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Institute of Masters of Wine reveals 2025 exam details highlighting rigorous testing and global wine industry challenges

Candidates face demanding theory and tasting assessments as the prestigious qualification maintains its reputation for difficulty and exclusivity

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The Institute of Masters of Wine has released the full list of wines and theory questions used in the 2025 MW examinations, providing insight into the demanding process faced by candidates seeking one of the wine industry’s most respected titles. The exams took place in London earlier this month, with the Stage One Assessment held on June 2 and the more advanced Stage Two exam running from June 3 to June 6. The results are expected to be announced in September.

This year’s exams tested candidates on a wide range of topics, reflecting both traditional wine knowledge and current issues facing the industry. The practical tasting papers included wines from classic regions such as Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Rioja, as well as examples from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Greece, and Hungary. Candidates were required to identify wines blind and answer questions about their origin, grape variety, winemaking techniques, and quality.

For the Stage One Assessment, candidates tasted twelve wines including Domaine de Chevalière Blanc from Bordeaux, Barefoot Buttery Chardonnay from the USA, Felton Road Bannockburn Pinot Noir from New Zealand, and Disznókő Tokaji 5 Puttonyos from Hungary. The selection also featured fortified wines like Henriques & Henriques Malvasia Madeira and Gonzalez Byass Leonor Palo Cortado Sherry. Theory questions for this stage focused on vineyard pests and their impact on grape quality, quality control during bottling, and the pros and cons of private-label wines for different sectors of the trade.

The Stage Two exam was even more comprehensive. Paper 1's tasting lineup included Château de Fieuzal Blanc from Pessac-Léognan, Chablis 1er Cru Côte de Lechet from Burgundy, Chardonnay from California and South Africa, Rieslings from Alsace and Mosel, and Vin Santo del Chianti Rufina from Tuscany. Paper 2 focused on red wines such as Chinon Les Barnabés from France's Loire Valley, Cabernet Franc from Argentina's Mendoza region, Gigondas from the Rhône Valley, Touriga Nacional from Portugal's Douro Valley, Barbera d'Alba from Italy's Piedmont region, and Xinomavro "Hedgehog" from Greece.

Paper 3 challenged candidates with a mix of sparkling, sweet, fortified, and rosé wines. These included Dr. Loosen Riesling Sekt Extra Dry from Germany's Mosel region, Cava Brut Reserva "Essential Púrpura" from Spain's Penedès region, Oloroso VORS 30 Years Sherry from Jerez in Spain, Tokaj I Édes Szamorodni by István Szepsy in Hungary, Sercial Madeira by Henriques & Henriques in Portugal, Fine Ruby Port by Cockburns in Portugal's Douro Valley, and a 40 Year Tawny Port by Kopke.

The theory papers covered five main areas: viticulture; vinification; handling of wine; business of wine; and contemporary issues. Candidates were asked to discuss topics such as controlling vineyard pests without agrochemicals; the use of artificial intelligence in viticulture; how rootstocks can help mitigate climate change; techniques for enhancing complexity in bottle-fermented sparkling wines; management of bacteria during winemaking; blending for consistency; technical considerations when changing wine closures; quality control measures for wine stability; Champagne's global reputation; sustainability versus profitability; overproduction and falling consumption; government wine monopolies; direct-to-consumer sales; evolution of Burgundy

négociants; health warnings about cancer risks on labels; changing attitudes toward alcohol consumption; ethical concerns in wine production; and the relevance of wine's cultural heritage to younger consumers.

The Institute's decision to publish both the list of exam wines and all theory questions offers transparency into what is required to become a Master of Wine. The exams are known for their difficulty and breadth. Candidates must demonstrate not only deep technical knowledge but also an understanding of current trends and challenges facing the global wine industry.

The MW qualification remains one of the most prestigious credentials in wine. Each year only a small number of candidates pass all parts of the exam. The process is rigorous by design: it tests not just tasting ability but also analytical skills and awareness of broader issues affecting producers, marketers, retailers, and consumers worldwide.

As marking continues through the summer months, those who sat this year's exams will wait until September to learn if they have joined the ranks of Masters of Wine—a group that currently numbers just over 400 worldwide.