PHENOLICS ESSAY BY JEANNIE BOUTELLE

SOMMjournal's monthly virtual series for July, focused on "Phenolics, Color, Tannins and Taste". Greg Van Wagner, SommGeo, lead us to 7 wineries around the globe. Lars Leicht, of SOMMjournal, set the stage, as each winery described how phenolics are managed, and their influence on color and texture of wine. What are phenolics?

Phenols, compounds present in the grape skins, pulps and seeds, impact color, taste and mouthfeel. I consider phenols the key components affecting the look and taste, the personality of the wine. Anthocyanins, responsible for color, are found in the grape skins. Created during the growing process, they are extracted during fermentation. Initially, not very stable, combined with tannins, during fermentation, they create a pigmented polymer (a larger molecule) which is more stable and results in a smooth mouth feel. Tannins are critical for palate weight but can feel sandy and dry if there is not enough anthocyanins. Brian Rudin of Canvasback wines, Red Mountain, used the analogy, "Phenolics are building blocks of mouthfeel and texture. They are a pile of bricks, the winemaker shapes into something sleek and elegant. Anthos can degrade quickly in the must but when they polymerize (bind with tannins) that is the key to a gorgeous texture", creating the perfect sip.

Building strong phenolics starts in the vineyard. Dana Grande, Grower Relations Manager at Jordan Winery, Alexander Valley, focuses on full ripening and coloring of their cabernet grapes. The goal of Nick Goldschmidt, Goldschmidt Vineyards, Alexander Valley, is to keep wine in the primary color zone for as long as possible, while using tannins as a preservative to maintain freshness. Michael Scholz, V.P. at St. SupÃ©ry in Napa said the building blocks for their cabernet grown at Dollarhide Ranch starts in the vineyard, and it is the true expression of what they can achieve with phenolics. At Austin Hope Winery, in Paso Robles, JC Diefendurfer described the huge diurnal swings from 105F to 50F in the area, that created rich anthocyanins in their cabernet grapes. He called tannin extraction the glue that holds the wine together.

At Bodega Altocedro, La Consulta, Uco Valley, Argentina,. winemaker, Kareem Mussi called La Consulta, a paradise for grape growing. He uses oak to add tannin to counter the concentrated anthocyanins. Last was Masi Winery in Valpolicella, Veneto, Italy. Andrea del Cin, technical director, outlined vine training methods, pergola (cooling), guyot training (warming) and their affect on phenols, warning too much heat created thick skins in the vineyard. He explained how gene mapping identified the phenolic compounds created during the complex appasimento process (grape drying 50- 100 days) used to create their voluptuous, rich, Costasera amarone.

From our global trip, I learned how phenolic compounds have a direct affect on the color and the texture of wine. Is the wine pale or deep ruby, are the tannins soft or coarse? The quality of these characteristics are determined by attention to a myriad of details in the vineyard and winery to sculpt a top quality wine and that perfect sip.