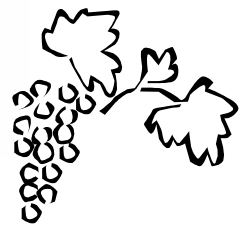




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The Grape Vine Newsletter



Wine Questions & Answers

Q. *One of the wines your club offered in the past was a 2004, but I could only find the 2003 in my local store. How much does the year matter?*

A. It depends where the wines come from. In the classic northern European wine regions, such as Burgundy and Bordeaux, vintages matter a lot, because there's considerable weather variation from year to year, and wine quality varies significantly. In countries such as Australia, South Africa and Chile, there is some vintage variation, but much less, and for many commercial wines which are blended to a particular style, vintage variation is hardly an issue at all. But for most cheap wines, the best advice is to drink the youngest wine possible, because it will generally be fresher and more interesting.

Q. *I've seen some wine producers describe themselves as biodynamic on their labels. What does this mean?*

A. Biodynamics is a form of organic farming, but it goes well beyond organics by using a series of special homeopathic-like preparations and tying-in the timing of vineyard work with phases of the planets. To those used to scientific-based agriculture, it seems a bit weird, spooky even, but wine growers who employ biodynamics seem to care deeply about their vineyards, and this probably helps them get good results. Typically, producers who have tried it have stuck with it despite the increased labor costs, because their wines have improved.

Q. *My boyfriend told me that a fail safe way to judge wine quality is by the depth of the punt on the bottle. Is he pulling my leg?*

A. Sort of. The size of the punt, the indentation at the bottom of the bottle, varies widely. Its purpose is uncertain: some people reckon it was originally introduced to make it easier for the earliest hand-blown bottles to stand upright; others reckon its function was to trap sediment. Some ambitious producers use heavy bottles with big punts to give the impression of quality, and the cheapest bottles used for everyday wine tend to have no punt at all, so I guess there might be a loose correlation between punt size and quality, but only a very loose one.

Q. *I enjoy white wine, but it takes me three or four days to drink a bottle. What's the best way of preserving the wine? I've seen some people use vacuum pumps, do these work?*

A. There are a number of devices on the market for preserving wine. The one you mention, vacuuming, tries to do this by sucking all the air out to prevent oxidation (the harmful effect oxygen in the air has on wine). I have tried this but I don't think it works. It's likely that the oxygen that dissolves in the wine as you pour a few glasses is enough to cause damage, so taking out the air from a half full bottle isn't going to protect it. This is also the idea behind another preserving device which squirts in an inert (non-reactive) gas such as nitrogen into the space left by the consumed wine. It doesn't really work either, in my opinion. So the best bet in your case is to simply recork the bottle and pop it back in the fridge. It should be fine for three or four days. I find that opened reds don't live as long and are best drunk within a day or two.

Q. *What are the tiny particles that can be seen in some wines?*

A. They are sediment, particles such as dead yeast cells or fragments of grape seeds and skins that are normal byproducts of winemaking. They are harmless. Sediment can be removed by pouring through cheesecloth into a decanter.

Q. *Which wines need to be chilled for the best taste? What is the right temperature for serving various wines?*

A. A general rule of thumb—Red wine, 65 degrees and white & rose wine, 55 degrees. If you need to use an ice bucket to bring your wine to serving temperature, first fill the bucket with ice about 4/5ths, then add water to barely cover the ice. Immerse Red wine in it for five minutes; whites and rose's for ten minutes

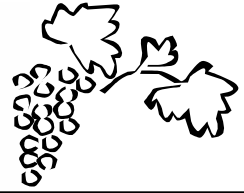
Q. *How can you tell whether a wine has gone bad?*

A. Smell is the first sign. It will have a pungent or moldy scent.



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Classic Wine Club Selections

Every month our **Classic Wine Club** members receive one or two bottles of our featured wines. The wines you get depend on the membership you are enrolled in. If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the fun. Happy wine tasting!

Aquinas Napa Valley

Don Sebastiani & Sons

The inspiration for the newest label from Don Sebastiani & Sons, Aquinas Napa Valley comes from St. Thomas Aquinas, a revolutionary scholar from the 13th century.

In a time when science was revolutionary and new discoveries threatened religious establishments, St Thomas Aquinas labored to build a bridge between the emerging disciplines and those who felt alienated by them. He embraced scientific thought and used laws of science to prove his belief in the Almighty.

Just as St. Thomas Aquinas was able to combine two seemingly opposed principles, scholastic and religious thought, Aquinas Napa Valley wines thrive to unite the prestige of Napa Valley with approachable wine stripped of pretension and snobbery.

Cabernet Sauvignon 2005

This classic Cabernet has a great nose filled with aromas of blackberries, fresh figs, cedar oak, and hints of minerals and earthy notes. From the first sip, this wine reveals enveloping flavors of currant, more blackberries, black olives, tobacco, and toasted walnuts, finishing with rich French oak and subtle cloves.

This wine is an excellent choice with grilled Sirloin steaks smothered in caramelized onions and mushrooms or roasted quail, stuffed with breadcrumbs, roasted red pepper and olives. It also pairs well with whole wheat penne pasta, tossed with sautéed wild mushrooms, arugula, and goat cheese, or potato-artichoke gratin with aged Gruyere.

Chardonnay 2006

A bright straw-yellow color with a slight lime cast, this wine has aromas of lemon peel, apricots, white peaches, and vanilla infused tea. The flavors are reminiscent of lemon crème brulee, peach yogurt, and citrus sorbet with notes of fresh cream and subtle oak notes.

This Napa Chardonnay would be delicious with honey, lime and jalapeño marinated chicken over jasmine rice with snow peas, fried Calamari with white polenta, chickpeas and fresh lemon, or Jack cheese fondue with toasted bread, green apple slices, ham and pineapple.

Innovative Bottling

You won't find a natural cork in any of the Aquinas Napa Valley Wines. They seal all of their wines using innovative closures, to ensure you get the wine their winemakers set out to create. All closures eliminate cork taint commonly found with natural cork as well as oxidation and leakage. The cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay are bottled featuring the neocork method.

Neocork preserves the cherished traditions of wine ceremony. It has a clean, natural appearance, minimal taste and odor, is compatible with all corks, and creates a perfect instant seal with no leaking. Easily extracted with a standard corkscrew, Neocork always comes out in one piece without any crumbs, chips or embarrassment. Neocork delivers excellent performance without compromise.

Questions or Comments?

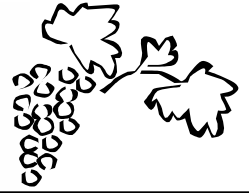
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Email us at GiftShops@GiftSpecialistsInc.com and put Newsletter Feedback in the subject line. We won't be able to personally answer every one, but they will all be read.



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This Month's Epic Reds Wine Club Selections

Every month our **Epic Reds Wine Club** members receive two bottles of our featured red wines. These wines are among some of California's boutique winery's finest offerings. If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the fun. Happy wine tasting!

Freemark Abbey Winery

The history of Freemark Abbey began in 1886, when Josephine Marlin Tychson became the first woman to build and operate a winery in California.

The historic site where Josephine's winery, Tychson Cellars, once stood is now known as Freemark Abbey. Today Freemark Abbey is proud to continue the legacy of winemaking that Josephine began so many years ago.

Josephine, a native of San Lorenzo, California and her husband, John Tychson moved to St. Helena in 1881 hoping that the Napa Valley's climate would help John, who suffered from tuberculosis. The couple decided to pursue their dream of making wine from their own vineyard and for \$8,500, they purchased 147 acres north of St. Helena, which later became known as "Tychson Hill".

The first vineyards on the Tychson land were planted in 1875. With only a horse and a plow, the Tychsons began to expand these vineyards, adding approximately ten acres of vines each year.

Despite his failing health, John began to develop plans for a winery on the property. Unfortunately, he never lived to see his plans take shape. Shortly after her husband's death, Josephine realized his dream and in 1886, began construction on a winery which would grow to hold a capacity of about 30,000 gallons. With the help of Nels Larsen, her foreman, Josephine successfully produced wine for the next eight years. In 1894 Josephine sold the winery to Larsen and in turn he leased the winery to Antonio Forni, a good friend of Josephine's.

Forni later purchased the property in 1898 and called his new winery Lombarda Cellars, named for his birthplace in Italy. He used the original Tychson building on the property for many years, but in 1899 he doubled the capacity with the construction of a new stone structure. He continued to expand the winery until the advent of prohibition in 1919. Like many other vintners in the Napa Valley, Forni was forced to cease production at Lombarda Cellars.

In 1939, three businessmen from Southern California; Albert "Abbey" Ahern, Charles Freeman and Markquand Foster purchased Lombarda Cellars. Together they reopened the winery and renamed it Freemark Abbey. Throughout the 1940's and 50's the new winery primarily sold its wines to San Francisco retail stores, where a longstanding presence began to develop for Freemark Abbey's label.

In the years that followed, Freemark Abbey went through a period of several different owners until 1966, when the following partners purchased the winery; John Bryan, Dick Heggie, Bill Jaeger, Laurie Wood, Chuck Carpy, Brad Webb and Jim Warren. In 1993 Winemaker Ted Edwards also became a partner and in 1996 assumed the role of managing partner in addition to his responsibility he held as a winemaker. In 2000, when Tim Bell was promoted to winemaker, Edwards assumed the role of Winemaster.

Merlot—Napa Valley 2002

The color is a rich ruby in depth with reddish hues. The aroma is appealing with nuances of dried cranberry, red raspberry, cherry, chocolate espresso, not to miss the subtle hints of mint and arugula. The pleasant balance in the flavor, while finishing on the crisp side, is accented by flavors of plum, cherry, dark fruit, chocolate and oak spice, finishing with a maturing tannin structure. This wine goes particularly well with grilled lamb or game.

Cabernet Sauvignon—Napa Valley 2002

Deep ruby, with intense dark fruit aromas of blackberry, plum, black cherry, and currant. Bright fruit aromas mingled with sweet oak, dark chocolate, slight clove, cinnamon, and black pepper. Great blackberry flavors evolve on a bed of balanced acidity and moderate tannins, yielding a long pleasant finish.

From time to time we have excess inventory of our Wine Club selections. If you would like to purchase additional quantities of this month's offering, or any of our other fine wine selections, please visit our Online Wine Store at:

www.WineGiftClub.com