

PEAY VINEYARDS

SPRING RELEASE

ISSUE 31



NOW *THAT'S* HIGH QUALITY! - ANDY PEAY

High quality: An adjective that has become almost meaningless due to its misuse and over-use by marketers. But, we all have some sense what high quality means in almost every category whether it is a consumer good, a service, or an experience. Advertising campaigns attempt to define the features that promise high quality for a specific product, but time and direct experience determine whether a company is, indeed, making a high quality product. Or not. The emperor can only walk nude down the road so far until someone inevitably turns to the person next to him and says, “presumptuous for little old me to pass judgment on a person of such high regard, but I believe that man is naked and stark-raving mad.” And that is good news. A claim of high quality is easy to make but to achieve it takes time, vision, and extraordinary effort.

What is high quality? In a consumer good, it is often a combination of the quality of the base material and the level of craftsmanship used to shape it into a product. For a handbag, how rare and fine the material is and how it has been treated, cut, and sewn into a bag. In the design process there is a consideration for its functionality while shaping a form that appeals to human aesthetics. You can touch the leather, inspect the stitching, and admire the way the bag balances on your arm or shoulder. Not just anyone can make a Prada quality handbag. Those leather makers have been perfecting their craft for centuries. Same goes for the sewers and dyers. Of course, high-end knock-offs can get fairly close to the Prada bag but over half the value has nothing to do with the cost of material or manufacturing. So why the premium price? Prada has a reputation built over years of making singular bags that sustain exacting standards and as such a premium has accrued in the Prada bag over a bag of equivalent features. This is their brand equity premium. It took 100 years to build this reputation and it is very valuable. The consumer knows it will be a superior bag and is willing to spend “extra” as the investment has proven to meet their claims of high quality. All of the above is true for wine as well but due to the nature of wine - how it is packaged, sold and consumed - it can be more complicated and confusing for consumers to assess at the point of purchase if they are buying a high quality wine and, even after they have consumed a wine, whether it was high quality. Why? What is high quality in wine and why can it be tricky for consumers to tell when they have experienced it?



A quick aside here. I don't begrudge anyone the success they have achieved with a wine they make. It is a hard business often driven by people passionate for what they are doing regardless of their skill or level of experience. If folks like their wine, well, that is great for everyone involved. But I don't think this “open-mindedness” means we are not able to parse out what high quality means when it comes to wine and to understand why it can—in fact, must—take a long time for a wine to gain stature as a wine of high quality. So, okay, now that we have that established...

Quality in wine must first be associated with taste. Affects of alcohol – whether desirable or not - are all fairly equal across wines (alcohol ranges from 11-17% and the affect is the same as a percent of any alcohol by volume.) Of course, what tastes good is subjective and highly contentious. A lot of code swapping goes on as marketers jockey to define high quality in wine by associating certain flavors, winemaking techniques, and regions with good taste. This is necessary to some degree as you can't usually taste a wine before buying it. Even if you can, tasting good is only part of what often makes someone put a wine in the “high quality” category. With wine, especially a luxury good like higher end wine, we are dealing with fashion. Wine is not simply a beverage to many but can be a symbol of good taste, sophistication, and personal achievement, oftentimes signaled by a high price. A high price can be a shorthand way of letting consumers know that this bottle is worth this much money or it would all be in a warehouse gathering dust. In fact, it may be, but that would be illogical so consumers assume that either there are a lot of fools out there or that they are dullards and more experienced and sophisticated wine drinkers think this is a high quality wine even if they personally do not “get it” and maybe they will if they drink more of it. Insecurity and

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SLOW FOOD FOR A FAST WORLD

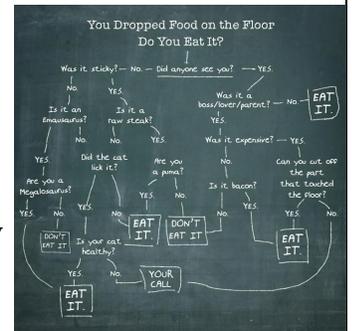
WINEGROWER — VANESSA WONG

I am standing in the middle of the kitchen puzzling over what is normally a very simple act: preparing a bagel and cream cheese. It is ordinarily a task that hardly elicits any thought save for perhaps the question of “plain or poppy seed?” But I just had knee surgery for an ACL reconstruction and standing on crutches before the refrigerator with cream cheese I strategize my next maneuver. In a series of pirouettes on my good leg, I spin 180 degrees and move between the microwave and the cutting board to get through the first step of thawing the frozen bagel and slicing it into halves. The next step of getting it to the toaster proves to be a greater challenge for carrying anything in my hands or arms is mostly impossible since my arms are otherwise engaged with the crutches for ambulation.

I briefly consider putting the bagel in my sweater pocket. Won't fit. Or atop my head? No can do. So I resign myself to advancing the bagel like a chess piece along the countertops in between intervals of crutch-stepping my way to the toaster.

In plotting my course, I deliberate whether I should bring the cream cheese with me en route to the toaster or backtrack to the cutting board after the bagel is toasted. Such are the stratagems I ponder over this very simple process. Alas, remembering I am unable to convey no more than the bagel halves I decide that although it required more steps, I would need to bring the bagel back to the cream cheese after the toasting step. This, however, was unpredictably a harder task for I had not foreseen that the toasting made the bagel too hot to handle. Trying not to despair, I gingerly pick up the hot bagel half and resort to flinging it Frisbee style across the kitchen aiming for the cutting board where the cream cheese awaited. The first half lands with success but the second half did something I have difficulty accomplishing with a real Frisbee: a ground bounce, or in this case a countertop bounce and it ricochets off and over the other side of the counter. Sighing I think to myself, “I should have chosen poppy seed — more friction”.

So with twenty extra laborious and limped steps to retrieve the wayward bagel, I manage to spread the cream cheese and now puzzle over how to transport the now ready bagel to the dining table. Plate or no plate--that is the question. I decide to forego the plate since it required more steps to the cabinet and back. I was pleased to find that the bagel halves stuck together agreeably and conveniently with the cream cheese in between so I could hold it through the bagel hole looped between thumb and index finger and still hold onto the crutch with the remaining fingers. That pleasure was short-lived upon discovering that handling a prepared bagel risked getting cream cheese on my hands. Not ordinarily a problem but tragic when cream-cheesy crutch handles need to be vigorously avoided. Very nearly giving up and wiping my hands on my pant leg, I sigh and shuffle my way over to and from the paper towels. With wiped off and clean hands I resume my task and proceed to the dining table when a mere two steps from my destination, I felt the agony of defeat as one bagel half slid from my grasp and onto the floor. “Noooooo!” I cry out at the perverseness of this whole episode of Operation Bagel. Not to be completely vanquished I employ the 5-second rule and pick the bagel off the floor and thank the breakfast gods for not allowing the Murphy's Law of the buttered side falling face down to happen. Finally arriving to the table with bagel I realize I needed to repeat the whole process but this time for a cup of coffee!



I found that when I eventually was able to sit and partake of my hard earned breakfast I realized it had taken me a full 25 minutes to accomplish something that ordinarily takes just 5 minutes--so many calculated and painstaking steps for such a simple operation. It made me appreciate each step and all the thought, deliberation and planning that went into each step, however small and seemingly insignificant. Bagel and cream cheese is not normally a slow food but with my temporary disability, I did have to get meditative to appreciate it with this Zen-like perspective.

The Slow Food movement started in the late 1980's as a way to counter people's insidious enslavement to the speed of the "Fast Life": the frenzy we humans mistake for efficiency and productivity. It is the philosophy that we should not only take the time to fully enjoy and appreciate food in our lives but also seek out and support the foods and the producers of these foods that likewise embrace this philosophy in their conscientious and considered farming, and their production and preservation of these foods. There are Slow Food chefs and restaurants that adhere to the "Slow Food manifesto" that strive to preserve local food traditions and stem the tide of dwindling interest in traditional gastronomy that falls out of favor or becomes forgotten for faster or otherwise more efficient fare. There is even an "Ark of Taste", an endangered species list as it were, that designates and catalogs fruits, vegetables, grains, livestock and

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THE 2018 SPRING RELEASE

We are releasing the first wines from the 2016 vintage along with our first 2015 syrah, *La Bruma*. As a whole, 2016 was a moderate growing season without any extreme weather events and was the fifth very good vintage in a row for us on the Coast. The lack of drama allowed Vanessa and Nick to focus on fine tuning the various blocks of grapes on the estate vineyard and, as a result, the wines are focused and increasingly expressive of our vineyard. Most of them are quite approachable despite their youth and all will reward any aging in your cellar.

2016 PEAY VINEYARDS *ESTATE* VIOGNIER

Usually Viognier is laden with a fruit bowl of tropical aromas and can be fat and unctuous on the palate. Our 2016 *Estate* Viognier is unique among wines made from this variety and instead delivers a bright and mineral driven wine that enraptures almost all who try it (even the avowed haters of this variety.) The nose on the 2016 *Estate* features candied ginger, baked apple, orange blossom, and Satsuma mandarin aromas. The mouth is direct and focused with great nerve and tension. There is no fat in the mid palate and the long finish emphasizes a mineral, chalky and salty tang that leaves you salivating. 125 cases

2016 PEAY VINEYARDS *SONOMA COAST* CHARDONNAY

We have had a string of increasingly great Chardonnay vintages culminating in the superb 2016 Chardonnays. Ninety percent of the 2016 *Sonoma Coast* Chardonnay is made from barrels of our *Estate* Chardonnay plus ten percent from *Searby Vineyard* farmed by Charlie Heintz in Occidental. The nose on the 2016 *Sonoma Coast* Chardonnay is quite pretty featuring lemon merengue, white peach, ginger, and lemon thyme notes. The mouth confirms the nose though there is a pronounced lime and Granny Smith apple fruit profile that delightfully lights a path from the front of the palate to the finish. The wine has medium weight across the mid palate and also finishes with a salty, briny flavor on a clean, crisp, and long finish. Superb to enjoy now and will age beautifully due to the wonderful acidity and freshness of the style. 475 cases

2016 PEAY VINEYARDS *SONOMA COAST* PINOT NOIR

The *Sonoma Coast* bottling includes a majority of the 15 Pinot noir clones we grow on the 35 acre Pinot noir vineyard and over-delivers for its price point. It deftly captures the signature savory, earth, floral and fruit profile that makes the West Sonoma Coast and Peay Pinot noirs unique. The bright nose on the 2016 *Sonoma Coast* Pinot noir is a knock-out featuring spice-laden ginger bread and tobacco leaf aromas accenting a raspberry and cherry core of fruit. There is real depth on the palate without fat and the round mouthfeel on the mid palate is held in check by light tannins that soften with air. A mixture of hibiscus, brine, and dried herbes de Provence flavors linger on the long finish. The balance of fruit, floral, and earth make this a very compelling and engaging wine. 1000 cases

2016 PEAY VINEYARDS *POMARIUM ESTATE* PINOT NOIR

The *Pomarium* blend is made from clones and blocks that capture dark fruit and earth flavors while also featuring high tone floral incense aromas. This offers a broad canvas and a balanced tension to the wine that makes it unique among wines from our area and from Pinot noir made, really, anywhere. The nose on the 2016 *Pomarium* has a powerful core reminiscent of Japanese plums, which are tangy and tart while also dark and deep black. The floral quality keeps the aroma lifted and bright and not heavy. The palate reveals a more serious and masculine side with dried leaf qualities, dark berry, blood/iron, and blood orange flavors all held together by fine tannins. This is a very good Pomarium and will age beautifully for many years to come. 550 cases

2016 PEAY VINEYARDS *SAVOY* PINOT NOIR, ANDERSON VALLEY

The *Savoy* Pinot noir is the most easy-going and fruit-oriented of our single vineyard Pinot noirs fully capturing the qualities that have made *Savoy* one of the greatest Pinot noir vineyards in the New World. Though our interpretation might be a touch less hedonistic than most producers of this wine, there is a certain come hither quality I find very compelling. I often have trouble spitting out *Savoy* when I am pouring it all day for customers in the market. It is 5 p.m. somewhere in the world, I say. The 2016 *Savoy* features an apple brown Betty base note with hibiscus and cherry blossom aromas accenting. The flavors in the mouth are captivating with deep red fruit like a Bing or maraschino cherry rolled in brown spices and candied orange with a broad, fleshy mid-palate. An orange, raspberry, and a slight metallic tang linger on the medium length finish. Delicious and seamless this wine will age beautiful and is showing very well on release. 325 cases



2015 PEAY VINEYARDS *LA BRUMA ESTATE* SYRAH

The last 2 vintages we have been chronicling the rebound of our Syrah blocks and how that, in tandem with a string of strong vintages for us on the Coast, has resulted in some of the best Syrah we have ever produced. Well, for all of you who like the flavors found only in cold climate syrah, we give you the astonishingly good 2015 *La Bruma Estate* Syrah. It must have something to do with years that end in 5 as this wine reminds me of the 2005 *La Bruma* – which we loved and only have 3 bottles of in our cellar. *La Bruma* usually presents a more feminine profile than *Les Titans* but the 2015 *La Bruma* has a very intense graphite and smoke nose with blackberry and black currant fruit lying at the core like a bottomless well. It is quite savory with fennel, rosemary and garlic notes making visions of lamb chops dance in our heads. Notably, there is little of the violet, floral quality usually found in this cuveé. The mouth is dark and savory with some bitter chocolate and plum notes overlying a granite and inorganic mineral quality. The wine is not heavy in the least as the alcohol is moderate and the finish bright and energetic due to refreshing acidity. This wine is very compelling right now but will be fantastic with a few more years under its belt. The 2005 *La Bruma* is just hitting its stride 13 years from vintage and we would give this wine up to double that life, if any lasts that long. 325 cases

2018 CALENDAR OF DINNERS & EVENTS

VINO Wine Dinner	Oahu, HI	2/20	808-879-0004 for a reservation
Sansei Wine Dinner	Maui, HI	2/22	808-524-8466 for a reservation
The Wolf Wine Dinner	Oakland, CA	3/1	510-879-7953 for a reservation
Nightbird Dinner Celebrating Int'l Women's Day	San Francisco, CA	3/8	415-829-7565 for a reservation
Cep Spring Release		3/15	
High Museum Wine Auction Weekend	Atlanta, GA	3/22-24	www.highmuseumwine.org
West Sonoma Coast West of West Tasting - Dallas	Dallas, TX	3/26	Tickets to be announced soon
West Sonoma Coast West of West Tasting - Houston	Houston, TX	3/28	Tickets to be announced soon
Farmhouse Inn Wine Dinner	Guerneville, CA	4/6	707-887-3300 for a reservation
Lifehouse Auction	Marin, CA	4/21	www.lifehouseagency.org
Rittenhouse Wine Dinner	Philadelphia, PA	4/22	To be announced via email
West Sonoma Coast West of West Tasting - Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA	4/23	Tickets to be announced soon
West Sonoma Coast West of West Tasting - D.C.	Washington, D.C.	4/25	Tickets to be announced soon
Hospice du Rhône	Paso Robles, CA	4/26-28	www.hospicedurhone.org
Ferry Plaza Wine Merchant Tasting	San Francisco, CA	5/2	www.fpwm.com
Shuttlecork Auction for the Nelson-Atkins Museum	Kansas City, MO	5/3-5	www.nelson-atkins.org
Petit Marlowe Wine Dinner	San Francisco, CA	5/7	To be announced via email
Spring Open House	Cloverdale, CA	5/12	RSVP: jenn@peayvineyards.com
Nantucket Wine Festival—seminar, in-home tasting, more	Nantucket, MA	5/16-20	www.nantucketwinefestival.com
Elanus Spring Release		5/17	To be announced via email
Taste of Place – Blackberry Farm Vintners Weekend: Andy Peay and Steven Satterfield from Miller Union	Walland, TN	6/10-13	www.blackberryfarm.com
Barndiva Wine Dinner	Healdsburg, CA	6/15	To be announced via email
Sun Valley Center for the Arts Auction	Sun Valley, ID	7/19-22	www.sunvalleycenter.org
West Sonoma Coast West of West Tasting - Occidental	Occidental, CA	7/28	To be announced via email
Fall Release		8/2	



MOURAD—WOLFERT BRAISED LAMB SHANK

This is certainly a slow food: a slow braise of lamb shanks. It takes a bit of time but it is also a perfect dish to make ahead. This is an adaptation from a combination of two recipes from two cookbooks: Mourad Lahlou's *Mourad: New Moroccan* for Lamb Shanks (and Spiced Prunes and Brown Butter Farro) and the other from Paula Wolfert's *Mostly Mediterranean* recipe for Lamb Tagine with Pumpkin and Chickpeas. Mourad's preparation is more haute cuisine akin to his signature restaurant dish. So I took the basis of cooking the lamb with his method and added the accompanying chickpeas and vegetables from Wolfert's tagine to make it more like a meal one would have at home. This goes very well with Peay *La Bruma* Estate Syrah.

- Vanessa Wong

Ingredients:

6 lamb foreshanks (1 pound each), trimmed and "Frenched"	1 cinnamon stick
Kosher salt	1 teaspoon saffron threads
8 cups coarsely chopped onions	8 to 10 cups chicken stock or water
1/4 cup sliced garlic	1/4 cup honey
3/4 cup grapeseed or canola oil, plus more for browning the lamb	1/2 pound dried chickpeas soaked overnight in water to cover and then drained
1/4 cup ground coriander	2 pounds pumpkin or butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cubed into 1.5" pieces
1 1/2 tablespoons ground ginger	1 pound carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch lengths
1 tablespoon ground cumin	4 tablespoons unsalted butter, for the braising-liquid sauce
2 teaspoons ground black pepper	1 teaspoon finely chopped parsley, for the braising-liquid sauce
2 teaspoons ground turmeric	
4 cloves	
6 allspice berries	

To Prepare:

1. Optional but recommended: Put a cooling rack on a baking sheet lined with paper towels. Salt the lamb shanks with kosher salt on all sides and put on the rack. Cover with a damp towel and refrigerate overnight.
2. Preheat the oven to 350. Place a large heavy roasting pan over medium heat for several minutes. Add a film of oil then add the shanks in a single layer. Brown the lamb evenly on all sides for about 12 minutes, adjusting the heat as necessary. Transfer the shanks to the baking sheet and pour off any fat remaining in the pan.
3. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, toss the onions and garlic with the oil. Add the onion mixture to the pan and cook, stirring constantly, over medium heat, until the onions are an even golden brown; adjust the heat as necessary. Increase the heat to high, add 2 tablespoons salt and the ground coriander, ginger, cumin, black pepper and turmeric and saffron threads and cook for about 2 minutes, stirring constantly, to bring out the flavors of the spices.
4. Nestle the shanks, smoother side down, in the onions and cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Turn the shanks over. The side with the most connective tissue should be facing down; the meat will be more tender cooked this way. Add enough stock to come three-quarters of the way up the shanks and bring to a simmer. Cover stock with a piece of parchment paper, brushed with water to keep the edges from curling up, and cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil. Put it in the oven and cook for 45 minutes. Lift the foil cover and the parchment paper then stir in the soaked and drained chickpeas. Re-cover the pan with the parchment and foil and continue to cook for 2 hours or until the meat is completely tender.
5. Lower heat oven to 200F. Carefully remove the shanks from the braising liquid, place them meaty side up on a baking sheet, cover with aluminum foil and transfer the shanks to the oven to keep them warm.
6. In a large saucepan, pour the braising liquid with the onions. Let sit for about 5 minutes, then ladle off the fat that has risen to the top and discard. To the braising liquid add the pumpkin cubes and carrots. Bring to a boil and simmer gently for about 15 minutes until the vegetables are tender.
7. With a slotted spoon remove the vegetables and add to the lamb. Increase the heat and reduce until the sauce reduces to 5 to 6 cups. If the flavor seems weak, continue to reduce it to intensify the flavor. Season the sauce with salt and pepper. Blend in the butter, preferably with an immersion blender, and stir in the parsley. Serve the lamb shank with the vegetables with the sauce on top. Or you can pull the meat off the bone and serve without the bone if you prefer.

A nice accompaniment is farro cooked in chicken stock or lightly salted water. Place 1 cup farro in a pot and add salt and enough water or stock to cover (about 3 cups). Bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low and simmer 30-40 minutes. Drain off any excess water.

Note: Paula Wolfert would have you parboil the soaked chickpeas for 5 minutes and remove the skins. This extremely laborious "slow food" step I tried and found unnecessary. She would assert that the chickpea skins feel and taste unpleasant. Having tried it both ways I found no discernable difference that made it worth this time consuming effort. And if you want to skip this "slow food" step entirely, you can add a can of drained and rinsed chickpeas at the very end of the cooking of the pumpkin and carrots in the braise liquid.



other foodstuffs like salts, oysters and honey that face a sort of cultural extinction because their cultivation is too laborious or unproductive for a cost efficient, fast-paced world. In the home, “slow foods” are disappearing from our culinary repertoire because folks just don’t have the time, inclination, or know-how to prepare them.

I often think about wine as the ultimate Slow Food. Not only does the beverage itself undergo a long process from grapes to glass spending months, even years, to transform starting with harvest and vinification and ending with its aging in barrels and further development in the bottle. Similarly the timeline of grapevine to grapes is an even longer and slower course and progression. The collective stages of this odyssey of the cultivation of plant to produce fruit that undergoes a process to produce food that itself continues to evolve through time can amount to the passage of decades and, conceivably, even a century. And within each of these phases come many steps and decisions that affect the outcome of the wine and the vine in many ways large and small. Often the outcomes of each of these decisions cannot be determined or realized immediately and sometimes takes years to see the effects.

For example, when I consider which type of barrels to use for each wine lot, the trial of a kind of barrel takes me at least three or four years through several vintages to evaluate the barrel itself and even more years when I place that information comparatively in the grand scheme of many vintages and assess the wine’s character through the course of years’ aging well after it has left the barrel and been put into bottle. The choices made in the vineyard have an even longer impact timeline. Nick and I plan and discuss decisions of the past and future with decades of observation and consideration. Farming estate grapes on our own land allows us to view the progression of the vines and wines produced from them with a very long term view. Even with non-estate grapes the process can be a lengthy one as well. There was one vineyard whose grapes we used for our Sonoma Coast cuveé that we worked with for seven vintages before I ultimately determined it was not quite the right match for our wines.

We live in the fast world that seems to become ever faster. I find that people, myself included, apply the same expectations of speed and the idea of “got to have it now” of certain aspects of day to day life to all things in life. I call this the “Amazon Prime” effect. Why isn’t that package here yet? I ordered it a week ago! Why hasn’t she answered my email/text? I sent it two hours ago! Fast is wonderful, is it not? Yet, not everything in life can be that fast and not everything should be that fast. Fast is not always beneficial, valuable, nor indicative of what is truly important. The 20 years of our farming and the 30 years of making wine in which we have gained and built up knowledge of our vineyard and further the understanding of the wines it produces, is but a mere blip in the grand timeline of wine-growing in general. Some things take time, some take a long time. Wine is very slow food. To bring it to you is a slow journey and we hope that you will enjoy it in the same spirit of slow food: over a relaxed meal prepared thoughtfully and with care. Perhaps even a stew that slow braised for hours to become the amazing dish that only time and slow gentle cooking can deliver. However, if you ever truly wanted to experience the contemplative meditation of what making a slow food is really like, try making a bagel and cream cheese on crutches.

Operation Bagel: Mission Accomplished (Slowly)



trophy-ism aside, many flavors in wine do take some time and repeated exposure to appreciate (like with coffee, oysters, and modern art). Further, a wine may not taste very good when it is first sold but with time in the bottle may change character and blossom into something sublime. Think young Barolo. Or it may never taste good but you won't know until 10 years down the road when you dare to open it (and even then, "was it my fault it didn't taste good because I waited too long or not long enough or...?") As a result, what someone says about a wine – and its potential - sometimes is more influential than what one tastes. "Why, yes, that blend absolutely tastes like a dirty, soiled horse stall soaked in cat pee. It received 98 points and costs \$100? Delicious." So, in the end, you can rely on taste to some degree for determining quality in wine but it is not fool proof and can be highly influenced by external forces. So what other factors should we consider to assess high quality in wine?

I would begin with the base material, the grapes. I remember the first time my mother used the phrase, "you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear." She was dismissing a restaurant's flavorless dish made from vegetables that came off a Cisco truck and I think it is useful here, too. To make high quality wine, your grapes simply must be good grapes. We believe there are certain farming practices one can (must?) employ to grow high quality grapes but again we are wandering into highly contentious and subjective territory. So, to clarify matters, I will focus on practices that are invisible to the consumer but require sacrifice and considerable cost revealing a winery's commitment to high quality production.

At Peay, for example, we promise our vineyard employees full-time, year round work and, as a result, they have worked for us for a long time. Each year they accrue knowledge about the vineyard and Nick's farming philosophy. Having full-time people in the vineyard plus Nick is very expensive and rare in our industry. We pay more per hour than almost anyone in the business and we pay for 12 months of work (even though they work only 11 months) and not just for the 6-9 month growing season like in the vast majority of vineyards. It makes it very difficult to remain profitable, especially in light of our low yields. But we retain our workers and they identify with their work. They work hard and with care and we think it translates into quality in the wines as they give extra attention to each vine. And the effect of their attention on quality takes years, decades, as we all learn more about what is working and what is not. If we made a great wine one vintage, what accounted for that? What did we learn from a tough vintage when all hell broke loose that will help us for the future? Every year we all think about what we can do to continue to move in the direction of making high quality wine? Like farming organically.

A decade or more ago, we increased farming costs a few thousand dollars per acre when we started to farm organically. The market wasn't asking about organic grapes back then but we felt a vineyard in harmony with its surroundings was more likely to make balanced fruit and would allow our estate vineyard's character to come through better in the wines. In addition to cost, it takes a lot more effort to farm organically. Nick spends over a month on his tractor driving at a snail's pace down every row tilling weeds under the vines instead of spraying herbicide. He notices things. He thinks about the health of the shoots. Of *that* specific shoot. He chews on that thought for the next 8 hours. Then he calls Vanessa. They chew together and come up with a plan. Now, you well know we don't adhere to biodynamic farming techniques but despite all our cantankerous musings on the subject, for the same reasoning I think the intention and the effort it takes to farm bio-dynamically is a sign that the bio farmer is also focused on high quality grape growing. Of course, a bio adherent may be more focused on unproven quasi-science than wine, but the effort it takes to farm this way is substantial and telling. Contrast these farming approaches with a wine I saw recently that proudly claimed to do nothing in the vineyard, or was "untended." Did it make high quality wine? I don't know, I didn't spend the money to taste it as I assumed it was low quality. It had to be. The vine evolved to grow and reproduce and does not really care about intensity or complexity of fruit expression that high quality wine possesses. Crop load and balance, sun exposure, nutrition, mildew pressure; all of these, and more, are things vineyard workers have sweated over for centuries in an effort to make higher quality fruit for winemaking. Untended!? I bet the winery says that grapes untended make wine by itself, too. That is, unless they make vinegar. In long, you must invest in your vineyard and your people to make quality grapes. It doesn't just "happen."

A second aspect of determining high quality in wine is to look at how, using the leather bag analogy, it is "cut, treated and sewn." Here again people use very specific terminology to let you know the effort they are undertaking to create a high quality wine: hand harvested vs. machine harvested fruit; estate grown and bottled at the



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HIGH QUALITY — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

winery vs. custom crush winemaking at someone else's winery; small vessel vs. large vat fermentation; and on and on. Many practices are not universally accepted as better than the alternative, though: Native vs. commercial yeast? Fermenting and aging in oak vs. stainless steel vs. concrete vs. eggs? Whole cluster vs. destemmed fruit? It is very easy to get caught in the muck of winemaking techniques driven by personal preference and subjective experience. So, let's stick with the same idea of looking at the effort a winemaker expends to achieve their objective of high quality wine as opposed to specifically what they do in the winemaking.

Let's look at fruit sourcing: Does a winery buy grapes or grow its own? It is a *lot* easier to buy grapes. You don't have to wait four years for vines to produce and you can buy older vine grapes which often can have more character than young vine fruit. You don't have to place as large a bet on your belief about a site's potential for making high quality wine, either. That fruit doesn't make tasty wine? Next! And you don't have to learn how to be a farmer and manage another business. But there is a cost. Someone who purchases fruit doesn't lose as badly as an estate winery if they are wrong about a site's potential but neither do they succeed as greatly. The vineyard is not theirs. Working with a single piece of land for a lifetime—maybe lifetimes—you become attuned to the subtleties of the place. You are able to invest in the long term potential of the site and, like many relationships, that investment can reap greater rewards. With a non-estate vineyard, regardless of what a purchaser says about the grower doing what she wants, farming is not under the winery's control. The winery's philosophy for growing high quality fruit must meet the economic demands of the grower who needs to make a profit. Owning or having a very long term lease that includes paying for all farming costs ensures you can put your ideas of what makes high quality fruit into practice over decades. And, at a personal risk.

Sorting is another practice no one really discusses but can reveal a lot about a winery's investment in high quality. Man, I wish we didn't sort our fruit. Of course, we don't pick obviously bad-looking fruit. But you would be amazed at what you catch when you spread the fruit out on a slow moving table. It takes us about an hour to sort a ton of fruit when it is "clean." It has taken us an hour to sort a ¼ ton of fruit when it is not. This means we often work 18 hour days staring at a moving sorting belt picking off leaves, marred fruit, etc. That is expensive, time-consuming, and, frankly, mind-numbingly boring. I have friends who say blithely that they just tip the bin in the fermenter et voila! Or who speed the sorting belt up so fast they can't even grab any bad fruit; it basically just spreads the fruit out so it can go through a destemmer without clogging. Or, that "we sort in the vineyard" as picking bins are dumped rapidly into a larger bin. Pish. These people have personal lives during harvest. Heck, they may even get home before 10 p.m.

All of this extra care in the source of the fruit and in the care of the fruit and wine in the winery takes thought, effort, time, and money. Sacrifice. It is a sign that the person making those decisions thinks deeply about and prioritizes the pursuit of high quality wine. It may take a lifetime or longer to achieve the goal. Only through years of experience refining practices with an eye on closing in on the final 5% of perfection, will you end up achieving high quality. And, to some degree, whether the wine ends up appealing to the consumer depends on whether the winemaker is correct about what makes a high quality wine. We have a palate to make that final determination.

So, we can argue all day over style, vineyard and winery practices, and relative value. Heck, it might even be fun if we are pulling corks while we banter. But if you really want to know whether someone makes high quality wine, look at the thought, commitment, and effort they expend to fulfill their promise. I bet that will be a better indication of the quality of their wine than what they say they do in the winemaking. Talk is cheap, high quality wine rarely can be.



Okay, not all sorting is brutal

