

Natural Winegrowing at Inman Family Wines (cont.)

The Importance of Properly Ripened Fruit

The key to quality winemaking is harvesting properly ripened fruit. Unlike many California wineries today that strive for maximum concentration and power (a trend inspired largely by a few influential wine critics), we do not let our grapes hang on the vine past the point of ripeness. Over-ripeness produces wines that are overly alcoholic and low in acidity. In order to achieve balance in such wines, winemakers must literally water down the must (the unfermented juice and skins) or reduce the wine's alcohol through mechanical processes. They also must add large amounts of acid. These practices are increasingly common in California (as is the use of enzymes during fermentation to enhance volatile aromas and mouth-feel), and result in manipulated, over-worked wines which, while they may deliver heft and richness, lack nuance, subtlety, charm and varietal clarity.

This is a particularly important issue with Pinot Noir, a variety whose range of enchanting cherry, berry, pomegranate, and potpourri herbal scents (tea leaf, lavender, dried rose) are easily sacrificed to over-ripeness, which also can compromise Pinot Noir's complex, delicate flavors, and supple tannins. While some California producers rationalize their use of overripe fruit as a means of avoiding Pinot Noir's herbal/forest floor aromas (often disparaged as "greenness"), such characteristics are, in fact, typical of the medium range of ripeness in the variety and are qualities prized by the French. Conversely, Burgundian vintners typically find the raisiny, pruny flavors found in many California Pinot Noirs to be inappropriate and disagreeable.

Because the Russian River appellation enjoys a long, cool growing season that allows for steady, even ripening, our estate Pinot Noir grapes achieve full ripeness at moderate sugar levels and with healthy natural acidity, enabling us to produce rich, fresh, balanced wines of moderate alcohol that we believe reflect the variety's true range of aromas and flavors and beautifully complement a wide range of cuisines.

Once our fruit is brought into the winery, we treat it as gently as possible. Wine movements where possible are made via gravity or they are pushed using inert gas. We prefer natural clarification to excessive fining or filtration, although if filtration is required we are not opposed to using it if it will enhance the quality of the wine. However, all filtering is done using crossflow which is not only gentler on the wine, but gentler on the environment as it uses reusable ceramic membranes rather than mined diatomaceous earth, which also creates landfill waste and environmental issues after its use. In short, at Inman Family Wines, we endeavor to make our wines as naturally as possible, with as little human intervention as possible, to ensure they embody not only the pure personality of the grapes from which they're made, but also the singular character of the place where they're born.

