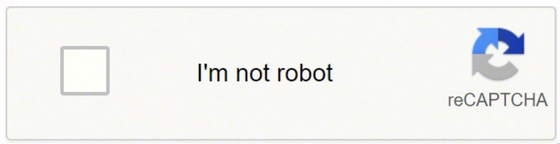

Next

How the red wine is made

Wineries make red wine today much the same way they did 6,000 years ago in Greece and Persia. Dark-colored grapes are harvested, crushed, fermented, stirred and separated from the skins by a press. Voila! Red wine.Better containers, presses and cellars have increased quality and efficiency of red wine production many times over, but it’s still essentially a simple process. Red wine production requires no cooking or ingredients besides grapes, yeast and, usually, sulfur dioxide as a preservative.Red wine is made on the skins Red wine is made like white wine, but with one major difference. Generally, it ferments with the grape skins and juice combined in a tank or vat. White wines are pressed before fermentation, separating the juice from the skins.The skin contact in red wine production allows color, flavor and textural compounds to be integrated into the juice, while the yeast converts sugar to alcohol. The skins contain most of the good stuff that gives red wine its color, while the pulp mostly provides the juice.Infographic by Eric DeFreitas Harvesting red-wine grapes and the crush Red wine grapes are ready to harvest in late summer to early fall, several weeks after the initial green color of the grapes has turned to dark red or blue-black, a period called veraison.Vineyard crews cut the grape bunches or clusters from the vines. That’s either done by hand or a self-propelled machine that shakes or slaps the grapes off their stems and collects the individual berries and juice.Delivered to the winery, winemakers can also sort out mildewed grapes, unwanted raisins, leaves and debris. Clusters then go through a destemmer/crusher that removes the whole grape berries from the stems and may squeeze them slightly to get the juice flowing. Any juice created at these stages prior to pressing is known as free run. Machine-harvested grapes are already ready to ferment. Privacy Policy Routinely, many add a measured dose of sulfur dioxide at this stage, and also later, to kill unwanted microbes and minimize oxidation. Red wine fermentation and pressing The combined juice, skins and seeds is known as must. Some winemakers cool the must for a day or two, a process called cold soaking, to extract color and flavor compounds from the skins before any alcohol is created.After this, some winemakers add commercial yeast to begin fermentation while others let the native yeast that clings to the grapes or exists in the cellar’s atmosphere start the fermentation. Either way, yeast cells come to life in the sweet solution and begin to convert the sugar into alcohol, heat and carbon dioxide.A cap of skins forms atop the must. This cap needs to be blended back into the juice at least once per day but often more during the fermentation process to keep it moist.This process releases carbon dioxide, allows oxygen uptake, speeds extraction from the skins and manages the heat, which can exceed 100ºF if not monitored.Winemakers stir the must or wet the cap by different methods. The juice can be pumped over the cap, the cap can be punched down, or the juice can be drawn off the solids and used to re-soak them (rack-and-return).Winemakers transfer the must into wine presses, which separate the skins and seeds from the wine and squeezes the skins to coax out what is known as pressed wine.How hard to press the must is a key winemaking decision. Too hard, and it brings out harsh tannins. Too soft, it might leave the wine lighter in color and texture.Getty Red wines typically mature in oak barrels Almost all red wines need to age before being bottled and sold. The process can take from a few months to a few years in big tanks, but oak barrels and vats are preferred for high-quality, traditional-style red wines.Usually, malolactic fermentation occurs during maturation, a process that converts the wine’s tart malic acid to softer lactic acid. It can occur naturally, however the winemaker can also encourage it by adding a malolactic culture.Winemakers use barrels to impart aromas, flavors and texture to the wine. New barrels give more intense spicy aromas and enhanced flavors, while neutral vessels like barrels that were used previously or containers made from concrete or clay, are valued mostly to smooth a wine’s texture.French oak barrels are about twice as expensive than American barrels, and they’re thought to lend a more complex and subtle array of spices. American white oak barrels are favored for many wines, however, for their generous vanilla and coconut nuances.Red wine is clarified during the maturation period by racking, fining and filtering. Sediments like dead yeast cells and tiny bits of grape skins settle out of red wine while it ages. These form a mucky layer at the bottom of barrels and tanks. Racking is the process of pumping or siphoning the now-clear wine off the sediment, which can be discarded.Winemakers may adjust red wines that taste too tannic or appear hazy with a process called fining that utilizes the binding abilities of egg whites, isinglass or bentonite clay. These agents gather unwanted substances and then fall to the bottom of the tank or barrel.Blending is an important step to make red wine. The winemaker can add complexity and perfect balance by blending together wine from different barrels and tanks.Getty Filtration and bottling When a red wine is mature enough to be bottled, many winemakers choose to filter it first. A coarse filtration removes extra sediment. A sterile filtration removes virtually all remaining yeast as well as microbes that might later spoil the wine.A final adjustment of sulfur dioxide is often made just before a wine is bottled. This is the process that’s changed the most since ancient times, when gourds, goatskins and clay jars were the most advanced packaging materials. Oxygen is removed from the empty bottles before they’re filled with wine, corked and labeled.Today’s winemakers have many more options, techniques and technologies than their ancient predecessors. But the object is still the same: to take sweet grapes and allow yeast to transform them into an enjoyable red wine. Red wine can vary greatly in colour, flavour, body and character depending on the grape variety used, the climate it is grown in, winemaking techniques, ageing and the general preferences of the producer. Unlike white wine, red also contains tannins due to its prolonged contact with the tannic grape skins during winemaking, and this can also vary between different grapes and wine styles. Here is a run through of exactly how red wine is made, providing an insight into the foundation techniques used in vineyards today. * Disclaimer: As an Amazon Associates, we earn commissions from qualifying purchases Related Alcohol Follow along to see how red wine is made, step-by-step, from grapes to glass. Surprisingly, not much has changed since we started making wine 8,000 years ago. How Red Wine is Made: Follow Along Step by Step Red winemaking differs from white winemaking in one important way: the juice ferments with grape skins to dye it red. Of course, there’s more to red winemaking than the color. Learning about the process reveals secrets about quality and taste that will improve your palate. So, let’s walk through each of the steps of how red wine is made from grapes to glass. Winemaking Pictures: See the process of winemaking in pictures and a video. Grapes stop ripening once their picked. Step 1: Harvest red wine grapes Red wine is made with black (aka purple) wine grapes. In fact, all the color you see in a glass of red wine comes from anthocyanin (red pigment) found in black grape skins. During the grape harvest, the most important thing to do is to pick the grapes at perfect ripeness. It’s critical because grapes don’t continue to ripen after they’ve been picked. Buy the Book - Get the Course!Get the Wine 101 Course ($50 value) FREE with the purchase of Wine Folly: Magnum Edition.Learn More Grapes picked too early may result in tart and thin-tasting wines. Grapes picked too late may result in wines that taste overly ripe and flabby. For all winemakers, the grape harvest season is the most critical (and very tense) time of year! Bolder reds like Cabernet get the stems removed before the fermentation. Step 2: Prepare grapes for fermentation After the harvest, grapes head to the winery. The winemaker decides whether or not to remove the stems or to ferment grape bunches as whole clusters. This is an important choice because leaving stems in the fermentation adds astringency (aka tannin) but also reduces sourness. As an example, Pinot Noir often ferments with whole clusters, but not Cabernet Sauvignon. During this step, grapes also receive sulfur dioxide to stop bacterial spoilage before the fermentation starts. Check out this eye-opening article about sulfites and your health. Yeasts like Saccharomyces Cerevisiae eat sugar and make alcohol. Step 3: Yeast starts the wine fermentation What happens is small sugar-eating yeasts consume the grape sugars and make alcohol. The yeasts come either from a commercial packet (just like you might find in bread making), or occur spontaneously in the juice. Spontaneous fermentation uses yeast found naturally on grapes! Commercial yeasts allow winemakers to produce very consistent wines year-in-and-out. Natural yeasts are more challenging but often result in more complex aromatics. A red wine fermentation takes about 2 weeks to finish. Step 4: Alcoholic fermentation Winemakers use many methods to tune the wine during fermentation. For example, the fermenting juice gets frequently stirred to submerge the skins (they float!). One way to do this is to pump wine over the top. The other way is to punch down the “cap” of floating grape skins with a tool that looks like a giant potato masher. Pumpovers rigorously extract lots of flavor from the grape skins and make for rich reds. Punch downs extract flavors more delicately and thus they tend to produce more subtle red wines. We can get an additional 15% more wine by pressing the skins. Step 5: Press the wine Most wines take 5–21 days to ferment sugar into alcohol. A few rare examples, such as Vin Santo and Amarone, take anywhere from 50 days to up to 4 years to fully ferment! After the fermentation, vintners drain the freely running wine from the tank and put the remaining skins into a wine press. Pressing the skins gives winemakers about 15% more wine! The creamy-chocolatey taste in wine comes from special winemaking bacteria. Step 6: Malolactic fermentation (aka “second fermentation”) As the red wine settles in tanks or barrels, a second “fermentation” happens. A little microbe feasts on the wine acids and converts sharp-tasting malic acid into creamier, chocolatey lactic acid. (The same acid you find in greek yogurt!) Nearly all red wines go through Malolactic Fermentation (MLF) but only a few white wines. One white wine we all know is Chardonnay. MLF is responsible for Chardonnay’s creamy and buttery flavors. Many red wines age in oak barrels. Step 7: Aging (aka “Elevage”) Red wines age in a variety of storage vessels including wooden barrels, concrete, glass, clay, and stainless steel tanks. Each vessel affects wine differently as it ages. Wooden barrels affect wine the most noticeably. The oak wood itself flavors the wine with natural compounds that smell like vanilla. Unlined concrete and clay tanks have a softening effect on wine by reducing acidity. Of course, the biggest thing that affects flavors in red wine is time. The longer a wine rests, the more chemical reactions happen within the liquid itself. Some describe red wines as tasting smoother and more nutty with age. Focus on texture if you have a chance to make your own wine blend. Step 8: Blending the wine Now that the wine is good and rested, it’s time to make the final blend. A winemaker blends grape varieties together or different barrels of the same grape to make a finished wine. Blending wine is a challenge because you have to use your sense of texture on your palate instead of your nose. The tradition of blending created the many famous wine blends of the world! Fining and filtering reduces the risk of bacterial spoilage. Step 9: Clarifying the wine One of the final steps of how a red wine is made is the clarification process. For this, many winemakers add clarifying or “fining” agents to remove suspended proteins in the wine (proteins make wine cloudy). It’s pretty common to see winemakers use fining agents like casein or egg whites, but there is a growing group of winemakers using bentonite clay because it’s vegan. Then, the wine gets passed through a filter for sanitation. This is important because it reduces the likelihood of bacterial spoilage. Of course, a large group of fine winemakers do not fine or filter because they believe it removes texture and quality. Whether or not that’s true is something for you to decide. “Bottle shock” happens if a wine is opened too soon after being bottled. Step 10: Bottling and labeling wines Now, it’s time to bottle our wine. It’s very important to do this step with as little exposure to oxygen as possible. A small amount of sulfur dioxide is often added to help preserve the wine. Many fine wines continue to age in bottle for years. Step 11: Bottle aging Finally, a few special wines continue to age in the winemaker’s cellar for years. In fact, if you look up different types of red wines (like Rioja or Brunello di Montalcino) you’ll discover that this step is considered essential for reserve bottlings. So, the next time you open a bottle try to figure out what went into it! Get The Winemaking Poster! Support great wine education and share this poster with friends. 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