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## **What's new in the Grapevine this week?**

- **How do I know if an old wine is still good?**
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## **How do I know if an old wine is still good?**

Every week someone comes into the store and asks me if the wine they bought on their honeymoon in 1991 (or 1981 or 1971) is still good. The best answer I can give is to open the bottle and taste it.

However, there are a few telltale signs the wine may be spoiled before you go to the trouble of opening it. First, take your thumb and gently push down on top of the cork. If the cork is soft or mushy, it may indicate there has been a leak or the cork has deteriorated. Next, try twisting the foil capsule that covers the cork end of the bottle. If it is glued in place by wine seeping out of the bottle, there is a good chance oxygen has seeped back in and spoiled the contents. Last, hold the bottle upright and look at the airspace between the cork and the wine. (This space is called the "ullage" if you are ever on Jeopardy!). If there is more than a half inch of space or the top of the wine just reaches the shoulder of the wine bottle, there may have been evaporation and/or seepage compromising the wine.

If you want to keep a red wine for a long time, keep it in a cool, dark place free of temperature variation and vibration. Store the wine on its side with the label facing up. If you want to do more than guess when the wine will be best, buy a full case and open a bottle every year or two to gauge the aging process. Drink the wine at its best regardless of your anniversary date. If it happens that you open that special wine before the date you planned, don't forget to say something sweet and mushy about your wedding day. Opening a flat, over-the-hill wine won't make the moment romantic no matter what you say.

## Why Blend Wine Grapes?

From time to time we return to the never-ending debate between wine enthusiasts who preach the primacy of single-varietal wines and those who argue for the benefits of blending two or more grapes in a single wine.

The "monovarietal" folks make a strong case with such great 100 percent varietal wines as Pinot Noir or Chardonnay in Burgundy, all-Cabernet reds in Northern California or full-Nebbiolo reds in Northwestern Italy, just to name a few.

That said, blending grapes can bring balance and character to wine. Almost red wines with the exceptions noted above are blends. Merlot is often blended into Cabernet to tame the Cab tannins and to provide richer mouth feel. Malbec gets an extended finish if blended with Cabernet. Grenache gets added body and tannin from Syrah and Mourvèdre in classic Rhone blends.

Let's take a look at a classic white blend that, in my opinion, makes a compelling argument for blends. The happy marriage of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, pioneered in Bordeaux and replicated around the world, strikes me as clear mathematical evidence that 1 plus 1 is *sometimes* greater than 2.

The two varieties are stylistically quite different, but in blends it works as well as the nursery rhyme about Jack Spratt (who could eat no fat) and his wife (well, you know the rest). Each grape brings a different character to the party, and in a well-made wine the results can create a synergy that exceeds the sum of its parts. Sauvignon Blanc is tart, grassy, light bodied, and hard edged. Semillon is lemony, viscous, with flat acidity and rounded edges. Blended together, the racy freshness of the Sauvignon Blanc is balanced by the body and backbone of the Semillon.

Sauvignon Blanc is notoriously short lived and the addition of Semillon allows fruit flavors to stay in the wine for a number of years. Similarly, Grenache has few tannins and the addition of Syrah and Mourvèdre give it more body, more structure, and a greater ability to age.

Next time you are looking for wine, look for a blend. Compare it to other blends with different proportions of the same grapes and see if you can tell the difference.

## How many grapes does it take to make a bottle of wine?

Even though I struggle with mathematical concepts higher than long division, it sometimes amazes me to think about what it takes to make a bottle of wine. In the technical notes that I receive with many of the wines we buy for the Wine Gallery is a note about the yield per acre. Grapevines can be quite prolific

and produce in excess of 25 tons of grapes per acre. In fact, grapes comprise the largest fruit crop on earth. However, winemakers are different than corn farmers and cattle ranchers. Winemakers do not care about the quantity yield per acre as much as they care about the quality yield per acre.

In the viticulture business, big crops mean uneven ripening and unripe grapes don't convert to good wine. Grape growers know that if they stress the vines by pruning the vines and thinning grape bunches, they will achieve a higher quality in the winery. When grapevines are stressed, they react by diverting all of their resources to ensuring the next generation of seeds (inside the grapes) will be adequately fed. As a result, fewer grapes mean a crop that ripens at the same time and produces concentrated juice and flavor.

Some of the best wines from Australia come from vineyards that yield less than a quarter ton per acre. Most wines in California are derived from vineyards that yield 2-12 tons per acre. We can do some basic math to determine how many grapes go into a bottle or a case of wine.

**One Cluster** = 40-60 grapes  
**One Pound of grapes** = 4.5 Clusters  
**One bottle of wine** = 2.75 # of grapes.  
**One bottle of wine** = 500-750 grapes  
**One ton of grapes** = 9000 Clusters  
**One ton of grapes** = 60 cases (720 bottles)  
**One acre** = 2 to 12 tons  
**One acre** = 120-720 cases  
**One acre** = 1,440 to 8,640 bottles

Memorize this chart in case you are ever a contestant on Jeopardy.

## Upcoming events

**\*\* Art walk is coming up on Friday August 11<sup>th</sup>** and once again I will be at Miller's Jewelry at Main and Tracy to pour some samples of tasty wines. Next Friday is the **8<sup>th</sup> annual Estate Jewelry Show** at Miller's and there will be an incredible array of exquisite estate pieces from around the country to view and shop. That array includes name-brand designer jewelry, period pieces and true antiques to peruse while you sip specially chosen Wine Gallery wines.

Not only is this a wonderful opportunity to purchase something spectacular, it is a great time to sell. An expert estate buyer will be meeting with those interested in parting with old, broken, or simply unwanted items. The

evaluation is FREE but call Miller's first (586-9547) to set up your appointment so you are ensured all the proper time and attention.

\*\*If you haven't attended an **American Wine Society** function, embrace your opportunity to get in on the next event. The date will be **Thursday, August 24<sup>th</sup>**. The AWS plan is for a casual summer evening in a private home in the Bon Ton historic district. The agenda includes food, conversation, and a chance to learn about and taste wines that go well with the warm days of summer. I have attended the first three meetings and found the programs to be educational, the wines excellent and the company convivial. If you are a wine lover, this is a chance to expand your horizons, sharpen your palate, and enjoy the company of other like-minded oenophiles. To be added to the email notification list send your request to [awsbozeman.com](http://awsbozeman.com).

\*\* It's never too early to put some dates on the calendar especially when it comes to the Wine Gallery's **13<sup>th</sup> Annual Grand Tasting**. Mark the date for **Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>** and get friends and family together to attend the best wine tasting of the year. We plan to have nearly sixty wines from all over the world. All will be rated 90 points or higher and priced below \$20.

This is a great chance to buy wine the most efficient way: taste it before you buy it. With so many wines to choose from, you can find the exact wine that fits your palate. If you don't like the first sample, move on to the next and buy the one you like. This is a great opportunity to fill your wine rack for the upcoming Holidays, get great values, and have fun doing it.

Our venue will be the Hilton Garden Inn and we plan to start at 7 PM. Tickets will go on sale October 1. Stay tuned to the Grapevine for updates.