

21 DAYS TO WINE: DAY 9

Sweet Wine Versus Dry Wine

WINE: Raeburn Russian River Chardonnay 2017

SCENTS: Banana, White grapes, Butterscotch pudding, Caramel candy, Toasted nuts

SUPPLIES: A white napkin or piece of white paper (to observe), SPRITE or similar sugary soda, or even fruit juice

21 DAYS TO WINE

REVIEW

In DAYS 1-8 we have covered quite a bit, including but not limited to:

- How the olfactory sense works
- How to train your nose
- How to describe aromas
- How wine gets its color
- How to evaluate consistency and effervescence
- Aromatic, semi-aromatic, and neutral grape varieties
- What this can tell you about the **grape variety, climate, winegrowing** and **winemaking**

I encourage you to watch the episodes again, download the class notes and send me your questions in the comment section.

SWEET VERSUS DRY WINE

What makes a wine sweet versus dry? This can be confusing. Wines can have all kinds of sweet aromas like ripe and tropical fruit or caramel or chocolate. The nose is connected to the palate, but taste and smell are two distinctive senses.

This is confusing and it takes a lot of practice to feel comfortable evaluating and describing wines in terms of sweet and dry.

RESIDUAL SUGAR

The key is sugar, residual sugar to be exact. Residual sugar is the amount of sugar left over after alcoholic fermentation.

As you know, during alcoholic fermentation, yeast feeds on sugar, the byproducts being alcohol and CO₂. The amount of residual sugar depends on the ripeness of the grapes and the winemaking process.

The more sugar there is to start, the greater chance you have for more alcohol and/or more residual sugar in the end. The **ultimate** result depends on the winemaker.

HOW DOES RESIDUAL SUGAR TRANSLATE IN WINETASTING?

We know that our sense of smell affects our ability to taste, but the perception of sweetness on your tongue is actually a physio-chemical reaction. It's not a flavor. Taste buds pick up on sugar, our noses pick-up on sweet aromas.

More Sugar = More Potential Alcohol

Alcohol is volatile, as are aromatic compounds. If your wine began as sugar-stacked juice, chances are it will be higher in alcohol and you will likely notice more intense aromas.

Ripe Grapes = Glycerol

As we discussed on **Day 6** [Viscosity], riper grapes contribute to the presence of glycerol in wine, which feels silkier and smooth on the palate. Wines with more residual sugar are more likely to feel look and feel like honey when you swirl them around your glass and inside your mouth.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY WINE IS SWEET OR DRY?

Sweetness is a scale, but unless your wine is labeled as a dessert wine or a sweet wine, or includes an indication from the Sparkling Wine Sweetness Labeling system, you should assume it is a **dry** wine.

That doesn't mean it cannot have rich, ripe and even sweet fruity aromas.

CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING SUGAR LEVELS

- Doux = more than 50 grams of sugar per liter
- Demi-Secx = 32-50 grams of sugar per liter
- Secx = 17-32 grams of sugar per liter
- Extra Dryxx = 12-17 grams of sugar per liter
- Brutx = less than 12 grams of sugar per liter
- Extra Brutx = 0-6 grams of sugar per liter
- Brut Nature, Pas Dosé, and Dosage Zérox = less than 3 grams

ACIDITY AND SWEETNESS

A wine can be both acidic and sweet. Precious aged Rieslings smell, taste, and feel intoxicatingly sweet and silky, but they finish with a cleansing tingle of acidity that allows them to age for so long, and keeps them from tasting cloying. You can describe these wines as intensely aromatic or very sweet with a crisp, balanced finish.

THE SPRITE TEST

Describing wine takes time. Until you have tasted hundred of wines, and ideally several side by side, it's hard to talk about sugar confidently.

Try this experiment. Open a can of Sprite or similarly sugary beverage. Sprite contains approximately **107 grams** of sugar per liter. Grape Juice contains **140 grams** per liter!

Pour yourself a glass of wine and try them side-by-side.

The most important thing to remember is that **fruity, sweet aromas do not always equal sweet wines**. You can certainly describe one wine has having a bit more residual sugar than another, but the category is still **dry**.

CHARDONNAY

PRONUNCIATION: Shar-Dough-Nay

Chardonnay is consistently among the top five most planted grape varieties in the world. It produces white wines and is amenable to a variety of winemaking styles. While you may think of Chardonnay as having quite distinctive aromas, it is considered a neutral grape variety, which means it takes on the character of the surrounding area, climate, as well as winemaking techniques like oak aging or secondary fermentation (sparkling wines).

Chardonnay is an incredibly versatile and resilient grape. The same grape variety produces bone dry and mineral driven Chablis (White Burgundy), tropical-fruit packed, buttery bouquets in the Central Coast of California, cool green and sleek versions in New Zealand and northern Italy, and it is one of the principle grapes of the Champagne blend (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier).

A NOTE ON "TYPICAL" CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAY

Not all California Chardonnay is bursting with tropical fruit notes and aged in oak to the point that it smells like caramel candy. It's simply a style that has seen massive success on the market throughout the United States.

The California AVAS (Grape-growing and production areas) vary tremendously in microclimate, soil types and winemaking styles. If you like your Chardonnay slimmer and crisper, more mineral and minus the oak, ask your server or wine shop owner for a recommendation.

RUSSIAN RIVER AVA

The Russian River Valley is part of Sonoma Country. It was established in 1983 as an AVA (American Viticultural Area) for its distinctive geographical and climatic characteristics. The AVA covers a portion of River Valley that curls southwest with approximate borders being Healdsburg in the North and Santa Rosa and Sebastopol in the South.

Volcanic and sandstone layers, the result of ancient tectonic plate shifts in the area, make up a soil type called *Goldridge* in parts of the Russian River Valley that bestows unique fruit qualities in popular varieties Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Alluvial (flood) zones create a complex variety soil types throughout, including clay deposits from the Sonoma Mountains. The area is known for a cooling fog that blows in from the Pacific and burns off during the day. The gradual warming allows for a steady ripening of the vines and ultimately healthy, juicy grapes.

Chardonnay and Pinot Noir make up the majority of production in the AVA, but there is plenty of experimentation with other varieties like Syrah, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, and a host of others.



my notes

TASTING NOTES

LOOK: Yellow gold and glinting

SMELL: Complex and distinctive fruit notes of banana and white grapes, Oak notes of butterscotch pudding, caramel candy, toasted nuts

TASTE: Springy, yet rich on the palate. Mostly balanced with a long fruity finish

DISCUSS

This is a very clean iteration of the oak-aged Chardonnay. The fruit is sweet, yet fresh, and the palate is balanced, though the overall impression is fruity-forward. Pair with roasted potato salad, grilled, BBQ chicken, or lightly dressed lobster salad.

Cheers!
ANNIE

WINE NOTES

WINERY

Raeburn takes its name from the Olde English, for 'a stream where one goes to drink.' Owner, Derek Benham grew up immersed in nature. In summers he worked in his family's fields and accompanied his mother on long hikes and birdwatching excursions. He entered the winegrowing and production industry in the 1970s. Raeburn is a tribute his mother and all the earth offers. The winery is certified sustainable and runs a water-efficient system that collect rainwater. They lovingly produce Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and a rosé made in a Provençal-style blend with Pinot Noir.

WINEMAKING

Hand-harvested Chardonnay grapes are crushed and barrel fermented in French and Hungarian oak (with 25% in steel to maintain balance). Malolactic fermentation on 75% of wine (a process that reduces the sensation of acidity, hence the "creaminess").



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