

THE ULTIMATE WINE EXPERIENCE

Making your own wine is becoming a popular passion for enophiles.

BY GARY C. PAVLIS, PH. D., C.W.J.

In previous columns, we have discussed how to enjoy wine more fully by using one's eyes and nose as well as taste buds. We have talked about the art of pairing wine with food; we have learned the benefits of cellar-ing wine, even for the novice wine drinker; and we have learned that New Jersey wineries are making some excellent wine.

This is all valuable information for wine lovers, but at this point I'd like to discuss the ultimate wine enjoyment. First, however, I should warn you that what I am about to tell you can develop into a passion, one that could result in a change in your reading habits, your vacation destinations, and the amount of space available in your home. This passion could make you quit your job, buy a tractor, and see your kids' feet dyed permanently purple.

What is this ultimate, possibly life-changing, wine enjoyment? It is making and drinking wine you have made yourself. I have met hundreds of home winemakers in New Jersey and the love of making wine is growing by leaps and bounds. Some make wine for the reward of pouring their own at meals or because of the reported health benefits of moderate wine consumption. Others make wine because they love seeing their name on the bottle. But most people make wine simply for the fun of it.

Never has winemaking been so popular—or easy. The first thing you will need is grapes, or at least grape juice. Both are readily available in New Jersey. We have over 40 wineries in this state and many sell grapes to home winemakers. In addition, there are wine supply businesses that sell grapes and juice to aspiring winemakers, and many offer winemaking classes as well. For example, Gino Pinto Inc. in Hammonton has supplied grapes from California and Chile to local winemakers for years and recently started to offer classes on how to make wine. The grape varieties available to home winemakers are quite amazing. If you want Cabernet from Napa, or Pinot Noir from Oregon, or Zinfandel from Amador, you can find it.

Making wine is quite easy (it's getting the taste and other qualities right that's tricky). White wine is fer-

mented in five-gallon glass jugs called carboys and red wines are fermented in open-top containers (a new garbage can works great). Once the fermentation is over and the wine stops bubbling, you wait for it to settle and then bottle it. At that point, you get to put your name on the bottle. Many people design their own label on their computer.

Of course, to do this at home, you'll need some equipment to crush and press the grapes. The old-fashioned method was to crush the grapes with your feet, but it would probably be better to buy a wine press since your friends might balk at drinking a wine you made with your feet. So, you'll need a grape crusher, a press, some five-gallon glass carboys and some new garbage cans to get started. I live in Atlantic County and have a great winemaking supply store right near me—the Richland General Store on Route 40, which has everything the home wine-maker could possibly need. In addition, the Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension county office in Mays Landing has a free pamphlet on winemaking, available by calling 609-625-0056.

But if you are a hands-on kind of person who wants to first explore winemaking before investing in equipment, or you're looking for some friendly guidance, check out a wine room. These relatively new personal winemaking facilities have all the equipment you could ever need, as well as grapes from the finest vineyards and barrels for aging. All you do is show up and decide what kind of wine you want to make. You get to crush the grapes, rack the juice, bottle the wine and label the bottles, and the best part is they do all the cleanup. I've done this with a group of friends and it is a lot of fun.

I have tasted and judged many homemade wines. Some are very good; some are very bad—but all, no doubt, were fun to make. There is something great about serving your dinner guests a wine that you made. In addition, there are many amateur wine competitions in this state and nationally. Winning medals for wine that you have made can be a big thrill. I once made a Riesling that won the gold medal in the



national American Wine Society competition and was named the best amateur Riesling in the United States. That was 20 years ago and I'm still bragging about it. Wish I could remember how I made that wine.

Winemaking is a little more complicated than I am able to convey in this space, so if you would like to read more and find good references on the subject, visit the website of the American Wine Society at americanwinesociety.org. Many of its members started making wine in their garage and have now gone on to open their own commercial wineries.

Whether you make it at home or go to one of the many wine rooms in the state, remember, winemaking can develop into a real passion. As I said earlier, over time, you will fill your basement and free space with fermenting and aging carboys and your vacation trips will be to places where wine is made: California, Italy and France will become your destinations of choice. So before you start making wine, be prepared. A winery could be in your future. ☺

Wine Supplies:

- Corrado's Home Beer and Winemaking Center, 400 Getty Avenue, Clifton, 973-340-0848, corradosmarket.com
- Gino Pinto Inc., 373 South White Horse Pike, Hammonton, 609-561-8199, ginopinto.com.
- Oceans of Wine Supply Inc., Toms River, 732-240-4993, oceansofwine.com
- Richland General Store, Richland, 856-697-1720

Wine Rooms:

Although most wine schools are "quiet" in terms of classes during the Winter months (until fresh grapes become available in the Spring), many offer a variety of private and special events and tastings, along with gift certificates and class reservations.

- Gino's School of Wine, Hammonton 609-561-8199, ginopinto.com
- The Wine Room at Manalapan, Manalapan, 732-792-7007, atthewineroom.com
- The Wine Room of Cherry Hill, Cherry Hill, 856-424-WINE (9463), thewineroom.com
- Make Wine With Us, Wallington, 201-876-WINE (9463), makewinewithus.com
- Winemakers of Somerset, Bound Brook, 732-271-9463, njwinemakers.com
- Wines by the Class, Sommelier Institute of New Jersey, Fair Haven, 732-859-7414, winesbytheclass.com



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