

WINEMAKING IN THE 1880S

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White wine is supposed to be the product of white grapes, although in some cases white wine is made of black grapes by drawing off the juice (or must) immediately after crushing to prevent the coloring of the must, which takes place as soon as fermentation commences.

White grapes are crushed in a tank

The must be drawn off and pumped into an open tank. In a few hours fermentation will take place and increase rapidly. A thick scum of yeast matter in an apparent state of ebullition appears on the surface. Heavy extraneous matter, such as particles of earth, dust and sulphur settle to the bottom of the tank.

This stage of fermentation, which may be 24 hours more or less after the tank has been filled with must, I ascertain the amount of sugar with the saccharometer remaining unconverted into spirit. When the scale shows about 10-15 degrees of saccharine, I remove the surface scum and draw the fermenting liquid into puncheons or pipes, filling them to within eight inches of the bung, leaving a space for fermenting over.

When to terminate the fermentation

Two or three days from the time of transferring to the puncheons will be sufficient to terminate the fermentation, when casks can be filled with wine taken from one of the same kind. The filling process is repeated as soon as the wine is quiet and commencing to clear, then the casks can be bunged and allowed to rest until ready for racking.

By this process I have succeeded to put through a large lot of wine, which, at the present (four weeks from picking the grapes) is perfectly dry and almost crystal clear. It should be observed that the faucet from which the fermenting wine is drawn should be two inches above the bottom of the tank to prevent the sediment from flowing into the cask. This way of handling the grapes, simple as it is, has many points in its favor:

1. The must from the crusher or press is thoroughly assimilated and uniform, the press wine furnishing the necessary tannin to the whole batch.
2. The wine goes to the casks the same stage of fermentation and the same temperature each cask completing its fermentation at the same time.
3. Most of the extraneous matter, such as dust, sulphur, etc, adhering to the grapes at the time of crushing is separated and removed from the must before the fermentation is completed.

The fermentation of red wines

In ordinary years, is not more difficult than that of white wines has this vintage (for some reasons yet known) proved a puzzle by the oldest and most practical wine makers and upset many theories which had heretofore been accepted as correct.

The grapes being crushed in tanks as usual, whether at a high or low temperature, have in a short time developed a most extraordinary fermentation in some cases the temperature of the mash running as high as 100 degrees Fahrenheit, a degree of heat considered fatal to a complete fermentation and will almost invariably kill the fermenting germs and leave the wine sweet, containing, say from two to ten degrees unfermented sugar. It is a condition so abnormal that, if left to itself, will result in what is commonly known as milk sour (lactic acid) wine.

Once the fermentation is arrested in a tank

I immediately drain the wine off, pumping it into an empty vat. The pomace is pressed and the wine expressed is pumped also into the same vat. It may contain five or ten degrees unfermented sugar, but the same process is practiced. I then crush fresh grapes over this unfermented wine in quantity equal to the wine already in the tank. In the course of a few hours new fermentation takes place, the mash (or must?) is thoroughly stirred three times a day and at the end of the week at most the fermentation will be over and dry.

While many other methods have been suggested, none have provided as satisfactory results.

I condemn no process that may have been successful for my neighbors. There are many ways in which nature may be assisted in the matter of wine fermentation. I simply throw out there these few suggestions in the hope of benefitting beginners who may be puzzled to find a way out of their present difficulties.