

Subject: *Orangewood Wines Newsletter - Volume 3, Issue 40 - July 15th, 2010*
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Introduction

After I sent out last month's newsletter, someone commented that the "New Delivery Person" section implied that maybe we didn't have the "Old Delivery Person". With perfect hindsight I should have said "Additional" rather than "New". To be clear, both John and Mandy (and sometimes Richard - that would be me) deliver our wine.

Jim Wallace and I have a go at describing what cooperage means this month. We also are trying to find the right level of information. The goal is to make you aware of the subject and give enough information that you are not intimidated when the topic comes up. Let us know if it's working for you.

Box Score

New Restaurants:	2
New Retail/Wine Bar Outlets	0
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New Restaurants

[Bandera Grill](#)

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New Sales Person – John Beach

John began his sales promoting Arizona's first estate grown wine with Sonoita Vineyards in the late 1990's and progressed to working full time with an Arizona wine distributor. He brings a wealth of wine knowledge from around the world as well as spirits - should we move in that direction. He will be working and is looking forward to building up our wine presence with Stanley in Tucson. John is giving us one problem. As we already have a driver called John, our normal email won't work. John Beach, therefore, gets the email address starting JohnB@...

Wine Terminology of the Month – Cooperage

When I played rugby at King Edward's Five Ways School in Birmingham, England, there was a player, John Cooper, who was very fast and had a great swerve. Fortunately, he was on the same team as I so I didn't have to worry about tackling him. John's last name, Cooper, meant that somewhere in his distant ancestry was a man who made barrels.

This is a craft that continues to this day. You can see it in action at the south end of Napa Valley at the Seguin Moreau barrel factory. There you can see a barrel being assembled from wooden staves and steel hoops and toasted around a flame that shoots on command from the floor. The neatest thing I learned from visiting this factory a few years ago was that the assembly requires the barrel to be turned upside down multiple times, as the hoops are hammered into position. The curvature of the barrel is such that putting the barrel on edge just beyond its tipping point causes it to flip under its own weight to stand on its other end. It's grand to watch. In wine making, cooperage refers not only to wooden barrels but to whatever containers are used - today most commonly oak and stainless steel, but in the past redwood and concrete were common, and are still used.

What's the big deal with what wine is kept in? It has to be fermented and aged somewhere - preferably in vessels that don't leak. This is the first question that a winemaker must decide: "Do the vessels add to the quality of wine or is the wine better without any help?" If the latter, stainless steel is the material of choice - its sole purpose is containment.

If the winemaker has in mind the barrel influencing the wine, then oak is the material of choice. The winemaker has a lot of choices and now has to do a lot of record keeping trying to understand how the selected oak affects the wine being made. Firstly, there are quite a few different barrel makers. For example, according to one article I read, there are 70 different French barrel makers that export to the USA. Secondly, the origin of the oak has different impacts on the wine. The forests in France are managed by the government and have been for centuries. Limousin, Alliers, Vosges, Tronçais and Nevers are names that you will see if you dig into technical data sheets far enough. In addition Hungary and Yugoslavia (or its offspring) as well as Minnesota and Missouri, in the United States, have forests of oak trees. All the barrels will be toasted to some extent - it's done to make the staves pliable enough to bend into a barrel shape - but once assembled, more toasting is done to the winemaker's specification.

The last variable is whether the barrel is being used for the first time, second time or third time. (After as few as three uses the barrel is called, euphemistically, "neutral oak".) Whatever the oak is going to do, it does it most as a new barrel, less as a once used barrel, and so forth. What does it do? Obviously it is adding "oakiness," but also it will absorb or soften some of the tannins, making the wine smoother sooner than it would be otherwise. One winemaker said to me that such improvements are not without cost. "No good turn should go unpunished." The cost is loss of fruitiness.

Often winemakers will have their wine matured in a variety of barrels from different barrel makers, different forests and different ages. This is where the winemaker becomes an experimental chemist rather than the artist they thought they were going to be. We didn't talk about cost, but oak barrels can range from \$400 for an American oak barrel to over \$1,000 for a French oak barrel - and the winemaker develops accounting skills too.

Patty Green of Patricia Green Cellars says that she has simplified her life by dealing with only one barrel maker (Ceduce). She still worries about forest selection and toast levels, but she doesn't have to worry about one barrel maker's definition of medium toast vs. another. She says the best time is when the French barrel maker's salesman shows up, looks at all the Ceduce barrels, puts away his sales presentations and says "Let's do deeneer!"

Rambling

The weather in Arizona has moved into the "monsoon season". Right now it is predicted to be 116F in Phoenix with a predicted dew point of 55F. There are clouds in the sky, but if it is raining it doesn't reach the ground – "Virga" is what it's called.

Twister, our Quarter Horse, recently celebrated his 28th birthday. He is still bright eyed and has an eye for the fillies. Unfortunately, the fillies don't give him the time of day. Laurie is out riding him this morning, while I take a training hike. Close to the top of one of the Seven Sisters' peaks (the fourth one I think) there was a snake, a coach whip, motionless on the trail. Not wanting to step over him, I tossed a few seed pods in his direction to no effect. Then as I was looking for another projectile, he turned and headed down hill with the grace and speed of good alpine skier. Whoomph! That set me to thinking about when I had followed a good Alpine skier down a hill. (If you drive a Porsche with the license plate RUL82, this would be you, Ric). He went down the hill with about a third less turns than I would comfortably make - the thrill of speed overcoming the fear of tree stumps. It was fun while it lasted, but I went back to more turns per vertical foot drop. What has this got to do with anything? This is a ramble isn't it?

Talking about following people, I have been gathering opinions and wrestling with what to on the "trade tasting" front – everybody does one. I know that I could ask all our wineries to come along for an event. We could have the Alpine Skier version, with lots of suppliers and gourmet catering, but there is no good time and place that would attract sufficient customers to make it worthwhile for all of us. Also, how does a winery represent their story and wines in 30 seconds at a time? We would all go down hill very fast, and, while exhilarating, it doesn't last very long. Instead, I want to build on some of the things that have been effective for us. Specifically, when we find a group of customers, two, three or more, who enjoy taking a little time to try a few wines with their sales person, this is a much more effective way to introduce wines and wineries to them. If there is a winery person or two there as well, that would be a bonus.

From Orangewood's perspective, then, we will do more of these small group soirées. Jim Wallace, for example, has a Wednesday lunchtime tasting group in Prescott that is informal and not restricted to Orangewood Wines, but it is still working as the basis for strengthening relationships and trying wines. When winery representatives are visiting, this will be one of the activities they can participate in. That's the plan rambling forward.

...the rambler rambles on...

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