vinetur

Wines aged under yeast veil reveal global diversity beyond Jura and Andalusia

Unique winemaking traditions shape flavors from France to Spain, Italy, Hungary, and South Africa through biological aging techniques

Monday, July 21, 2025



Wines aged under a veil of yeast, known as “vins de voile,” have long been associated with the Jura region in France and Andalusia in southern Spain. However, this unique winemaking technique is found in several other regions across Europe and beyond. The process involves allowing a thin layer of yeast, called a “voile,” to form on the surface of the wine after fermentation. This veil plays a crucial role in shaping the wine’s texture, aroma, and flavor profile.

The formation of the voile depends on specific conditions. Most yeasts used in fermentation die off once alcohol levels rise and sugar is depleted. However, certain strains of Saccharomyces cerevisiae—such as beticus, cheresiensis, montuliensis, rouxii, and bayanus—can survive in these harsh environments if they have access to oxygen. When these yeasts remain active after fermentation, they create a biofilm on the wine’s surface. This process is known as “biological aging.” The thickness and integrity of the veil determine how much oxygen reaches the wine, which influences its development.

Climate and humidity are key factors in supporting the growth of the voile. In Jerez de la Frontera, Andalusia, cool and humid winds from the Atlantic Ocean help maintain ideal conditions for biological aging. Local wineries often keep their cellars above ground with open windows to benefit from these breezes. In Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where manzanilla sherry is produced, proximity to the ocean ensures even more humidity and cooler temperatures. Wines from this area are known for their pale color, fresh acidity, almond notes, green apple aromas, and pronounced salinity.

The Jura region also benefits from a cool and humid climate that supports veil formation. Here, wines like vin jaune are made from the savagnin grape and aged under voile for over six years. These wines develop complex flavors with hints of curry spice, nuts, and a distinct iodine character.

Other regions have their own traditions with vins de voile. In Gaillac, southwestern France, oceanic influences help create wines with nutty aromas and amber hues. Sometimes the appearance of the veil is accidental, as seen at Roc des Anges in Roussillon or at Gianluigi Bera’s estate in Piedmont, Italy. In these cases, unexpected environmental factors led to the development of unique wines with floral or oxidative

notes.

The presence of the voile has a significant impact on wine composition. The yeasts consume organic acids (especially malic acid), glycerol, residual sugar, and some alcohol. Over time, this results in wines that are drier and lighter in texture but often higher in alcohol due to evaporation during long aging periods. The chemical activity of the yeasts also produces distinctive aromatic compounds: sotolon (responsible for curry or fenugreek notes), acetoin (buttery or almond aromas), 1,1-diethoxyethane (apple notes), and various terpenes that add citrus elements.

Maintaining a healthy veil requires careful management by winemakers. In Jerez, sherry producers use the solera system—a fractional blending method—to refresh older wines with younger ones rich in nutrients needed by the yeast. This helps preserve freshness and ensures a consistent style over time. Fino and manzanilla sherries are protected from oxidation by their thick veils throughout aging; they remain pale and vibrant with saline intensity.

In contrast, Jura’s vin jaune is made from a single vintage without blending younger wines into older barrels. The veil here is less dense than in Andalusia but still imparts characteristic flavors while allowing some oxidative development. These wines are aged for at least six years before bottling.

Some wines experience both biological and oxidative aging phases. For example, amontillado sherry starts life under a veil but later loses it and continues aging exposed to air. This dual process creates complex profiles combining saline freshness with deeper nutty or tobacco notes.

Beyond Jura and Andalusia, other regions continue to produce vins de voile on a smaller scale. Gaillac maintains its tradition with several producers still making these wines from historic vineyards. Roussillon offers dry rancio wines—often more oxidized but sometimes aged under veil as well. In Hungary’s Tokaj region, Samuel Tinon crafts dry szamorodni wines from botrytized grapes aged under voile for years.

Italy has two DOCs—Vernaccia di Oristano and Malvasia di Bosa in Sardinia—that preserve this style despite limited production today. South Africa once produced fortified vins de voile similar to sherry; today Adi Badenhorst’s Funky White keeps this tradition alive without fortification in Swartland.

Other isolated examples can be found in Savoie (France), Valais (Switzerland), Rueda and Bierzo (Spain), Marsala (Italy), and Piedmont (Italy). Each region brings its own grape varieties and geological influences—from limestone soils in Jerez to volcanic rhyolite in Tokaj—resulting in diverse expressions of vins de voile.

Despite their differences in terroir or winemaking approach, these wines share an ability to balance richness with vibrancy thanks to high levels of glycerol and acidity at harvest combined with slow transformation under yeast veils. Not all regions meet every condition thought necessary for veil formation; sometimes chance plays as much a role as tradition or climate.

Vins de voile remain one of wine’s most intriguing mysteries—a testament to both nature’s unpredictability and human ingenuity across centuries of winemaking history.