

Dutch Wines – The Road To Quality And How To Achieve This

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Abstract

The Dutch are producing wines, and the production is growing. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is not on its full potential yet. It is possible to produce good quality wine in a cold climate like the Netherlands, a region like West Sussex is showing this. But only if vineyards will be planted smart at protected and warmer micro-climates where the vines can catch enough sun to ripen the grapes.

This research is necessary for two reasons. First, the Dutch production is still in the experimental phase and there is a knowledge gap with other countries. This research will go in depth with the characteristics of the Dutch wine production and help the producers. Second, the wines of the Netherlands can become of very high quality, and for this the Dutch producers need help from other countries. For this, Dutch wines need to become more known, this research will help with that. Plus, it is one of the first written in English.

The Dutch wine production characteristics are discussed. Researched are the Dutch geography, climate, viticulture, vinification and the people. These characteristics are compared with other (successful) wine regions.

Official numbers say that the Netherlands has 157 hectares of vines planted and in the future this will probably grow. There is a three-tier classification system. The future for the Dutch wines seems positive due to the popularity of Dutch wines.

The soils in the Netherlands are varied, but most importantly is clay and sand where sand is more water retaining and therefore warmer than clay. In the South there are some small hills.

The Dutch have a cold climate which is tempered by the sea, the sea also brings in depressions. Average temperature is under 10 degrees Celsius. Some regions have a warmer micro-climate and are more suitable for ripening grapes. Frost and unpredictable rainfall are the biggest hazards in the vineyards. There is a lot vintage differentiation due to the depressions and this will only become worse because of climate change. Nevertheless, other regions like West-Sussex, Champagne and Niagara Peninsula proves that you can make good quality wines in these circumstances.

The most popular varieties planted in the Netherlands are disease resistant grapes. This is mainly due the fact that these grapes can withstand the unpredictable rain better, ripen earlier and give good yields. There is an ongoing discussion in the Netherlands if it is possible to make good quality wines from these 'new' varieties. Regions like West Sussex and Niagara Peninsula are showing that it is possible. Most of the production is white wines, yields are maximum 100hl/ha for whites and 85hl/ha for reds. Sustainable winegrowing is popular which also supports the use of PIWI's.

Production costs of Dutch wines are high, especially in comparison with other countries. In knowledge the Netherlands is far behind with other more established countries. Also, there is not a strong association helping the Dutch wines to the next level.

Following from the research section there are 4 recommendations for making the best quality wine possible in the Netherlands:

1. Use disease resistant varieties (PIWI's)
2. Production of traditional and Charmat method sparkling wines
3. Look at other cold climate how to arrange new vineyards
4. Creation of a strong umbrella organization