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

- **Why are French women more slender?**
- **What is Malo-Lactic fermentation all about?**
- **Opening screw cap bottles**
- **Health update**

## **Why are European women more slender?**

For the last 10-12 years there has been quite a stir in the media about the obesity epidemic in America. Someone noticed that European women and French women in particular don't seem to struggle with obesity. How do French women do that when they live in a country that arguably has the best cuisine in the world? It seems everything in France is cooked in butter or bacon and tastes just like whatever they serve for Sunday dinner in Heaven.

The old standby for explaining the difference used to be the snarky observation that French women smoke a lot of cigarettes. While 30% of the adult French smoke vs. 18% of American adults, the French smoke less than 8 cigarettes per day, while American smoker per capita consumption is closer to 16 per day. Those statistics make it sort of murky about the reason European women are slimmer.

The answer probably lies elsewhere. There are three main reasons on the beverage side which may point to the disparity between obese Americans and more slender Europeans:

- 1) Europeans drink fewer soft drinks.
- 2) Europeans drink more water.
- 3) Europeans drink more wine.

All these facts are borne out by recent statistics published by the Wine Institute.

The first salient point is that the average American drinks 48 cans of soda pop per month, while the average European only drinks 10. If you add powdered or “sports” drinks into the mix, Americans are drinking some form of flavored sugar water 54 times a month compared to less than 11 times per month for the Europeans. It is interesting that bottled water sales reflect 10 servings per month on both sides of the Atlantic. Milk, hard liquor, and fruit/vegetable juice consumption is also about even on a per capita basis. Europeans drink less coffee and beer than Americans but Europeans drink more tea.

The second disparity is that Europeans drink a 12 oz. glass of tap water 82 times a month while Americans only drink 20 glasses. Every weight loss diet ever invented says to drink more water. If Europeans are filling their tanks on pure water instead of factory modified liquids that contain empty calories, they probably are doing a bit more for their health. Water is the key to the hydration that keeps your electrolytes balanced, blood pressure more stable, and leaves you more alert. It also fills your stomach with zero calories.

The last point is that Europeans drink 8 glasses of wine per capita each month compared to a little over two per month for Americans. (That is in spite of how much our Wine Club is helping boost the average for the Land of the Free). Wine drinkers do not develop a “beer belly” due to physiological differences in how beer and wine are metabolized. Maybe because we drink more beer and less wine, we tend to get more apple-shaped than our European friends.

Remember, it’s not just what you eat, but what you drink that can add those extra pounds. Drink more water and wine and less beer and soda. You’ll be as slender as a French woman in no time.

## **What is Malo-lactic fermentation?**

Last week in a rant about FitVine wine, I made reference to malo-lactic fermentation. I got a couple of questions about it this week so it may be helpful to give some background for what I was talking about.

Fermentation—or “regular” fermentation—is a process of yeasts converting the sugar in grapes into alcohol. If you just left grapes alone, eventually they would ferment on their own, thanks to native yeasts that are present everywhere. If fermentation is left to happen on its own, it’s often called “natural,” “wild” or “indigenous” fermentation.

Meanwhile, malolactic fermentation (sometimes called ML or "malo" for short) isn't technically a fermentation, but a conversion of harsh, tart malic acid to a creamier, softer lactic acid by friendly bacteria. ML isn't necessary to the winemaking process, but it's popular as almost all red wines and many whites white wines incorporate it into the winemaking process for both for added complexity and stability. This natural process converts sharper malic acid (found in green apples) into softer lactic acid (found in milk products). Total acidity is reduced; the wines become softer, rounder and more complex. In addition, malolactic fermentation stabilizes wines by preventing an undesirable fermentation in the bottle. Malolactic fermentation can aid in making a wine "microbiologically stable" in that the lactic acid bacteria consume many of the leftover nutrients that other spoilage microbes could use to develop wine faults like volatile acidity, brett and overly reduced flavors.

Often called a secondary fermentation, it is most often produced by adding special strains of bacteria. Frequently associated with big, rich, buttery Chardonnay, malolactic fermentation is often prevented by winemakers when fresher, crisper styles like Sauvignon Blanc are desired. In reds, the grape odor becomes richer and wines become more mellow and full-bodied.

During this secondary fermentation, carbon dioxide is released. Every now and again, if no sulfites are present, this can result in wine that has a fizzy component. In Vinho Verde it is a benefit, in Pinot Noir it is a defect.

It often makes me wonder if the only trick malo-lactic bacteria performs is acid reduction and addition of texture. Does it also add something to red wine that causes red wine headache? Alas, that is a topic for another day.

## **Opening a screwcap wine bottle**

More and more wines are sealed with a screw cap these days. While many of us bemoan the loss of the customs and tradition of opening cork sealed bottles, we also rejoice in the new screw cap technology that keeps wine in its intended state.

Screwcaps were once a sign of an inexpensive wine. More modern sealing technologies have improved the performance of the screw cap. Today we see almost all wine from New Zealand, Oregon, South Africa, and Australia sealed with a screw cap. The technology is a bit more expensive on the front end because the bottles need to be manufactured to closer tolerances and with the threads on the neck. In the long run, the rarer

incidence of spoilage reduces customer pushback and added expense of replacement bottles.

Screwcaps start off as a one piece capsule that is forced onto the top of the wine bottle that is then crimped at the neck to secure it. A perforation is added so that when the top is twisted, the skirt portion on the neck will separate and the cap can be removed.

Every once in a while, it seems the perforation tool got a little dull and twisting fails to break the perforation and the whole capsule comes off. However, it is more common that the perforations are a bit stronger and it takes a strong hand to remove the cap.

The correct technique for opening a screw top is to hold the skirt portion below the cap in your left hand and the base of the bottle in your right. The last step is a bit counterintuitive but, trust me, it works. Twist the bottle in a counter clockwise direction and the cap and skirt will separate pretty easily.

To showboat a bit: Once the cap is free of the skirt, keeping holding the bottle in your right hand. Holding your left forearm parallel to the floor, place the cap on the inside of your elbow and move the bottle down your forearm toward your hand. Keep the loose cap touching your skin and by the time the bottle gets to your hand the cap will be perfectly ensconced in your left palm. Razzle dazzle!

## **Health update**

I only have good news this week. Follow-up tests and follow-up care indicate that I was very lucky to get to the hospital and start receiving care as quickly as I did. (Jeanie has a heart of gold, silver hair and a lead foot).

The prognosis is for an early and complete recovery. Part of that recovery is certainly from all the cards, e-mails, flowers and good wishes from all of you.

That said; I requested a rebate from all my suppliers this week. After all, red wine is supposed to be good for the heart. I feel like they must have been selling me the oenological equivalent of decaf. It may be a coincidence that Kryptonite now makes me a bit woozy. Go figure.

Thank you all for your warmth and concern. It is good to be doing business with such nice people and that, by far, is the best thing for anyone's heart.