

Orangewood Wines

Small Wineries, Great Wines

Orangewood Wines' Newsletter

Volume 4 Issue 11 August 18, 2011

Introduction

"Hey, it's August 18th and where is my Orangewood Wines' Newsletter?" I know you are all asking this. Well, I hadn't written it, but here we go.

August is when school starts in Arizona. Some business folks convinced the legislators to declare August as the end of summer and encourage "back to school spending". Never mind that it means kids are practicing football at 111F (today's predicted high); never mind that families have to return from their summer homes to experience the least pleasant month of the year; business people need to get their cash registers working again. That would include, gratefully, us.

Last month's discussion of "Clues from the Colour" received a lot of feedback including expectations that we would provide clues for the nose, taste and finish. We will, but not in one swell foop.

Box Score

New Restaurants:	1
New Retail/Wine Bar Outlets	1
New Wineries	0
New Sales People	0

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New Restaurants

[DC Steakhouse](#)

98 South San Marcos
Chandler, AZ 85225
(480) 899-4400

New Wine Stores/Wine Bars

Vineyard Winebar

1001 North Main Street,
Cottonwood, AZ 86326
(928) 634-2440

Wine Terminology of the Month - Bottle Size and Aging

Wine comes mostly in 750 millilitre (25.4 fluid ounces) bottles, but other sizes are available. Half size bottles, or splits, are 375 ml. We have a Port that is in a 500 ml bottle. Larger format bottles are Magnums (1.5 litres), double magnums or Jeroboams (3.0 litres), Methuselah (6.0 litres) and on through a range of Old Testament names for more than you can ever drink, never mind pick up. Each of these bottles is usually sealed with natural cork. The neck sizes do not vary as much as the capacities. Some people believe that good wine improves with age and I count myself as one of those. Why would wine improve with age? If we look at a bottle of wine with a cork in it, we see that there is a little air trapped between the cork and the top of the wine. This is called ullage. If we imagine this bottle sitting in a winery's cave somewhere, traditionally, it will be at cellar temperature. Unless the cave is artificially warmed and cooled there will be a temperature variation as the cave warms slightly in the summer and cools slightly in the winter. The bottle and wine therefore also warm up and cool down slightly. Our high school physics tells us that when things are heated or cooled they change in size. Everything has a coefficient of expansion that allows us to predict how much. Liquids expand more than solids do. That is why the liquid in a thermometer goes up in warmer weather rather than down. You knew that. In the cave the wine warms by a couple of degrees, compressing the air that we call ullage. Given time, the compressed air will seep out through the cork. Then the temperature drops and now the ullage is decompressed, sucking in a little, very little, fresh air. The wine, therefore, has an opportunity to react with small amounts of additional air with each annual breath. I don't know, chemically, what it does with that air, but I suspect, empirically, that for some years it improves, eventually reaching its best and then it starts to deteriorate. So why did I mention all those bottle sizes. The reason is that the cork size and ullage amount does not vary much with bottle size. Typically, the splits and magnums have the same size neck and cork and ullage as a regular bottle. If we assume that the same amount of fresh air is "inhaled" in a small or large bottle, then the small bottle gets more air per millilitre than the big bottle. This leads us

to expect the smaller bottles to age more quickly than larger ones. Expressed differently, don't leave those splits hanging around too long.

In practice, in a cave, in my wine cellar and in our warehouse, the wine is stored horizontally or upside down. The point is to keep the cork moist and the seal pretty much intact. What this means to the breathing is that the ullage gets compressed, but it is not next to the cork, so instead of breathing out air, a little wine is pushed out. Breathing in does bring in a little air just the same. So we should expect the ullage to increase in size as a bottle gets older. We should also expect that the cork will be mostly wine stained. This is OK. I had an experience recently where this occurred. A 6 year old magnum showed a little discoloration when the capsule was removed. Commonly this is viewed as a bad thing and on a young bottle of wine such discoloration suggests that the bottle was overheated or the cork is defective. In such cases there may be other clues. Overheating often pushes the cork out a little, so look to see if it is properly seated in the neck. Defective corks will likely lose more wine, so look at the ullage. If it is large on a young wine, start to worry. The magnum with discoloured cork, did not have a large ullage and did not have its cork pushed out at all, and, as a final test, Laurie and I opened the magnum to evaluate the contents. We are happy to report it was delicious.

So one more thing. Our hypothetical cave varied temperatures with the seasons. I think this is key. I plan to vary my cellar temperatures by 2 degrees. I turn them down 2 degrees at the autumnal equinox, and turn them back up at the vernal equinox.

Anything else? No! Class dismissed.

Rambling

Lisa Salazar and Stephen Noble, sales people who sold a plethora of Frank Family Vineyards' wines, got to visit California. As a reward the winery and I split the costs for them to fly and stay there for a couple of days. As a personal sacrifice I accompanied them! Clearly, first order of business was visiting the Frank Family Winery. We recommend to our customers that they visit there because it is such a fun place. We wanted some fun too. Head funster is Dennis Zabloski who has run this tasting room long enough to be an Icon. The tasting room staff are all focused on providing a fun and educational experience to every visitor. We did get to learn what was new - there's always something; and we got to stand inside the historic winery building that is depicted on the front of their wine bottles.

While in the vicinity we visited Tres Sabores. This small winery, located in St Helena, is just off the valley floor on what is referred to as the Rutherford bench. During the summer they have movie nights that start when the sun sets. This week it was "The Sweet Smell of Success" a story of intrigue amongst the press, the police and politicians. Made in 1957, it is very topical and deserves a remake. We also visited Alysian, Gary Farrell's new winery, and the Floodgate Vineyard, where he gets some of his grapes and where his new winery is being built. We met with Brandi Pack of Jocelyn Lonen Winery, but more about that next month. We even found time to have a beer at the Rutherford Grill.

The Rambler rambles on...

Richard (newsletter writer), Laurie (editor) and Jim Wallace (another writer and editor)
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