

John's Vineyard

Towards the 2005 vintage

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October 20th. It was time to harvest when it was clear there was not much prospect, with longer nights, wet weather and heavy cloud forecasted, that they would get any more ready. Air temperature was about 17 – 18C. The total harvest weighed about 20 kg (larger than in previous years), filling two large containers (see photo).

Crushing Crushing followed immediately. I toyed with the idea of using my feet but decided it would be more trouble than it was worth so I spent a very boring 4 hours doing it by hand. Stalks were removed from each of the 340 bunches (some were very small indeed, with 5 or 6 berries). Crushing was done by hand with 10 bunches at a time in a plastic mixing bowl, using a wringing action followed by downward pressure of two fists being twisted left and right pressed hard against the bottom of the bowls (painful). The outcome was 4.5 gallons of must looking like dense cabbage soup.

Must qualities The specific gravity (1.071, or 17.8 Brix) of the must was enough to give a wine with 9.5% alcohol. So using the formula in the Jeff Cox wine book I added 1.4lb of table sugar, enough to raise it to a potential of 12.5%. The pH level was 3.1, indicating the juice was at the acidic end of the permissible range. Carefully measured potassium meta-bisulphite (1 teaspoon to 1 gallon) was added to kill off any unsavoury natural yeast prior to fermentation 24 hrs later. I hope I have understood the chemistry section of my wine book OK.

Pressing A stainless steel wine press was used to squeeze out the finer must, thereby reducing the total volume to 2.75 gallons stored in a 5 gallon glass carboy. The new Specific Gravity after pressing and adding sugar was 1.082, enough to proceed to the next stage..

So far so good. Fresh must passed to wine-maker (myself). The troubles then began. See next instalment.

They told him that it couldn't be done

Australian and New Zealand friends scoffed at the idea that the Poms could grow vines for wine, ignoring the 100 or so vineyards across the UK. So as a complete novice in 2000 I took up the challenge - in my small back garden in Somerset. There were some favourable factors:

- * limestone based soil;
- * a 30 foot high south-facing white stone wall, providing shelter from north winds and a sun-trap;
- * alleged global warming;
- * Chardonnay flourishes in Champagne, northern France.

Twenty two tiny vines (Chardonnay - Colmar 57 - S04 grafted on American rootstock) were planted in April 2000. After 4 trial growths, 2005 is the year for the big test. Follow progress in this Monthly Newsletter. See how I finish this traditional rhyme:-

*They told him that it couldn't be done,
And with heart he set right to it. He tackled the job that couldn't be done,
And (could / couldn't) do it.
John Stephenson*



From crushed to pressed must