

Video Worksheet: Most are easier, this one carries a NERD ALERT!

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Transforming Tuscany: Talking Ripeness with Stefano Chioccioli

Background: Our understanding of winegrowing and winemaking has evolved over time. For example, the definition of ripeness previously focused on sugar levels in the berries (winemakers would pull out their refractometers, see that the grapes were at 24 brix, and call in the harvest crew). Nowadays, you can't ask a winemaker about ripeness without entering into a discussion about the maturity of seeds and stems.

The goal is to achieve optimal ripeness in the key grape components including flavors, sugars, acidity, tannins, seeds and stems (and, of course, these components all ripen at different rates, though the timing can be brought closer in synch with vineyard techniques such as trellising, planting density and yield management). Achieving full ripeness can be tricky; grapes can become overripe, which some winemakers associate with raisined or overly-stewed flavors. Others associate overripeness with high alcohol and yet others with low acidity.

Gather a group of winemakers around a table to discuss "optimal" ripeness and you'll quickly realize that this is a hot (sorry) issue. To demonstrate some of the difficulty in defining optimal ripeness, here's one of my favorite fruit analogies: I prefer my bananas so ripe that they have lots of brown specks on the peel; you might prefer bananas with a touch of green. Is one of us right and the other wrong?

Why does ripeness matter? It impacts the flavors, mouthfeel/texture, balance and ageability as well as the unique identity and quality of your wine.

1. _____ management refers to how grapes are grown.
2. Controlling yields makes for more _____ flavors. There are a number of ways to accomplish this, including planting more/fewer (*circle one*) vines per hectare and _____ harvest.
3. Polyphenolics (aka phenolics or phenols) are perceived in a wine's _____ (which comes from the skins) and in a wine's _____, _____ (which come from the skins, _____ and _____).
4. Sensations associated with unripe phenolics include _____ flavors, _____ taste and a _____ mouthfeel or texture.
5. As Stefano explains, ripe polyphenolic components contribute pleasure, _____ and _____.
6. Gentle pump-overs encourage the extraction of _____, rather than bitter, polyphenols.

I hope you enjoy learning wine with these Videos and Worksheets. If you want to learn more about wine, you might like Wine Spectator School at WineSpectator.com/school where all courses are now benefits of membership. For more definitions and audio pronunciations, check out WineSpectator.com/glossary.

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