Finding and Choosing the Best Grapes

BOB PEAK

WINEMAKER MAGAZINE CONFERENCE, JUNE 3, 2022
Today’s Topics

- Find some grapes
- Get them home
- Determine what you got to decide what to do
- Examples from my experience
Finding Grapes in Wine Country (it’s not as obvious as it sounds)

- Your local home winemaking supply store
- Wine making clubs
- Friends who make wine—including in groups
- Online classified ads
- Print classified ads (!)
- Your favorite winery
My Local Home Winemaking Shop

- The Beverage People
- Now list online; used to maintain a binder in the store
- Growers list grapes for sale
- Start in July and August
- Variety, quantity, price per pound, picking conditions

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Growers, you may like to use this template and fill in the blanks.

- Grape Varietal(s) Available:
  - Listing Date:
  - Pricing:
  - Estimated Pick Date:
  - Min/Max:
  - Who picks?
  - Age of vines:
  - Rootstock:
  - Clone:
  - Other:
  - Location:
  - Contact info:
The Sauvignon Blanc You Didn’t Taste

- Ed Johnson Listed Grenache, Grenache Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc in Potter Valley
- I bought Grenache a few years ago
- For the 2020 WMM Conference I bought 2019 Sauvignon Blanc
- Dealings were by phone
- Drove an hour and a half at 6:00 AM
- Ed’s crew did the picking
- Gave him a check and drove off
Local Winemaking Club

Genco
Garage Enologists of North County
Based in Healdsburg, CA
Winemaking competition
Group run by an experienced home winemaker
A group picks grapes and makes wine from his vineyard
Learn as you do it, and take wine home at the end

SHW
Sonoma Home Winemakers
Located in Sonoma Valley, CA
Have several team projects
Announce availability of grapes at summer/fall monthly meetings
Most unusual: maintain and harvest a one-acre City of Sonoma-owned vineyard

Sacramento Home Winemakers
Located in Sacramento
A large club—meeting of close to 100 people
Winemaking Workshops
Group crush activities
Winemaking competition
Tastings
Tours
Field trips
Friends Who Make Wine

- They love to share their wine
- They get their grapes somewhere
  - May grow grapes
  - May purchase
- A work-related group can help coordinate schedules and labor
- Ask if you can join in
Work Group Example

- Staff members at The Beverage People
- Bought a half-ton of local Pinot Gris
- Pitchforked our portion into smaller bins
- Three parts processed at my house
- Crushed as on previous slide
- Pressed
- Took home juice in PET carboys
Wineindustry.com classifieds

Zinfandel and Syrah /Mendocino County’s most prized grapes

Grapes

•

Vintage
2001

Varietal
Zinfandel

Appellations (AVA) - CA, OR and WA
Mendocino AVA

Farming Practices
Farmed Sustainably

Quantity
18

Price
Using Classified Ads

- Start looking early—late spring to midsummer
- Use more than one source
  - Mostly online
  - Some print ads in wine country
- Mostly deal in half-ton or to quantities
- Need to arrange your transportation
- Be ready when notified of harvest
Ask your favorite winery

- Horse and Plow in Sebastopol, CA
- Do they grow?
- Do they sell grapes?
- Where do they purchase grapes?
- Can they refer?
- Will they order extra and sell some to you?
Assuring Quality: Near the Vineyard

- Ask if you can visit during the growing season
- Find out what commercial wineries use those grapes
  - Visit
  - Do some tasting
- Ask if you can come get a sample of grapes close to harvest
  - Taste
  - Test Brix, pH, TA
- Be present for harvest if possible
Assuring Quality: Far from vineyard

- Specialized grape distributor
- Christina Musto Quick from Musto Wine Grape Company
  - I bought some Chilean Carmenere for a previous conference
  - Also bought Primitivo and Riesling to make at home
  - Clean, high-quality fruit packed in plastic crates
  - A similar company near you
More Assuring Quality

- Produce wholesalers
  - For a conference in San Diego
  - Recommended by Gi Classen of Curds and Wine
  - Made arrangements by phone in advance
  - Went to the warehouse
  - Paid for and picked up my refrigerated crates

- Farm Stands
  - Some also distribute locally
  - Apples for cider: Granny Smith, Pink Lady, Fuji
  - Ordered from the wholesale contact by phone
  - They delivered to The Beverage People the day before my class
Final Suggestions for Far Away Grapes

Supermarket
It can be done!
They order from produce wholesalers all the time
Talk to the produce manager
Order a week or two before you want them
Some table grapes are vinifera and make decent wine

Friends in Wine Country
Do they have a vineyard?
Will they sell some grapes?
Can they do some searching locally for you {offer to buy them a tasting if a winery interests you}
Possibly do the other checking described earlier
Maybe receive the grapes at their home

Road Trip!
In May or June
Hit the road, visit wineries
Look around while there for distributors
Ask about sources as you go wine tasting
What Grapes do you want?

- Use a “filter” model
  - Where will you look for grapes?
    - What varieties interest you?
      - Which of those might be available
        - Who can you get them from
How to judge

- Regional reputation of the grower
- Harvest Specifications they may provide: Brix, pH, TA
- A brand name of winery, grower, or distributor that is known and trusted
- Your own assessment if you can
Walk the Vineyard if you can

- Visit on harvest day the year before you want to buy grapes
- Walk again in the spring to observe pruning quality
- Visit in summer to assess vine health
- Help pick if allowed
Get the Grapes Home

- Keep cool: AC, gel packs, frozen jugs of water
- Sort as you pick if possible
- Sort at home if not
- Eliminate mold and rot
- Measure Brix, pH, TA
- Keep fruit as cool as you can
- Any questions?
Awaken Your Inner Temptations

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Quick Order Processing
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- SO₂ (Free & Total)
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- pH
- Malic acid (MLF)
- Residual sugar
- Dissolved oxygen
- YAN
- ABV%

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