

Tasting Notes

Barrel Tasting Weekend – March 2-3, 2024

Today we are tasting the 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon

Harvested early October 2022, fermented and put in French oak barrels, it is now half way through its barrel life. It will be bottled in March 2025, so the wine spends about 28 months aging in the oak barrel. 2022 was a very mild season with early bud break and an early harvest. The summer had several ups and downs in temperature which contribute to a complex flavor of this vintage. There is still a lot of blackberry and cherry to the flavor. I can smell coriander and bit of sandalwood starting to emerge along with licorice. This will be an interesting vintage to follow.

We use French oak barrels from several different coopers. Barrel makers take the wood from different forests and they grow differently depending on soil, climate, slope direction and more.

We usually buy from three different French coopers. Some impart more vanilla and almond, some more earthy flavors, coffee, cedar, chocolate and the blend is different each vintage.

This is still a young wine with a concentrated berry flavor of dark cherry and blackberry in the front of your palate, hints of licorice, laurel, bay leaves, cedar.

We rack the barrels every 6 months. In the young wine there are small particles from yeast cells, fragments of skins etc. They will slowly form sediment at the bottom of the barrels. Racking is a process where we carefully hose out the wine from a barrel, leaving only the sediment at the bottom, then cleaning the barrel and putting the wine back in. We do this 4 times during the aging time and we only need some light filtering before bottling since most have already been filtered out in this process.

Why age a wine?

There are a lot of interesting changes that can only develop if you allow the wine to age. Complex layers of flavors will develop as the fruitiness deepens in addition to nuttiness, cedar, earth, herbaceous spices, peppery spices, vanilla and many more nuances. It happens both during barrel aging as well as more slowly while bottle aging the wine. There will be more texture to the wine, or mouthfeel as we like to call it, the color will go from bright red-blue to ruby red and eventually brick red. So to experience this we need to let the wine age. The planning starts early so you have a grape and a wine that can mature well. The right grape varietal, harvested at the right time and aged in oak barrels and then given enough time in the bottle can give you incredibly rewarding flavor experiences. This is not for the impatient wine lover!

Additional Background information:

Factors that influence the aging potential of a wine

- Tannins, from grapes and oak barrels
- They act as anti-oxidants to preserve the wine
- They evolve into new flavors as the wine matures
- Higher acidity and low pH will also preserve the wine
- High alcohols will also help to preserve a wine

Stages that contribute to the taste

- Grapes growing and developing flavors
- Barrel aging creating flavors from tannins and new compounds formed
- Bottle aging which creates new flavors from reactions between tannins, alcohol and acids.

Fermentation

Fermenting with the skins means that there are a lot of tannins in the final wine. Red wines age better than white wines since the white wines ferment after their juice has been pressed and the skins are not in the juice. Cooler temperature at fermentation enhance fruitier flavors in white wines, 55F is ideal, higher temperature wines lack luster and fruit essences. Red wines fermented at 25-30C retain more of their original fruit flavors, too high temperature risk losing some of the tannins and also depresses fruit flavors.

Oak

Wine needs time to develop more flavors than what you get from the grape and from fermentation. The tannins in grapes are preservatives, but they need time to soften to taste better. Oak barrels contain another type of tannins, lignin, which add to the tannins in the wine. French oak barrels have twice as much tannins per surface unit as American oak – but is 60% more expensive. They also add different flavors. Barrels for red wine have their insides charred which adds to the flavor pallet. Oak barrels are more efficient as new from a tannin perspective, but may still be used as aging vessels when they have been used. Butter, Cedar, Spice, Nuts, Raisin, and Vanilla are flavors typically added in this process

White wine

White wines lack tannins so barrel aging helps with preservation. Chardonnay is an example of a grape which is often aged in used oak barrels. Some whites, like Riesling, have a lot of acids which allows aging. Some Riesling wines of dessert style (they have both sugar and high acidity) can age up to 100 years. Neutral barrels are what we call them when they have been used many times so very few flavors are added from the oak. Instead they help enhance the mouthfeel and sense of roundness as.

Red Wines

We use more new barrels for red wine since we want to get the tannins from the oak to interact with the tannins and other substances in the wine. The toasting of the barrel is an important component as it drives flavors of vanilla, honey, burned caramel and more. How fast or slow an oak tree grows, if it is on a northern or southern slope will also differentiate the taste influence of the barrel. Tannins in both wine and barrel add to the aging potential and flavor profile

Bottle aging

Slow natural chemical reactions in the bottle create new substances with new flavors. Fruity flavors dissipate over time and you will find new ones as the wine ages. Alcohol and acids create new compounds with their own flavors. The tannins keep creating longer and more complex molecules that taste softer on our tongue. You will start finding new flavors such as cedar, spices, nuts, raisins, smoke, chocolate, prunes, leather, earthiness, almonds, nuts but also mature fruits, banana, dried fruits. (Some flavors can evolve such as sweaty horse and stable which have long been the hallmarks of some French old Bordeaux!) The universe of interesting flavors is why wine lovers will pay enormous amounts for bottles that have been aged a long time. You could not find these flavors without the time component. You cannot use the microwave to create them!