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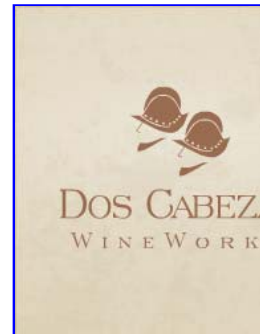
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Cold Maceration



Vietti Winery 2011

Most of us are well familiar with the term maceration, the process by which the “phenolic” components of the grapes, the tannins, anthocyanins (color), and flavinoids are leached from the grape skins, seeds and stems into the must. Essentially, maceration is the process that lends red color to red wine. In white wines, maceration is either avoided or permitted in a very limited manner.

Traditional maceration starts with the breaking of the red grape skins and exposure to heat. The environmental temperature is key to the process; the more heat, the faster and more pronounced the extraction of phenols from the grape skins and other materials. Maceration often continues into the fermentation period.

The process of maceration can be a key factor in establishing the profile of the wine, adding not simply color but mouthfeel, as well. Controlled extraction can also add to the complexity of the wine as well as improve its aging potential as earlier muscular tannins soften over time. On the other hand, zealous extraction can result in a wine that’s tough and overly tannic, resulting in either a wine that may never soften and be approachable.

One derivation of maceration is what’s referred to as cold maceration. This is a technique that’s utilized by Luca Currado of Vietti located in Castiglione Falletto. You can learn more about Luca, his wines and his philosophy of winemaking that has made his estate one of the finest in the region at www.vietti.com. As well, look for our video series with Luca upcoming this fall.

As we toured the Vietti winery, Luca introduced us to one of his large stainless steel tank, topped by a large cloud of steam. Silhouetted amongst the shrouds of clouds was the faint outline of one of his staff, clearly fueling the process. Turns out that he was shoveling in dry ice (frozen carbon dioxide at nearly minus 110 degrees F) into the tank. Dry ice easily transitions through sublimation- the process of going from solid to gas without ever passing the liquid phase- and provides twice the cooling energy of water based ice per pound and three times per volume. The other advantage for a wine producer is that dry ice has no effect on the grape must other than cooling, the heavier gaseous CO2 settling to the bottom of the tank. So why use dry ice to cool the must?

Luca explained to us that he prefers to cool the grape must for approximately five days in order to control the extraction, allowing for a more gentle process than would occur ordinarily. He feels that this is particularly important this year in light of the intense heat of mid-late August resulting in grapes that are riper earlier than normal.

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