

Wine Making

Southern Rhône grape varieties are particularly interesting for their great potential of fruit expression. The Mediterranean climate generally favours good natural maturity levels in grapes and this, accompanied by relatively low yields of 4.5 to 6.5 tonnes per hectare (between 35 and 55 hectoliters), gives concentrated wines.

When fermenting the different qualities, we adapt our wine-making techniques to develop this potential, removing stems to avoid woody tannins and reducing crushing to ensure a good percentage of whole berries in the vats.

At least three key factors come into play during fermentation. To begin with, good temperature control (25 to 30° for traditional red wines) allows yeasts to work under optimum conditions. Secondly, regular pumping-over of the vats ensures that caps are moist, helps with colour and tannin extraction and generally maximises the fermentation process. The third factor, of great importance, is regular tasting of each vat, at least once a day during the 10 to 20 day maceration period ; we will make different decisions based on our impressions.

Our general aim is therefore to preserve the fresh fruit flavours. Whilst we are not looking for intense tannic extraction, tannins should be present but not dominant and as round as possible. Particular attention is paid to press wines (7 to 10% of volumes). Depending on the vintage, these are stored for malolactic fermentation in used oak casks. This speeds up fining and rounds off the wines, allowing them to be reintroduced into the different blends at an early stage.

When fermenting the grapes destined for the Cairanne blend, we look for natural maturity exceeding 13°5 and if possible closer to 14°. Maceration lasts for between two to three weeks, with initial temperatures of 26/27°C rising to 30 to 32° once alcoholic fermentation is over. The intensity of extraction, as mentioned above, is based essentially on tasting impressions.

For the Côtes du Rhône, our practice is similar, except on the Carignan, where lower maceration temperatures are kept below 30° to avoid extracting eventual bitter flavours.

Vin de Pays grapes however are subject to a shorter maceration period, 7 to 12 days, since we seek to protect the fruit and are looking for a slightly lighter texture.

These are only general guide-lines. It is evident that our approach varies from year to year, based on the natural state of grapes. Our job as wine-makers during the fermentation period is to free elements trapped in the berries but there is no point in lighter years looking for heavy extraction, either of colour or tannins, when the potential is not there. It only hardens the wines and upsets their balance.