



Country Viniculture in the Heart of the Foothills

Trellis Wire

September 2024

www.SWGGA.org



A Message From The President Ready or Not, Harvest Time is Here!

After traveling for the first three weeks of August, I wasn't expecting to come home to grapes so far ahead of schedule. As in, Sauvignon Blanc grapes at 25 Brix and rain expected tomorrow! I scrambled and picked, foot treaded and pressed 250 lbs. of Sauv Blanc, solo. I did four different yeasts, including wild yeast on the cleanest grapes.

I tried something new this year - a "Pied de Cuvée" - pre-crushed a small amount of grapes a week before, including a few wildflowers thrown in. It took 6-7 days for the native yeast to get going, then that's used to inoculate the native batch. It worked great and eliminates the potential long lag time for wild yeast to get going.

Round Two – Labor Day weekend: Harvested about 500 lbs of Semillon, Zin & a little Cab for Rose'. This year, I've found more challenging grape conditions, with the worst critter damage ever (birds & ground squirrels), so it took much longer to pick/sort. I used the best grapes for native ferments in the Sauv. Blanc & Semillion, and the others I sulfited and inoculated. I had to pick most of my Zin for Rose' since it was getting slammed by birds. In addition, sections suffer with "water berry/sour rot". It's a condition that happens during ripening, has no cure and a bit hard to detect. You can sometimes tell by feel when picking a berry; it's softer, but often you have to taste berries from every cluster to confirm the condition. Do you get a watery sour taste or a tasty, sweet grape? Unfortunately, it was lots of the former and that's a lot of pucker... talk about palate fatigue!

I'm anxious to hear how harvest is going for everyone else and look forward to those conversations at our September 12 field trip to beautiful Frescas Farms Vineyard. Hope to see you all there!

Cheers. Diane

More photos on page 8



2024 Calendar

For The Rest of the Year we change to the Second Thursday of each Month.

Thursday, September 12th

Field Trip

Ray and Geri Frescas' Vineyard in Chicago Park Featuring a Vineyard Tour and grape berry ripeness assessment program.

Details on Page 2, 3 & 4.

Thursday, October 12th is at Ponderosa Hall Featuring a Silent Auction and Syrah Vertical Tasting Details on Page 5

Thursday, November 14th Ponderosa Hall

Thursday, December 12th Holiday Party

Plus Going Native with the Starrs. Details on Page 7

This is the 2nd Thursday of September.

Field Trip

Thursday, September 12th, 6:00 p.m.

Frescas Vineyard

12857 Sierra Vista Dr., Chicago Park

Optional vineyard tour 6:00 p.m.

The vineyard is a bit of a walk from where the meeting will be held. If you are going on the vineyard tour, park at the top of the vineyard and join the tour at 6:00 p.m. For those of you skipping the vineyard tour, continue up the road to the parking spot and join in there.

Once we are all back at the meeting area we have a program focusing on berry ripeness.



You May Be Ripe But Are You Mature?

When is the best time to harvest your grapes?

Of course brix and pH matter. We will test them for that. But what about phenolic ripeness? What about guys like Mark Henry who never takes a refractometer or pH meter into his vineyard? Henry says the grapes will tell him everything he needs to know. So what are the grapes saying?

Dave Elliott will be our guide looking into grape berry and cluster development. Dave is collecting grape samples from various vineyards throughout the area. He will start the program by looking at the brix and pH levels of the various samples. More importantly Dave will guide us through the subtle complexities of phenolic maturity including seed color, pulpiness and much more. See the next page for a list of some of those considerations.

How important is hang time and how does that affect picking decisions? Seeing and tasting grapes in their various levels of development may show a path of where they are heading, if you let them. What if brix says pick while other phenolic signs might say wait. What do you do? The eternal dilemma. Pick when you can? Pick when you have to? Pick when you want to?

Please bring a bottle of wine for the social hour and if you can please bring an appetizer to share.

If you don't like plastic glasses, bring your own wine glass.

Remember To Mark Your Calendars

The September, October, November and December meetings will all occur on the second Thursday of those Months

What is grape berry analysis all about? These folks wrote the book on it.

Winegrape
**BERRY
 SENSORY
 ASSESSMENT**
in Australia

**Erika Winter
 John Whiting**

Department of
 Primary Industries
 Victoria, Australia

Jacques Rousseau

Institut Cooperatif du Vin
 Montpellier, France

The whole idea here is the presentation of different ways to look at grape berries in order to make harvest decisions. They take a lot of factors into consideration, way beyond brix and pH. Here is a list of some of the things they consider.

Softness of the berry. Stalk removal. Color. Detachment of the pulp from the skin. Juiciness. Sweetness. Acidity. Herbaceous aromas. Fruity aromas. Disintegration of the skin. Tannic intensity of the skin. Grain size and astringency of the tannins. Seed color. Seed crush-ability. Seed astringency. Seed tannic intensity.

That's a lot of things to consider. Usually we are just tasting the berries in our vineyards. Here we are bringing together a variety of grapes from different vineyards in order to make comparisons. The first thing is to figure out what we are looking for. Here is their example of how you would consider berry softness.

Examining Softness

The first assessment is to squeeze the berries lightly by exerting the same pressure to each berry. Do not break the berry as juice is needed for subsequent assessments.

	1	2	3	4
SOFTNESS <i>Squeeze the berry between the fingers</i>	> Hard berry > Bursts under strong pressure	> Elastic berry > Changes shape slightly under pressure but goes back to shape quickly	> Plastic berry > Changes shape easily, takes a while to go back to its shape	> Soft berry > Changes shape easily under light pressure, does not readily go back into shape



Examples of differing berry softness as described in the boxes above the photos.

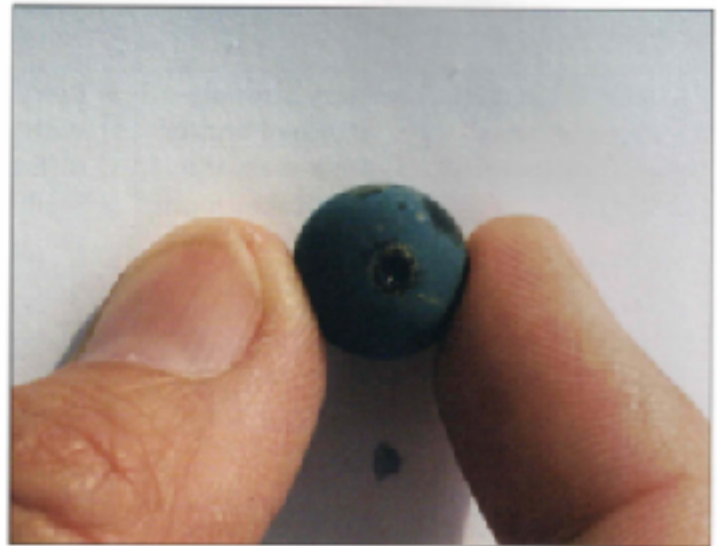
Examining the skin color of red varieties.

For red varieties look at the area of skin around where the stalk was removed. Fully ripe berries do not appear translucent when held up to the light.

	1	2	3	4
COLOUR RED VARIETY <i>Look at the stalk end</i>	> Pink, pale red	> Red, but light penetrates berries	> Dark red, but not evenly coloured around the stalk	> Blackish red, evenly coloured



Pink pale red (score 1) and light red (score 3) berries.



Blackish red, evenly coloured Shiraz berry (score 4)

	1	2	3	4
COLOUR WHITE VARIETY <i>Observe bulk sample</i>	> Green	> Green yellow	> Straw yellow	> Amber yellow



Chardonnay of three degrees of ripeness (least ripe on the left).

Assessing the skin color of white varieties.

In white varieties it may be worthwhile putting surplus berries of each maturity grade into a transparent glass or plastic cup and compare the color of the three bulk samples side by side.

This is the 2nd Thursday of October. Social Hour: 6:30. Meeting: 7:15.

October Meeting Thursday, October 10th, at Ponderosa Hall



**Gold Medal Silent Auction
During The October Meeting**

During the October Meeting at Ponderosa Hall Bernie Zimmerman will preside over a Silent Auction highlighting nine California State Fair Gold Medal winning wines produced by SWGGA Club Members. Peter Willcox, Bill Betts, Dan Carrick, Gary Glaze, Bob Hudelson, and Dave Elliott are all donating their winning wines for a **fund raiser with all proceeds going to the Scholarship Fund.**

Peter Willcox	2023 Chardonnay	Double Gold
	Best Chardonnay in California	
Dan Carrick	2021 Viognier	Gold
Dave Elliott	2023 Viognier -	Gold
	2023 Albarino -	Gold
	2021 Albarino -	Gold
	2021 Petite Sirah -	Gold
Bob Hudelson	2022 Zinfandel -	Gold
Gary Glaze	2020 Tempranillo -	Gold
Bill Betts	2021 Petite Sirah	Gold



And That Ain't All Folks

What would a Silent Auction be like without any wine tasting? Alas, we have only the one bottle of each Gold Medal winning wine. But we have something even more cool. Dave Elliott has offered to provide a vertical tasting of his award winning Syrahs.

Just to be clear, a true vertical tasting is when it is the same grape, from the same vineyard, produced by the same winemaker for multiple years. Dave produced his first Syrah in 2007. His most recent bottling is 2021.

Dave and I have taken on the difficult task of picking eight vintages out of those possible fifteen. I know. I know. Like they say, it's a tough job.



It's A Tough Job But

In Case You Missed It . . . August Meeting . . . by Bernie Zimmerman



About 40 people gathered to hear Guy Lauterbach talk about his experience in transitioning from a home wine maker to a commercial winery. Guy joined about 20 years ago when we were the Sierra Grape Growers Association. He began planting his vineyard in 2007. His philosophy was to plant the grapes that produce wines he likes, and noted the importance of paying attention to the heat index to pair grapes with climate. He mentioned the comparative low price of suitable land in this county compared to places like Napa. But ultimately the value of the grapes comes not from the land but from the wine they produce. He started making commercial wine in 2011 and now produces roughly 300 to 350 cases a year. He features Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux style wines and blends. He urged people aspiring to develop a commercial winery to first “hang out at local wineries” and ground yourselves in what they do. One thing he missed in designing his winery was storage space for bottles, both empty and full. He spent a lot of time discussing the various ways Federal, State and local governments “become your partner” in the wine business.

For example, if he wants to take a bottle of his wine home for dinner, he has to account for it as a taxable removal. He also stressed the ongoing regulation of water and wastewater disposal. Finally, he noted that more commercial wineries in Nevada County have closed in recent years than have opened, and spoke of the difficulty of disposing of an operating winery when it is time to move on. Guy doesn't seem ready to do that yet, is still producing great wine (we sampled a 2016 Cab) and seems to be still enjoying himself.



The biggest crowd of the year listened to Guy Lauterbach discuss transitioning from a home to a commercial winery.

Winemaking Classes at Gray Pine Winery

Second Session: Sunday, September 15th at 8:30 a.m.

Guy Lauterbach will be offering his free, three-session introduction to winemaking classes at his Gray Pine Winery. Spread over a six to eight-week span of time depending on the weather conditions and harvest, Guy takes you on a deep dive into preparing for crush, fermentation, and post fermentation. Each session is about two and a half hours and takes place on Sunday mornings starting at 8:30. Thank-you Guy.

Contact Guy directly to sign up for the classes. rgl@graypinewinery.com



Going Native with Phil and Jackson Starr

A number of SWGGA winemakers are experimenting, or are at least considering experimenting with native yeast fermentations. I was talking with Jackson the other day and he mentioned that at Sierra Starr they were going to make a natural wine, a considerable step beyond just a native ferment. I was curious to hear more.

“No, we’ve never considered or explored the possibility of a natural wine,” Jackson explained, “but we do have a history of experimentation.” Some of you might recall their Zinjolais, a nouveau Beaujolais-style wine made from Zinfandel. Or their Ice Wine. That was a feat. And the Port. And the Pinot, and the Riesling.

They have also done their share of experimenting with native fermentations including with both Chardonnay and Zinfandel. But never a natural wine. Was that even possible? In case you are wondering, there are no regulations that actually dictate what is and what is not considered natural.

For the purpose of this conversation we will equate natural with non-intervention. Nothing added to the wine. The true devotees call it zero-zero. There are some natural producers who might add a little SO₂ at crush or perhaps just at bottling. There are no set rules.

One thing everyone does agree on is that it requires starting with grapes in excellent shape. Anything but pristine is going to be a problem later. Remember you can’t add anything to fix anything. To source their grapes they turned to a local organic grower they knew and trusted. The grapes looked good and on August 23rd they picked Primitivo grapes bringing them in at 24 brix and 3.5 pH.

They did two bins in a conventional manner and one bin natural. For the natural bin they used a technique called *pie du cuvée* where you get a small starter batch of grapes a week or so before you bring them all in. Remember you can’t add yeast so you want a small batch of natives to get up and fermenting so they can jump start the bigger batch when it arrives. No CO₂ cover blankets allowed. “We were putting them out in the sun everyday trying to get the starter batch as warm as possible to get the ferment started.” Phil added.

The day I was there the bin was down to about two brix. “My biggest worry,” Jackson said, “is that I get a stuck fermentation. Then what do I do? Actually the native ferment is a little ahead of the traditional one. That *pie du cuvée* really gave it a boost.”

Sanitation is incredibly important in winemaking and only more so with non-interventionist wines. Jackson makes sure he never cross-contaminates one bin from the other, washing everything scrupulously in between. “It’s still fermenting so right now I am just hoping it finishes. I am watching for any off-aromas or flavors. After fermentation and racking I will start to look for the balance of fruit, acidity and body.”

I saw Jackson a few days later when he gleefully told me, “It went dry.” Now it is off to the next part, whatever that isn’t.

We will check back sometime later to see how this project develops. Stay tuned.



Phil and Jackson Starr with their all natural Primitivo

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diane.houston

@managementtrust.com

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djelliott

@skydancesranch.com

Treasurer

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lwhittet@sbcglobal.net

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sclarabut@gmail.com

Social

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Al Schafer

afsarch@sbcglobal.net

Director At-Large

Gerard Van Steyn

gerardvsl@gmail.com

Director At-Large

Tom Martella

48vines@gmail.com

Program Coordinator

Rod Byers

rodbyers

@pinehillwineworks.com

Web Master

Jim Garrett

jim@relateddatas.com

Trellis Wire Editor

Rod Byers

rodbyers

@pinehillwineworks.com

SWGGA SWAG

Check the website, www.swgga.org for product descriptions. Contact Susan Clarabut at sclarabut@gmail.com if you have questions, wish to check pricing, or, best of all, would like to make an order.

Vineyard Sign	\$57
Woman's Long Sleeve Shirt	\$35
Men's Short Sleeve Shirt	\$35
Apron - Sold Out -	\$21
Cap	\$18
Corkscrew	\$13



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