



## Fine Wine... It Takes Classic, Old World Winemaking ©

Great wine, award winning wine for the more demanding consumer, requires winemaking techniques that take no shortcuts and that make absolutely no compromise on quality. At Bel Vino we strictly adhere to the best winemaking practices by employing classic Old World, small batch, handcrafted winemaking methods. Every winemaking step is specifically tailored to each wine varietal for each year, and each red wine varietal is oak barrel aged for a great finish. Our methods and practices are the same as those employed by the best wineries in the world, such as those in Napa, Sonoma and the Bordeaux region in France.



**George Bursick, Bel Vino Master Winemaker**

World small batch handcrafting methods mean that our Winemaker individually customizes and fine tunes each varietal each year to maximize the quality, flavor and aroma that can be obtained with each varietal in each year.

In our companion article, "Fine Wine...It All Starts With The Vines", we point out another critical winemaking factor: Making great wine, award winning wine, requires starting with great grapes. The management methods for the Bel Vino vineyards, coupled with some of the best soil and climate for California vineyards, give our Master Winemaker the highest quality grapes to work with. Our high quality vineyards and grapes are where classic, Old World Winemaking begins at Bel Vino.

Bel Vino's grape crushing process starts very quickly after our grapes are harvested. This begins by using our state-of-the-art de-stemmer which gently removes stems from the grapes. Next, our state-of-the-art crusher uses soft rollers to gently squeeze the juice from the grapes. The reason for these processes being extra gentle is so that we do not crush, cut or damage the red grape skins. If the grapes go through faster de-stemming and crush machinery the skins become mangled and damaged to some degree, which in turn causes bitterness and oxidation in the juice. In that case the result will be inferior flavor, color and aroma. Using our slow and gentle process results in a lower yield and a higher cost to produce, but this assures the highest quality juice possible.

Note that freshly pressed juice from red grapes has very little color. All the red color and much of the flavor and aroma in finished red wine comes from the red skins, not from the grape juice. So to make red wine we must leave the red skins (carefully undamaged in our case) intermingled with the juice throughout the fermentation process, which is the next winemaking step after crushing.

Fermentation is the process of converting the natural sugar contained in the grape juice into alcohol, a process that takes approximately 3 weeks. Typically 10% to 15% of the grape juice is natural sugar, and that sugar is available to become alcohol. To start fermentation we place our high quality juice, still intermingled with the red skins, in large

Great red wines are dark in color, moderately tannic, have rich and concentrated flavors, wonderful aromatic qualities, and deliver a soft, velvety sensation in the mouth. These wines are the most elegant and desired in the world and are the type wines that Bel Vino focuses on and creates across all its red varietals.

Wine is typically either small batch handcrafted for more demanding consumers or is mass produced using fixed formulas for the mass market consumer. With formula winemaking each varietal is made according to a fixed recipe and production is geared for maximum speed and lowest cost. Bel Vino's Old





stainless steel tanks. A separate tank is used for each grape varietal (Cabernet, Merlot, etc.). Each tank is independently refrigerated and temperature controlled as necessary to support an exact fermentation result for each year of each varietal.

Next in the fermentation process is the blending of custom yeasts with the mixture of juice and skins. The yeast causes the natural sugar in the juice to turn into alcohol. The Bel Vino Winemaker uses over two dozen strains of yeast, one which is specific to each varietal (Cabernet, Merlot, etc.), and where each yeast strain originated in the region of the world where that grape varietal originated. This custom yeast process results in finely tuned varietals that are each the best they can be.



Our Winemaker ferments some varietals in two separate tanks, making two separate batches of the same varietal. Then each of the two batches is fermented differently in order to produce two different flavor and aroma profiles. The differences in the treatment of these two batches typically includes the use of different yeast strains and fermentation temperatures. After fermentation, and usually just before bottling, the Winemaker hand mixes several different proportions of these two batches together into sample blends. The objective in creating a number of sample blends is to find the one blend that produces the best overall result with the best flavor and aroma profile for that one varietal. This dual batch fermentation technique is another important difference in making handcrafted Old World style wine vs. formula wine.

After fermentation of red wine the skins are removed and the raw wine product is stored in 60-gallon oak barrels. At this point the wine is allowed to settle to improve both the color and clarity, and then the wine is put through a second fermentation step called “malolactic fermentation”. Malolactic fermentation is a process in which tart-tasting malic acid, which is naturally present in fermented wine, is converted to lactic acid. Malolactic fermentation starts by blending a desirable and good bacteria with the wine, and the bacteria converts the malic acid to lactic acid. The end result is wine that is rounder, smoother and richer tasting with a mouth feel that is more supple. Without this second fermentation process the wine will be somewhat harsh and tart tasting.

Once malolactic fermentation is completed the red wine is stored in 60 gallon oak barrels for typically one year to a half dozen years. Though oak barrel aging is quite expensive, it nevertheless is a time tested process that gently and gradually improves the wine in various ways, with an end result that is usually dramatically better than the freshly fermented wine was. Some of the ways that barrel aging enhances the final product is that the wine becomes smoother, more mellow and more drinkable, and some combination of these flavors and aromas will be introduced into the wine: Vanilla, oak, wood, chocolate, tobacco and charcoal.



Degradation to wine quality will occur during the aging process if the wine gets too warm or if too much evaporation is allowed to occur. Either of these problems will cause the wine to partially turn to vinegar, resulting in far less than pleasant tasting wine. Bel Vino does all its red wine barrel aging in a modern and sophisticated facility that year round is both temperature controlled and humidified. Both temperature and humidity factors are critical for best barrel performance. Every month the wine in each barrel (over 1,000 in the Bel Vino facility) is

sampled, tested and serviced as necessary to ensure that no damage or degradation occurs to the wine. This servicing includes topping each barrel off every month to replace any wine that was lost to some inevitable evaporation that has occurred.



After barrel aging is complete the Bel Vino Winemaker samples and tests each varietal and then makes various final adjustments to get the absolute best end-result product. These adjustments can include mixing two different batches of the same wine (as described above) in some proportion, adding small amounts of other wine varietals (typically 5% to 15%) to bring in additional flavor and aroma characteristics, and performing certain proprietary techniques that are unique to our Winemaker.

The last step in fine winemaking is the bottling process. All Bel Vino wine goes through a special filtering system just before the wine goes to the bottling line. The purpose of the filtering is to remove unnecessary sediment and to prevent certain bacteria from getting into the finished bottle. The bottling line itself is a high tech, high speed marvel, that is immaculately clean, and which runs inside Bel Vino's clean and temperature/humidity controlled winemaking facility. One of the first steps in the line is filling each bottle with nitrogen in order to expel all the oxygen in the bottle. When the wine goes in the bottle it pushes the nitrogen out so that what is left is an oxygen, bacteria and sediment free environment that ensures the wine will have a maximum shelf life with no pre-mature oxidation or other unnecessary and degrading effects.

Many wineries are not as meticulous and quality driven with their winemaking as Bel Vino is. This often is due to their catering to mass market consumers and having to compete on price, which is normal and understandable for wineries that want to serve those consumers. But Bel Vino chooses to serve more demanding consumers and accomplishes this by being an Old World Classic winery, producing the highest quality, best tasting wine in Southern California



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