

Why Most Wines Aren't Vegan

And How to Choose the Right Ones

A free guide by Frances Gonzalez

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A NOTE FROM FRANCES

Before You Open Your Next Bottle

I've been vegan for over 30 years. I've spent nearly a decade studying wine. For most of that time, I assumed that wine — made from grapes — was naturally plant-based.

I was wrong.

The truth is that most wine, including wines labeled organic and natural, involves animal products at some stage of production. Not on the label. Not advertised. Just quietly part of the process.

This guide is what I wish someone had handed me a decade ago — plain English, no technical jargon, just everything you need to choose wine that genuinely matches your values.

"Wine and ethics don't have to be opposites. I built Vegan Wines to prove that."

— Frances Gonzalez, Founder of Vegan Wines

THE TRUTH ABOUT WINE

Why Most Wine Isn't Vegan

Wine is made from grapes. Grapes are plants. So wine should be vegan — right?

The problem is that wine-making involves two distinct phases where animal products typically enter: **in the vineyard** (what goes into the soil) and **in the cellar** (what's used to clarify the finished wine).

IN THE VINEYARD

What Goes Into the Soil

Even certified organic vineyards routinely use fertilizers derived from animal slaughter:

- **Bone Meal**

Ground animal bones, used to add calcium and phosphorus to soil.

- **Blood Meal**

Dried blood from slaughterhouses, used as a nitrogen fertilizer.

- **Fish Emulsion**

Liquefied fish byproducts, used for rapid nitrogen release.

- **Feather Meal**

Ground poultry feathers, used as a slow-release nitrogen source.

These inputs are applied directly to the soil your wine grapes grow in. They are rarely disclosed on wine labels, and are permitted under most organic certification schemes.

IN THE CELLAR

The Fining Process — Explained

After fermentation, wine is naturally cloudy — full of yeast cells, protein particles, and tiny grape fragments. To create a clear, bright bottle, most wineries use a process called **fining**.

Fining agents bind to these particles and pull them out. The most common ones are animal-derived:

- **Egg Whites (Albumin)**

Widely used in red wines. Binds to tannins and softens the texture.

- **Casein (Milk Protein)**

Used for white wines to remove browning. A dairy derivative.

- **Isinglass**

Made from dried fish bladder. Common in white wine and beer.

- **Gelatin**

Derived from boiled animal bones and skin. Used for both reds and whites.

- **Chitin**

Made from crustacean shells. Used as a fining and filtering agent.

Key fact: Fining agents are not required to appear on wine labels in the United States. A wine can say "contains egg" — or list nothing at all.

"Organic" on a label tells you about farming practices. It says nothing about what happens in the cellar.

HOW TO SHOP SMARTER

What to Look For on a Label

Wine labels won't tell you everything. Here's what actually helps:

◆ **Barnivore.com**

A crowdsourced database of vegan wine, beer, and liquor. Search any wine before you buy.

◆ **"Unfined" or "Unfiltered"**

Wines labeled unfined were not put through animal-based fining — though vineyard inputs still matter.

◆ **"Vegan Certified"**

Look for certification logos (Vegan Society, BeVeg). These require full supply chain verification.

◆ **Ask the Winery Directly**

Many small producers will tell you exactly what they use. A quick email usually works.

◆ **Biocyclic Vegan Certification**

The gold standard. Covers vineyard practices and cellar processes. No animal inputs at any stage.

◆ **Curated Lists Like Ours**

Frances personally verifies every winery on VeganWines.com — soil, cellar, and everything between.

BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Varietals Worth Starting With

These wine styles are easiest to find in genuinely vegan form — and they're beautiful to drink:

Albariño (White)

Crisp, aromatic, naturally low-tannin. Easy to fine with bentonite clay — fully vegan. Great as an aperitif.

Garnacha / Grenache (Red)

Medium-bodied, bright red fruit. Biodynamically or biocyclically grown versions are often unfinned by default.

Tempranillo (Red)

Spain's signature grape. Earthy, cherry-forward, age-worthy. Many Spanish producers now use vegan practices.

Pét-Nat (Pétillant Naturel) (Sparkling)

Naturally gently sparkling — typically unfinned and unfiltered by definition. A great starting point.

Orange Wine (Skin-Contact) (White)

Extended skin contact naturally clarifies white wines — no animal fining needed. Earthy, complex, and typically vegan.

Frances's current pick — Bokisch Vineyards, Lodi CA — features Albariño, Garnacha, and Tempranillo, all organically grown and personally verified. Visit veganwines.com for exclusive bundle pricing.

FREQUENTLY ASKED

Quick Answers

Q: If fining agents are filtered out, does it matter?

It matters for ethical reasons — supporting the practice contributes to demand for animal byproducts. Some people are also sensitive to trace residues.

Q: Is 'natural wine' automatically vegan?

Not necessarily. 'Natural wine' is a loosely defined term. Many natural winemakers are vegan-friendly, but not all. Always verify with the producer.

Q: Is wine labeled 'suitable for vegans' reliable?

In most cases, yes — especially UK and EU wines, where this carries more legal weight. In the US it's voluntary and unregulated, so verify when possible.

Q: Can wine be biodynamic and vegan?

Yes — but biodynamic doesn't automatically mean vegan. Some biodynamic preparations use cow horns. Biocyclic Vegan certification is the strongest guarantee for both.

Q: Where can I find Frances's current verified winery pick?

Visit veganwines.com — Frances features one winery per month with exclusive negotiated bundle pricing, always personally verified.

READY TO DRINK CONSCIOUSLY?

This Month's Winery Is Live Now.

Frances has personally visited Bokisch Vineyards in Lodi, California. Two exclusive bundles — Spanish varietals, organic estate, on sale now. These are the wines she drinks.

veganwines.com

No membership. No sign-up. Just click and buy.