although there are some natural wine producers who make champagne method without adding sugar or yeast - this is done by slightly modifying the process.
Charmat Method	wine is fermented dry, then moved to a large tank where is force-carbonated by injecting CO ₂ into the wine. the wine is then bottled with airtight seal to keep CO ₂ in the wine	a very sparkling wine, almost soda pop like, very easy to make but often lacking complexity	both natural and conventional producers, although mostly conventional producers.