

# Terroir: Soil Associations!

Words

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Illustration

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Do you believe in terroir?  
Is it something to believe in?  
Or is it as vague and questionable  
as The Great Pumpkin or  
The Loch Ness Monster.

I recall one writer saying scornfully that the term was an invention of the French to invest their wines with some mystical profundity. Would you seek to verify each and every protoplasmic primordial atomic globule of evidence to reach a definitive conclusion about the subject or do you accept that terroir is intuitively part and parcel of wine as we know it?

Wine is viewed by scientists as the product of microbiological determinism. It is an odd decontextualisation of a subject, stripping away the human and indefinable element to create a notion of absolute quantitative-and-qualitative-ness, of good and bad, of truth and falsehood. In his essay *Science and Hypothesis* (1905) Henri Poincaré remarked that science is built up of facts, as a house is built of stones; but an accumulation of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house. Perhaps, when we discuss certain abstract notions regarding human responses to wine we should not seek to nail them like butterflies to a wheel. Facts are not science – as the dictionary is not literature. Scientists are inclined to reduce every abstraction, every intuition and every philosophical uncertainty to a series of soulless chemical equations and formulae.

There are professional naysayers who don the mantle of scepticism as if this entitles them to be automatically ranged with the battalions of truth against the ignorant armies of wine romantics: in the final over-analysis, they do not seek to explain but rather explain away, to sanitise the pleasure of drinking by removing every vestige of magic and mystery. Wine is written and talked about extensively, empirically measured and evaluated, boxed off and treated as a product, something forever to be circumscribed, rather than to be appreciated for its inviolable unknowability, its singular quiddity.