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From Vine To Glass: The Process Of Making Wine

By Angela McLaughlin – Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Oct 06, 2016

After a long day, many of us just want to sit back and relax with a glass of wine. Being situated right in the middle of prime wine country means there are a lot of options for wine fanatics. We are lucky to live in a place and time where the selection is almost never-ending, and there is always something or someplace new to explore.

Knowing the amount of time and dedication that goes into making a glass of wine may surprise some of us, and may make us appreciate it that much more.

It all starts on the farm, where dedicated growers, or viti-culturists, place their time and energy into producing a bountiful crop of healthy fruit. When harvest season rolls around, figuring out the perfect time to harvest is a sensitive process. Determining whether the grapes are ready to be picked depends upon a number of different factors, from ripeness to weather patterns. The winemaker will test the grapes, monitoring sugar and pH levels, as well as other things, and determine when the harvest should take place.

Methods for collecting grapes from the vine differ from vineyard to vineyard. Some large operations choose to use mechanical harvesters, which can cover more ground at a faster rate than a group of hand-pickers. Many operations choose to use the traditional handpicking method for collection, where groups of people go into the field with clippers and selectively remove the grapes from the vine. There are pros and cons to each option, and every vineyard has to make its own decision as to what will work best in each situation.

Jennifer Lane, who owns the Pamo Valley Winery tasting room on Main Street, prefers to harvest by hand, and I was lucky enough to participate in one of the harvests. With Ramona's nearly perfect climate for grape growing, many of Ramona's vineyards use these locally grown grapes. Lane says that though they grow many of their own estate varietals, they also acquire grapes from other local vineyards, making all of their grapes 100 percent locally sourced.

Getting up close and personal with the hand-picking process was quite the experience. The day started early, before the heat of the sun could slow us down. We met at Escalona Vineyards to harvest a crop of Cabernet Franc grapes.

Armed with buckets and clippers, we scoured our way through the vines, clipping off the luscious bunches. No leaves were allowed in the buckets, and as little stem as possible was to be left attached to the grape clusters. We trimmed off all the "raisins" and any unripe grapes before dropping prime fruit into the buckets.

"Harvesting by hand allows you to inspect the fruit you are picking and make wise decisions about what you want and what you will leave behind," says Lane. "A machine would not be able to pick quality fruit – for example, if there was mold, unripe grapes or bird damage on a cluster – a machine would pick everything, whereas we would drop the unwanted fruit."

After a good morning of teamwork, we had completed our task and set out to weigh the product of our labors. We ended up collecting 1,232 pounds of grapes!

"Harvesting by hand is a fun way to get people together and involved in the process, while at the same time getting the job



Rita Mirales has participated in almost all of Pamo Valley Winery's harvests this year. She and her husband, Rick, also help with bottling activities at the winery.

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done, Ó says Lane.

The harvest is just the first step in the long process from vine to glass.

Lane says that once the grapes are harvested, they are brought back to the winery where they are crushed and de-stemmed. The next day, yeast is added and the fermentation process begins, lasting between five and 10 days.

"Once all the sugars have been converted to alcohol and the wine is determined Ódry, Ó it is ready to be pressed, Ó says Lane. "The pressing process is where you press the juice off the skins. The wine juice is then transferred by pump to settling drums, allowing all the sediment to sink to the bottom. The wine is allowed to settle anywhere from 10 to 14 days. Ó

But wait, there Ós even more to the process.

"The wine is then racked off of the sediment into oak barrels, where it will rest anywhere from one to three years. During the aging process, wine is often tested to make sure nothing bad is happening in the barrel. Wine is topped up about every few months, and sulfites are added to keep bacteria from occurring. The wine is also racked off every six to 10 months and transferred into a different barrel. Ó

For Lane, making wine is a family endeavor.

"While Pamo Valley Winery Ós harvesting crews are out and about, picking grapes in the vineyards, my husband, Jason Lane, mother, Sharon Uran, and stepfather, Jeff Uran, are continuously hard at work behind the scenes at the winery, operating the weighing, crushing and pressing activities. Ó

That Ós a lot of time and dedication put into making wine! I, for one, will no longer take my glass of wine for granted.

"There is a lot of blood, sweat and tears that go into making a bottle of wine, Ó says Lane. "I love that you can turn fruit from a vine that you personally planted by hand into a nice bottle of wine that is shared amongst friends and family. Ó

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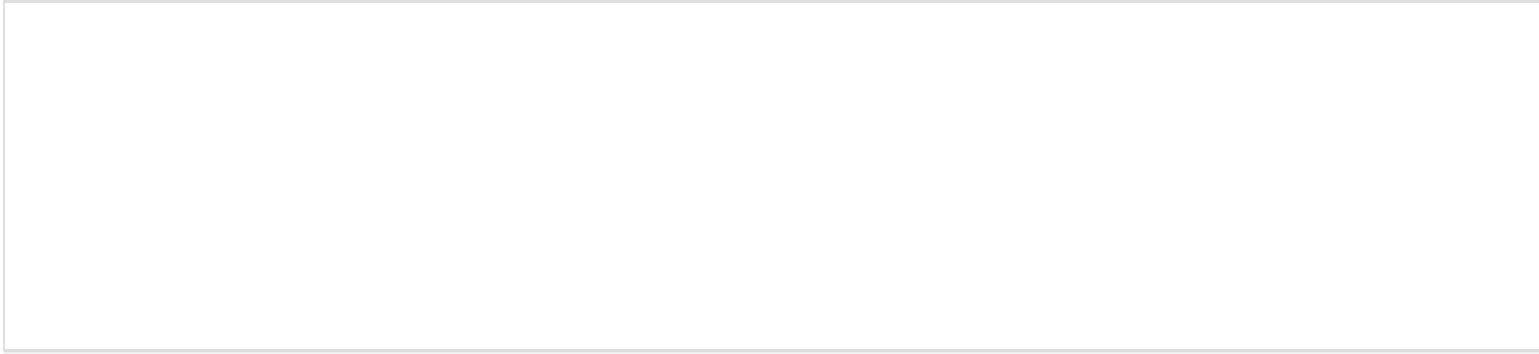
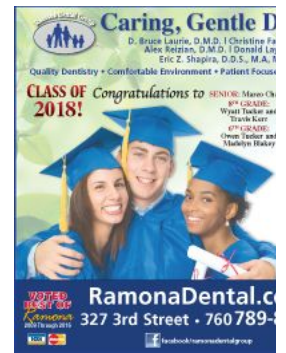
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