



De nombreux vins, J'adore la différence mais je la comprends

(Wines are many. Love the differences, but understand them)

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In the universe of drink, wine is a thing, but within wine there is diversity – differences which we love. Usually, I describe one variety of wine, or one grape, or one phase of wine making in detail. By looking at the same aspect, side by side, across the wide range of wine types, it helps me to appreciate the difference and gain depth of understanding. Red vs white vs rose' are broad differences. Even within each of these there are many differences based on grape, region, and style. So, I want to start at the beginning – in deep winter when the vineyard is stark and brown – when you wouldn't think the dormant vines would ever come to life again. This is when pruning is done. Or even earlier with vine selection, planting, spacing and trellising. Then let's see how far through the vigneron's year we can get. Seemingly dead vines come to life with bud break (so no mystery that early Christians linked the Easter resurrection to the juice of their fruit). Then on to flowering, canopy control, cluster thinning to control yield, veraison, ripening, picking, pressing (for white) or stemmer/crusher (for red), and then maceration, fermentation, barrels, secondary fermentations (yeast and bacterial malolactate), and preparation for bottling, and finally bottling and closures. OMG, this is going to turn into a multi-month project!



Let's start with Winter. Remember in the early 20th century America's wine industry suffered "winter" caused by the double death knell of prohibition and the great depression. Vineyards abandoned or replanted as orchards, and the whole idea that wine made the meal was lost! And then America was attacked (Dec 11, 1941) and the "Greatest Generation" arose, won the War and returned to rebuild our economy! But Americans had to re-learn wine, both its making and its best use and matching with food.



Vineyards were reborn and new wineries grew, first and famously in California's Napa and Sonoma Counties, guided by UC Davis Prof Maynard Amerine. Californians planted as he taught, widely spaced vines at 8 ft intervals in rows spaced 10 ft apart, and believed his promise that vines grafted onto the rootstock "AxR" would forever be resistant to the Phylloxera root louse (which had devastated "own rooted" vinifera vines). Wrong on both counts. Turns out that vines like more dense plantings. Vineyards needed to replant to vines at 4 ft intervals and rows only 7 ft wide. Oh well, they had to replant anyway as Phylloxera mutated and were able to attack "AxR".



In Washington, a decade or two behind, wineries began to proliferate under the early guidance of Professor Walter J. Clore (WSU – Go Cougs!) and fortunately avoided many of California's early planting errors. However, in the cooler climate, phylloxera was not an issue so vines were planted on "own root". But now new vineyards are on newly developed resistant root stock as phylloxera show the power of diseases to mutate and defeat man's remedies. Today those UC Davis and WSU are among the most respected wine schools.

And grapes are planted with 4 ft vine spacing in rows 7 ft apart, and a variety of resistant root stock is peppered about a region so only a portion of vines become susceptible to phylloxera at any time.

Wine societies like our own SES sprang up as places where the people could learn about wine and food. Members like our late program chair Frank Zahnizer, and others like him who had military service in Europe, shared wine knowledge they gained there.

We tasted wines with food to learn pairing. And America's "Wine Winter" has blossomed through a glorious "Spring" to a fruitful "Summer". This was illustrated to me when Ernesto Gallo died. He and Julio always stayed at the Florence Hotel il Principe (which is also Julie and my hotel there). I e-mailed the matriarch of this family hotel to ensure she knew of Ernesto's passing and to extend my sympathy. She replied that every single Florentine knew, and mailed me a copy of Florence Newspaper. The entire edition was filled of stories of the Gallo Brothers. There were two themes: 1) the Gallos had restored wine to the American table and 2) having left North Italy in poverty, they worked hard, built a wine empire, and exemplify the "American Dream".



So now we have resurrected wine in America, we know the vines, now mostly on diverse types of grafted phylloxera root stock and planted with dense spacing as has mostly been done "forever" in Europe.



Next month we will tackle pruning of dormant vines in winter, and trellising styles, and how they may vary with different grape varieties. Love those differences, and we'll strive to better understand them, and help make vineyard and winery visits more understandable.



TO BE CONTINUED IN THE AUGUST WINEMINDER!