



Frankston Amateur Winemakers Guild Inc.

MAKING SPARKLING WINE

(From notes by Arthur Stone - Edited by Chris Myers 2006)

It is assumed that you can already make a basic wine, so that is not covered here. Many winemakers consider that making a sparkling wine is too difficult and fiddly and that it is harder than making an ordinary wine, but for the enthusiast, the end result is a unique product that will find ready acceptance by most people.

Equipment

Your usual winemaking equipment is needed plus a supply of hollow plastic corks and **champagne type bottles**, plus wires to tie down the corks. It is important that you only use heavy true champagne bottles which have a crown seal ring on top. Never use chipped, badly scratched or carbonated wine bottles as they may not take the pressure of the methode champenoise process and **explode with some danger**.

Ingredients

From experience one should avoid strong flavoured fruits. The taste of a sparkling wine seems to be magnified by the bubbles of carbon dioxide so that a wine infused with this gas is rather flat without it. There are many fruits that are suitable - oranges, lemons, grapefruit, (citrus fruits work well) nectarines, apricots, plums, quinces, passionfruit, bananas, blackberries, loquats, dandelions, parsley, peaches, pears, apples and strawberries to name a few.

Method

Decide from the beginning that you are going to make a sparkling wine. As a rule of thumb use only two thirds of the fruit you would need for an ordinary wine. You are basically starting by making a delicate table wine, not a heavy bodied one. You could use a second pressing as a base wine where the strong flavours of the fruit have already been extracted leaving a more delicate must to work with. Ferment on the pulp for only as long as it takes to extract the flavour for your purpose. Remember body is not essential in a sparkling wine.

Add only enough sugar to bring your specific gravity to between 1.070 and 1.085. Any stronger and the alcohol produced may kill your secondary ferment. Use a champagne yeast if it is available, but most of the general purpose yeasts that we now use seem to be capable of doing the job.

Allow the initial ferment to go to dryness and rack and mature to clarity (debourbage). It is most important to have a clear, clean wine at this stage, light and flabby with a slight under acid taste. If not, you must adjust the balance now as you cannot touch it in the next stage. A word of warning - the wine at this stage is in a very delicate state, with not enough alcohol or acid to protect it and fight off bacterial infections. Keep the jar closed and topped up. Carbon dioxide protection is best.



Frankston Amateur Winemakers Guild Inc.

The next step is to get a champagne yeast started, (important this time). Add sugar to the wine (tirage liqueur) to raise the specific gravity to 1.004 and add the yeast starter (levurage). Place in a warm position under air-lock and monitor the specific gravity. When it is down to 1.002 transfer the wine into sterilised heavy bottles (tirage) and wire on the plastic hollow corks. Keep them in a warm spot for a week and then place them in a cool position on their sides (entreillage) for a minimum of six months. The bottles are then transferred to a rack with their necks pointing downwards ready for remuage. At least twice a week, but preferably every day, give each bottle a sharp half twist until the sediment has fallen down the neck of the bottle into the hollow cork. This may take several weeks or even months depending how efficient is your remuage technique. Ageing in the bottle is continued at this stage. During this ageing there are chemical changes and reactions between the components of the wine and the dead yeast cells causing esterification. Spoilage cannot occur as the pressure of the carbon dioxide prevents it. Bouquet and flavours develop and the wine acquires a greater smoothness. The wine will keep indefinitely so don't be in a hurry.

The next step is to disgorge the sediment, but it is recommended to do this only when the wine is required for drinking. The time honoured way of doing this is by placing the neck of the bottle in a receptacle containing ice mixed with salt until there is a frozen plug of wine in the neck trapping the sediment. Or this can alternatively be done by putting the bottle in the freezer- checking regularly, until the thin neck, which will freeze first, is frozen. Always chill the bottle in the fridge first. Ejection of the frozen plug may be difficult at first but with practice will become easy. It is best to eject in a protected space such as a laundry sink which gives you room to manoeuvre. After carefully removing the wire and holding the thumb on the cork to stop it coming out, place a cloth over the neck and the cork. Holding the bottle hard up against the back of the sink with the neck slightly lower, twist the cork slowly out with the cloth in position. The cork will eject when about half way out and most of the ice with it. The cloth saves the cork and ice plug from flying across the room and any ice that is left can be carefully poured out with a little of the wine. As the cork ejects and the ice plug has gone, bring the bottle upright so that you do not lose the wine. You should now have a dry wine, but if sweetening is required, this is the time to do it. A mixture of 50/50 sugar syrup and apple juice can be used, or just sugar syrup by itself. How much is used is a matter of taste and a small sampling can determine this, as not all bottles ferment out to dryness. From a truly dry wine the addition of 25 mls. of sugar syrup makes an acceptable degree of sweetness for most people. Always chill your sugar syrup before adding it otherwise it will cause the wine to foam out of the bottle.

Always keep a clean cork ready in case you need to plug the wine quickly. You can also top up with a sweet white wine if desired and if you like a dry wine, top up with a dry white wine. When the bottle has been topped up, wire a clean cork into position and gently move the bottle to blend the additions into the wine. Chill again before drinking.

Caution

An exploding bottle is a very dangerous thing. Remember to use only the thick heavy bottles that are designed for sparkling wine. Fill your bottles almost full as the exploding force comes from the gas not the liquid. The smaller the gas space the less the chance of an explosion. Always cover your fermenting bottles with an old blanket and handle the bottles carefully until you know what the pressure inside is like.