

# The Compleat History of Wine Retailing, In 644 Words or Less

Some day not too long ago, this dude walks into one of our stores and says that the way that we organize our wines is "stupid". This gentleman, who we're certain probably walked four miles through snow to go to school every day, is one of those "how we did it in my day was far superior to anything since" types. It is to honor his Luddism that we now reveal *The Compleat History of Wine Retailing, in 644 Words or Less*.

Eons ago, a young upstart wine clerk named Jack Neanderthal was working in a primeval liquor store called UG ugg UGGGG. While doing some light dusting, Jack had an epiphany. Jack, who like most of his kind had difficulty enunciating speech and fashioning useful tools, was a freakin' savant when it came to wine retailing.



Jack concluded that shopping would be easier for customers if he organized the crude clay bowls of wine into white wines (which were best with birds he killed with rocks), and red wines (which excelled with small mammals he killed with rocks). Customers appreciated this enhancement, and UG ugg UGGG went on to become the preeminent wine shop in all of Neanderthaldom.

Unfortunately, just over the hill was a burgeoning suburb of Fox Run Cro-Magnon Estates, where lived people with larger cranial cavities and fancy linguistic skills. From this society sprung forth one Steve Cro-Magnon, a somewhat dim wine clerk being whose existence proved that evolution is not a smooth process, but one of fits and starts.

Steve, feeling the pressure of being the advanced species, felt that he had to do something to top Jack Neanderthal's damnably successful wine system. Lacking Jack's marketing sensitivity, Steve decided that his wine would be organized by its place of origin, which resulted in a larger number of groupings than Jack's, proving (in his mind) organizational superiority.

Steve then utilized a deftly-crafted bone stylus to draw pictographs on cave walls to inform his customers where his wines were grown. There was a squiggly line for "down by the river", a couple of isosceles for "mountains", and a comically ill-conceived, short-lived symbol for "place where the Woolly Mammoths go to die".

The Neanderthals mysteriously died out, and with them went Jack's simple, yet effective system of wine organization. Steve's system survived and later evolved into the system of organizing wines by country of origin, which prevailed from pre-history until August 23, 2004, when Hair O' The Dog opened on Elliott Road.

We organize our wines into flavor families. The idea is that it makes sense to organize wines with similar taste characteristics, regardless of where they were produced. Our flavor family system is based upon the fact that when most people buy wine, they are looking to pair that wine with food. We group together wines that are best when consumed with lighter foods, as well as wines that are at their best served with hearty foods. In all, we have [eight flavor groupings](#), which are lovingly described both in the artful signs that hang in our stores and on our web site.

Grouping wines by their country of origin is a simplistic system whose chief benefit is that it's easy for stock clerks to figure out where to put the wine.

Some might argue that "terroir" (the soils, topography and weather where the grapes are grown) is the critical factor in defining wines. Poppycock, we say. We are indisputably hip to the impact of terroir on wine, but we're certain that the selected grapes for the wine are more important to how you're going to enjoy wine.

We would ask doubters to consider the following: Is a California Chardonnay more similar to a California Cabernet Sauvignon, or to an Australian Chardonnay?

So it seems as if the dude who said that our system was stupid didn't know Jack. We hope that the next time that you hoist a glass of a well-chosen, perfectly-matched wine from Hair O' The Dog with your meal, you will cast your eyes toward the heavens, think of Jack Neanderthal, and quietly honor him with a softly-spoken UG ugg UGGG.