

SNOW ON WINE



Smoke Taint

After the “joy “of breathing and tasting wild fire smoke, who wants a “sensory flashback” from sniffing and sipping wine “Tainted” by smoke. The ‘dirty’, ‘ashtray’, ‘campfire’, or ‘burnt’ flavors described by those who taste Smoke Taint in wine, occurs because grape skins absorb noxious Smoke residue. In attempting to save its seeds (the vine’s “*family jewels*”) it binds the noxious residue to sugars. However, during fermentation, and during bottle aging, the smelly noxious stuff is released again.

Tom Collins and the WSU Viticulture and Enology team are actually tenting and smoking grape vines, trying to provide knowledge:

- Of when smoke is a danger, due to fire nearness and the duration and density of smoke;
- At what point in grape development smoke absorption is most likely to occur;
- Of grape handling -- cleaning grapes hasn’t worked, but different yeast strains can reduce or increase smoke taint, and aging on the “lees” can help remove Smoke Taint;
- Of how to use various filtering and purification techniques to remove Smoke Taint without taking out the flavors we love.

Rick Hamman, viticulturist for Hogue Farms, and chair of the Washington Wine Commission Wine Research Advisory Committee, says “there is little the grower can do,” unless grapes are ready and can be harvested before smoke arrives, as they were last year in much of Sonoma. Rick also wonders how different some Smoke Taint may be from wine aged in highly toasted barrels. He says that no comment or complaint of Smoke Taint has come from any winery purchasing his grapes or from consumers, although he believes that Smoke problems will continue and may increase.

Want to know more? Jeff recommends the following:

- 1) “Grapes of Fire,” The Spokesman-Review, Spokane, WA, September 8, 2018, pp 1, 8.
- 2) “Smoke Gets in Your Wine,” Washington State Magazine (magazine.wsu.edu), Summer 18, vol 17 no. 3, p 15.
- 3) Tom Collins, “A Note on Smoke Taint – 2017,” Washington State University - Viticulture and Enology Extension News (VEEN), Fall 2017, pp 2,3.
- 4) Jim Harbertson, Thomas Henick-Kling, Markus Keller and Michelle Moyer, “A Note on Smoke Taint,” VEEN, Fall 2012, p 10.