

Some Ideas about how to Make Great Red Wines

Robert Parker Jr., Jean-Luc Thunevin and others

Why is modern-day wine making better (from Great Wine Estates):

- Significant changes in the vineyard
 - Emile Peynaud and Pascal Ribeau-Gayon in Bordeaux
 - Later harvest dates
 - Riper fruit w/ lower acidity and slightly elevated alcohol
 - Better disease control for rainy years
 - More attention to health of the vine
 - Yield limitation, from older 60-100 hl/ha to 25-50
 - Canopy management – leaf removal, shoot positioning
 - New clones and rootstocks
 - Smaller berries
 - Gentle handling in the field
 - Lower vigor with smaller berries produce crops of higher fruit quality
- Progressive changes in the wine cellar and fermentation
 - Temperature controlled stainless steel and wood fermenters
 - Harvest at full phenolic maturity with higher sugars
 - Selection/sorting (table de tri)
 - Cold soak
 - Cuvaison extended from 10-15 days to 21-30 allowing for better tannin structure
 - Healthier and controlled fermentation environment
 - Reverse osmosis and entropy to remove water replaces saignee
- Changes in the wine's élevage and bottling
 - Bottle after shorter period of élevage to capture freshness in the wine
 - Cellar sanitation is much improved
 - ML in barrel
 - Selection process – free run only, introduction of second and third labels
 - Less racking, rack under gas, aging on lees
 - Microbullage
 - Little or no fining and/or filtration
- Recent factors contributing to quality
 - Increased knowledge of viticulture, vinification and weather has improved wine quality
 - Improved health of the vineyards yields higher quality fruit
 - Movement towards more natural wine making has led to less traumatic bruising of fruit and wine
 - Preservation of the fruit, vintage and terroir characteristics has reached the pinnacle because of gentle handling techniques
 - Bottling process is aimed at putting the essence of the vineyard into the bottle in a less oxidized and evolved condition.

From Guide to Wines 7th Edition

- Vineyard and winery consultants like Abreu and Newton, Rolland, Turley, etc.
- Soft touch approach in vineyard and cellar
- What constitutes a great wine?
 - Ability to please both the palate and the intellect
 - Ability to hold the taster's interest
 - Ability of a wine to offer intense aromas and flavors without heaviness
 - Ability of a wine to taste better with each sip
 - Ability of a wine to improve with age
 - Ability of a wine to offer singular personality
- Best producers believe that:
 - 90% of the quality of a wine emerges from a vineyard's terroir and site
 - Vineyards have to be meticulously managed and respected
 - No great wines can be produced from less than fully ripened fruit
 - Grapes have to be handled gently
 - Every act in the vineyard and winery has to be aimed at producing the unmanipulated, uncompromising essence of the a vineyard, a varietal, or a vintage
 - Methods include:
 - Low yields
 - Harvest only physiologically mature fruit
 - Driven to preserve the identity of the vineyard and fruit
 - Minimal intervention in the cellar, avoiding fining and filtration
- Making sense of terroir
 - Rootstock impact on yields
 - Yeasts – commercial or wild
 - Yields and vine age impact on fruit quality (< 2t/a or 35-40 hl/ha)
 - Harvest philosophy – picking fully ripe grapes
 - Vinification equipment and techniques
 - Elevage
 - Fining and filtration
 - Bottling date
 - Cellar temperature and sanitary conditions

Jean-Luc Thunevin (taken from New France) at Chateau Valandraud: sacrifice everything to please the vine.

1. Small yields. INAO allows 60 hl/ha. 30 is the most. An essential rule.
2. You work organically. You use the physical work in the vineyard to solve problems, not chemicals.
3. You use leaf plucking.
4. You harvest absolutely ripe grapes, even with the risk of losing everything that entails. By hand and sorting each bunch and each berry.
5. You carry out serious vinification, defined as wild yeast only, using good wooden vats in a clean cellar and good new oak casks. Good wine is not frightened of new oak.

Jim Law (2010) – comments after visit to en primeur in Bordeaux: fill in mid-palate depth with Merlot to give more strength and depth. Lengthen and give elegance to finish with Cabernet Sauvignon. Key is blending with ripe fruit.

Joe Fiola (2010) - vine and vineyard quality and sustainability are all about internal and external soil moisture and drainage features of the site. Well to excessively-well drained soils are necessary. Also move cold air away from vines. Rutgers – add steep slope to site to enhance all aspects of air/water drainage.

Tony (2010) – select sites with convex features, not concave.

Kees (2008) – moderate soil moisture, timing of availability is important, shoots must stop growing before veraison, combined with low soil nitrogen status to regulate vine size.

WS (2010) – in the case of DRC vineyard and cellar practices are not unusual for any fine Burgundy estate. It is the attention to every detail in the vineyard, sorting, cellar etc. that sets them apart and achieves consistent greatness, and great vineyards. Bernard Noblet: “respect the nature of the wine.”

Jeff Newton – vine density and spacing as it influences yield per vine is very important. Also, fruit wire height (20-24”), proper canopy management practices and in dry regions, irrigation scheduling are critical to quality.