

Fifteenth Annual Varietal Seminar

The Secret Life of White Wine
August 13, 2005 at Copia

Moderator of the varietal seminar for a seventh time, board member John Skupny likened this day's event to an aerobics class--five scheduled presentations and 22 wines. The five sessions included, "Everything that Sparkles," "Exciting Whites and Their Inspiration,"

"Chardonnay and Good Food Together," "Sauvignon Blanc—Taming the Sauvage Blanc (while at lunch in the Olive Grove)," and "Looking through Rosé-colored Glasses."

Everything that Sparkles

Happy to have sparkling wine begin the day, John introduced panel moderator Dawnine Dyer, Hugh Davies and Mark Pope. Dawnine's yelp when she saw the sparkling wines to be poured set a festive tone for seminar. The *methode champenoise* sparklers were, from Napa Valley: Brut Rosé, Domaine Carneros; Etoile Brut 1999, Domaine Chandon; Cuvée M, Mumm Napa Valley; J Schram Brut 1999, Schramsberg Vineyards; and, from France: Michel Turgy Brut, Mesnil, Champagne.

Dawnine Dyer,
Partner, Dyer Vineyards

Panel moderator, Dawnine Dyer's own sparkling career spanned 25 years at Domaine Chandon, from 1975 until she retired in 2000. She now makes Dyer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon on Diamond Mountain with her husband (and NVWL Association Board Member) Bill Dyer. Dawnine also consults, and is president of Napa Valley Vintners Association.

Dawnine pointed out that wines with bubbles also include cava and prosecco as well as champagne. Today, she observed, while we have traditions of champagnes from France, serving them at most of our important events, it isn't as though we



Meyer Food Forum, Copia



Dawnine Dyer

know much about this kind of wine. People just like it—it is poured more than still wines at tastings. However, Dawnine firmly believes the more you know, the more you enjoy. Temperature, effervescence, subtle aromas brought to the senses by its bubbles; these are all part of tasting a sparkling wine (which, because of the bubble action, you don't need to swirl to taste). Dawnine finds carbonation the important key to the balance of this kind of wine. As it goes flat, and CO₂ creates acids, its balance changes. The wine's effervescence gives the texture. You must have that dancing, that firing on your taste buds to have the full effect of a sparkling wine. Lipstick kills the visuals, she says. You can see the bubbles disappear as oil from a lipstick's smudge fans out from the glass's edge.

Since the tradition of growing and making champagne is European, and the varieties of grapes in California used in sparkling wine are all from Europe, for Dawnine, paying attention to those traditions isn't homage, it's reality. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir predominate in sparkling wine production here. In France, Pinot Meunier is also widely grown for making champagne, but not here. Hugh Davies pointed out that there is no other market for Pinot Meunier here, the way there is for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Hugh Davies,
President and Winemaker,
Schramsberg Vineyards

Hugh Davies was born at Schramsberg 40 years ago in 1965, the same year the Davies family re-established the winery. Today, besides working at Schramsberg, Hugh is also vice president of Napa Valley Vintners Association.



Hugh Davies

Schramsberg makes eight sparkling wines, six of which are vintage-dated, including J Schram Brut. When Hugh's family moved to Schramsberg, Hugh said about 1,000 acres of Chardonnay were planted in all of California and about 250 in Napa Valley. Now, there are over 50,000 acres of Chardonnay in the state and 7,000 in the Valley. In 1965 the acreage exclusively for sparklers was very small. Today there are over 100 acres devoted to

Blanc de Blanc at Schramsberg itself. They made only 1000 or 1500 cases of vintage 1999 J Schram (Blanc de Blanc in style) and 15,000 to 20,000 cases of the vintage Blanc de Blanc. Hugh says it's a tightrope match to do a single vineyard vintage, because the blending must be simple and austere. Vintage sparkling wine must be made 95% from fruit from that year. With non-vintage, if the components are not horizontal (from the same year but different vineyards) then they are vertical (from the current and earlier years). The winemaker still has the ability to infuse a little character, to "go to the spice rack" as Hugh describes it, to introduce a little more flavor, character. A quality vintage *methode champenoise* wine is defined by its aging and its vintage—how much sunshine on the fruit post-veraison there was, what the temperature variations were during the growing season. At Chandon, Dawnine elaborated, time in the bottle, in contact with yeast gives a toasty body structure and is critical to the development of its sparkling wine. She also mentioned she had started the Chandon Etoile Brut that was poured. Vintage *methode champenoise* wines are labeled with the bottling date. Hugh observed, with a sigh, that vintage *methode champenoise* winemakers are not part of the culture yet in the United States, as they are in France, where nearly every champagne producer makes a vintage. Since its very beginning, Schramsberg has had vintage dated

sparkling wines. Hugh does feel, however, that there has been steady improvement overall in making vintage *methode champenoise* wines in America.

Hugh pointed out that weather patterns vary in California and the Napa Valley where lack of rain, different humidity and moisture differ from many French regions. However, locations for vineyards for sparkling wines are improving. Particularly important vineyards have been developed in cooler regions, in areas with coastal fruit, such as South Napa—Carneros (which, in 1965 had zero grapes planted in Region I) and Monterey County.

Mark Pope, Proprietor, *The Bounty Hunter*

Mark began his rare wine business with a mail order catalogue eleven years ago. He now has a retail shop in Napa that John Skupny said Mark created from the perspective of a *bon vivant*. Mark said of what he stocks, “If it’s not great, we don’t sell it.”

Mark happily commented that California’s sparkling wines were not just for breakfast anymore; from his getting out over a million catalogues he can see that sparkling wine sales are going up. Mark quoted Winston Churchill on champagne, saying that when one was victorious one deserved it, and when one was defeated one should demand it. He also quoted the



Mark Pope

French as saying there were two occasions to drink it: happy and sad. Mark called California styles “exuberant, racy, fruit forward” and the French “yeasty, toasty.” And, he said of wines made in the *methode champenoise*, “I like to drink champagne because I’m breathing.”

Pointing to the Michel Turgu Brut from Mesnil in Champagne, Mark said there were 30 different vintage Blanc de Blancs and single vineyard Blanc de Blancs from there. Mesnil is home to Krug and Salon with an east-facing slope and village in a compact area with soils of white chalk and clay. Mesnil champagnes have a bouquet of green apple, white flowers, and baked apple. Hugh liked the analogy—“as the wines age, the apple pie bakes.”

Dawnine and Hugh next gave an overview of making *methode champenoise* wines. Typically, wineries making *methode champenoise* wines pick first in the Valley, at

19-20 °Brix for Chardonnay. For Mumm Napa Valley, harvest had already begun; Chandon and Schram would begin to pick Monday after the seminar. Harvest always varies. In 1997 and 2004 it was July, in 1999 it was August. Harvests have even begun in October. The grapes are not fully ripe when they are picked; the fruit has less sugar and more acid—*very* different from Cabernet. The base wines (before they sparkle) will have 11 to 11 1/2% alcohol before bottling (still wine fruit picked at 24-25° Brix yields wines 13 to 15% alcohol). The base wines ferment in tanks or barrels. For some, there is malolactic fermentation, common in champagnes. Primary fermentation takes place over two to eight weeks. *Assemblage*, a blending of base wines, takes place in the spring when yeast is also added just before bottling, with a 2 1/2% sugar solution. The bottles are then stored in caves, cool and dark, where subtle oxidative characters—burnt, toasty—develop during this second fermentation. When the bottles come out of the cave they are riddled (expertly turned and shaken) to get the remains of the yeast into the necks. Once all the sediment is in the neck of the bottle, it is frozen and its bottle cap popped. Interior pressure shoots out the yeast plug. A *liquor d’expedition* is then added. This *dosage* in California makes up 2 to 3 percent of all the sugar in finished sparkling wine. The wine is then stoppered with a proper champagne cork and

its contents left to marry. For J Schram the *dosage* is 50-50 sugar and wine; for the 2003 Chardonnay, 7 to 8ml into 750ml bottles plus 7 to 8 ml sugar. Some may even add a little red, said Dawnine, like Domaine Carneros. That quantity of fruit flavor it gives makes for a refreshing beverage that Dawnine finds extraordinary. Mark commented that sparkling Rosés gave great varieties of tastes per dollar. Panelists then took questions: Among them were:

Q: What is the methodology for cava, prosecco etc.? Hugh answered that it is more a matter of grape varieties--very much like still wine. Cava uses the Xarello, Macabeo and Parallada varieties; Prosecco is made with Muscat grapes.

Q: Consistency is important in France. What about here? Dawnine says vintage champagne used to be a 10% exception to non-vintage champagnes, but disasters in Champagne are now far less common and blending is no longer necessary to overcome uneven harvests. Now the blending is more of a tradition.

Q: What is the optimum fill for a glass? Dawnine says because of the stem of the glass, a shallow pour isn't necessary. The wine will stay cool and there is plenty of space above for flavor, which allows for a more substantial pour--and isn't that a wonderful thing?!

Exciting Whites and their Inspiration

John introduced the next session, a series of parallel tastings or pairs to compare and contrast varietals in the Napa Valley with their foreign provocations. Panelists were Michael Havens, Jon-Mark Chappellet, Michael Drash, and Peter Luthi.

Michael Havens, *Owner and Winegrower, Havens Wine Cellars*

Michael Havens was first bit by the wine bug in 1969, in Switzerland high above the Rhone Valley, where he got to love light white wines. He and his wife, Kathryn, first tasted Albariño in 1986 in Spain, where this wine typically cost two times the regular whites on the menu. It is delicious with cheese, seafood, and picnics and the Havenses fell in love with it. Should they import or grow it? Kathryn said, "You decide." Albariño budwood from the Morgadio Estate in Spain was already being grown on California's Central Coast by Brian Babcock. Havens planted this Albariño in Carneros in 1987 on a difficult site they dike to keep out the Napa River. The site has clayey soil and gets river fog, which keeps the vineyard cooler, longer. It is also quite windy there. The Albariño is picked at 21 1/2° Brix; which means it tracks with Chardonnay. Michael called Chardonnay a winemaker's grape—you really go to the

spice rack a lot for the blend. By contrast, Albariño is a variety that speaks to place. The winemaker needs to get out of the way, which is different historically in how Americans are thinking about wines. While the Albariño Havens makes is just 3% of their production, it is a flirt and they have to remind themselves to pour their reds. Michael says it takes all the attention from them. Michael poured Havens Wine Cellar 2004 Albariño, Napa Valley and Adegas Morgado 2004 Albariño, Rias Baixas, Spain.

Michael Drash, *Winemaker, Luna Vineyards*

Michael Drash came to winemaking on a whim. He drove from Florida to Santa Rosa in seven days and knocked on the door of De Loach Winery. Ten years, four wineries, and successively better, tougher jobs later, Mike arrived at Luna as winemaker. Its style of winemaking was the Kongsgaard hands-off style. This did include acid additions originally, but no longer. Luna Pinot Grigio is 80 to 90% barrel-aged in barrels 10 or 12 years old. Pinot Grigio fruit is tight-clustered and thin-skinned, always prone to Botrytis (bunch rot). This year there was shatter (berry loss), but with the looser clusters, so far there's been no Botrytis. Luna does a whole cluster press. Pinot Grigio is a cousin of Pinot Noir, its fruit light red in color. When Luna fermented two barrels of it on the skins, the red was a ringer for



Mike Drash

Pinot Noir. Luna has been open only nine years--they are still learning what works. It's a young vineyard at the winery, planted to I46 and I52 Alsatian clones of Pinot Grigio. You would think the fruit would need a cold climate, yet Garvey's in Oakville is warm and it gives the best fruit. Mike calls Pinot Grigio a baffling varietal: a quaffer wine in Italy, it is currently experiencing double-digit growth in the United States. Luna's inspiration for the style of Pinot Grigio they make is from Friuli in Alsace. They want a riper, more extracted wine with enough weight to reach the mid-palate. Mike poured Luna Vineyards 2004 Pinot Grigio, Napa Valley and Jermann 2003 Pinot Grigio, Venezia Giulia, Italy.

*Jon-Mark Chappellet,
Winery and Vineyard Operations,
Chappellet Winery and Vineyards*

Jon-Mark Chappellet, with his brother Cyril and his father Donn, helps run Chappellet Winery and Vineyards, begun by Donn in 1967. Jon-Mark considers his family pioneers on Pritchard Hill, where their innovative winery is now in its fourth decade of operations. When Donn bought existing vineyard in 1967, one quarter of it was in Chenin Blanc. Jon-Mark calls the history of Chenin Blanc Napa's history. Chenin Blanc used to be one of the workhorse wines. It had a big presence in the 1950's and 1960's in Napa Valley. Growers liked it because you can crop it up to 14 tons an acre, especially in rich soils, but that doesn't serve the varietal very well. At Chappellet, the fruit is dry-farmed, low yield. The vineyard's top terrace is at 1800 feet. This could mean five tons an acre, but Chappellet finds two to two and a half tons is optimum. They once went from two tons to one, but found one ton allows too many viruses and the balance of the fruit is lost. Normally Chenin Blanc is made off-dry with residual sugar; at Chappellet it is fermented dry. The vineyard is undergoing replanting now, to Chenin Blanc at Jon-Mark's and his mom's insistence. The focus is on the potential to the best the varietal can do, and the best it has is a lot about subtlety. Chenin Blanc won't drive the business,



Jon-Mark Chappellet

obviously, but they treat it with care. They get Botrytis at 18-20° Brix if there is some humidity, a heavy canopy (canopy management has helped Chenin Blanc, but you still need the right breeze), perforation of the skins and dehydration leaving a fair amount of acid and sugar. If they're too late, the acid's dropped and character lost. They may go from knives to scissors, and pick partial bits of clusters for the right kind of fruit. There is no malolactic fermentation. At Chappellet they are very hands-off, letting the grape express itself. Jon-Mark says Chenin Blanc is not as aromatic as Albariño and is easily taken over by oak and by malolactic fermentation, which does wild things. Jon-Mark poured Chappellet Winery and Vineyards 2003 Dry Chenin Blanc, Napa Valley and Marc Bredif 2003 Vouvray, Loire Valley, France.

Peter Luthi,
Winemaker, Trefethen Vineyards

Peter Luthi has been winemaker at Trefethen since 1985, where White Riesling has been a consistent producer. Peter has been involved with Riesling nearly his whole life. In the Lake of Zurich area of Switzerland where Peter was raised, it is mostly white grapes. His father was a microbiologist at an experimental research station. Peter grew up tasting wines from experimental crosses of Riesling-Sylvaner, Merle le Turgau and Riesling-Chasselas. Lightness, fruitiness, these facets of Riesling plus its longevity have fascinated him. Peter feels Riesling doesn't get the attention it should get—in the 1950's and 60's there was probably ten times as much growth as today. Trefethen had to re-plant in the early 1990's because of phylloxera, and had to decide: Riesling or Chardonnay? Riesling had been enjoyed



Peter Luthi

for a long time. Peter counseled, 'Wouldn't it be boring if there were no Riesling?' Trefethen Riesling terroir is in the Oak Knoll District at the southern end of Napa Valley, with cooler, relatively heavy (rockier in Germany) loamy soils. In cooler, wetter years Botrytis can be too much for table wines. It drives up sugar—by 4 to 5° Brix in a couple of days. Peter prefers lower alcohol Riesling, so if Botrytis begins, they'll pick parts of the blocks early. Riesling naturally has pronounced acids, 2 to 2.1 pH. Its fruit develops a floral characteristic—jasmine, orange blossom early in its life. Trefethen produces wines that work with food: Chardonnay, Cabernets, and a drier style of Riesling. Its threshold level of residual sugar at .5 or .6 per 100ml and high level of acidity makes it refreshing, as wine with elevated acidity tends to cleanse the palate, especially with spicy foods.

In Germany, Riesling is grown in regions such as Mosel—Saar—Ruwer, typically along the rivers. It is so much easier to make here—the terrain! The climate is stable; it is not so steep or rocky. There is a lot of slate in Germany, which gives the wines a mineral character. In Europe, the vines struggle for warmth; in Napa Valley, they struggle for coolth. The problem may be in reverse, but you still have to find the spot. In Germany, Rieslings have higher acidity, balanced with higher residual sugars, and are not perceived as

tremendously sweet. Jon-Mark observed that in this culture we don't get to experience not-dry wines very often. Germany classifies its Rieslings as non-qualified Kabinett, Auslese (late harvest), Spätlese, Eiswein, and Trockenbeerauslese. Kabinett tends to be lower in sugar than Spätlese or Auslese, although it still has ten times the sugar that Trefethen has, but this is balanced by acidity. Peter finds Riesling to be a versatile wine. You can have it before or at dinner, an aged Spätlese or Auslese with dessert or after. Riesling has low acidity and you are not burned by alcohol. Peter chose a pair of wines because of their differences, although he said they shared the qualities of jasmine and wet rock. Peter poured Trefethen Vineyards 2004 White Riesling, Napa Valley and Johann Joseph Christoffel Erben 2003 Ürziger Würtzgarten, Kabinett, Mosel, Germany.

Chardonnay and Good Food Together

Steve Rogstad,
Winemaker, Cuvaision

Linda Carucci,
Curator of Food Arts, Copia

Steve Rogstad and Linda Carucci made the next presentation, a tasting of two Chardonnays made by Cuvaision under Steve's direction, and a salad before lunch inventively prepared by Linda to match the Chardonnays.



Steve Rogstaf

Steve initially trained in wine at Chateau de l'Eclair, a research facility in Beaujolais, France. He then went to UC Davis and from there to Saintsbury, Rombauer and Spring Mountain. In 1996 he became winemaker at Clos Pegase and in 2002, winemaker at Cuvaison. The wines he chose were from fruit from Cuvaison's estate vineyards in Carneros and Mt. Veeder: Steve poured Cuvaison Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley 2003 and Cuvaison Chardonnay, Estate Selection, Napa Valley 2003.

Linda put together the salad course for lunch. She said she enjoyed bringing nuances in the wine to play with the greens and other components. Originally trained in psychology, Linda has now brought mind to palate much the way, she said, a simple salad tossed in the bowl led to the day's salade composée. With Chardonnays, Linda thought a raspberry



Linda Carucci

vinaigrette would be good. She chose red raspberry vinegar from Kozlowski Farms, Sonoma. Low in acid, 4.5% acidity, she said this vinegar doesn't get you in the back of the throat. Ordinarily Linda would also use sugar. Today, she used honey (and a dash of mustard for emulsification). The smoked chicken was not heavily smoked and the wild rice was graced with fresh thyme. Linda cautioned that wild rice undergoes change when in the icebox overnight. And she said not to worry if it takes much longer to cook than the box directs. For textural contrast, Linda added fennel that she had shaved on a mandolin and ice-watered to get the strength out. Toasted pecans gave additional smokiness.

Steve went on to say that Cuvaison Chardonnay is not made in a full malolactic style. They like to preserve acidity so it goes well with food. The Cuvaison



Salade Composée

Chardonnay Estate Selection is made with full malolactic fermentation and spends 15 months in barrel. Steve feels both wines convey a true sense of the vineyard. He and Linda urged everyone to compare and contrast the flavors of the Chardonnays with those of the smoked pecans and stone fruit, and note acidity, the fat of the meat, the richness of the wild rice.

When Steve was in Beaujolais, the wine community was still wondering how malolactic fermentation came about. Was it an act of God? At Chateau de l'Eclair they were doing some enological research on yeasts. In Beaujolais there are at least 50 wineries, many of which didn't then know yeasts were responsible for fermentations. They used wild yeasts. Steve and his colleagues found that certain bacteria lack the ability to create the enzyme that allows that buttery thing to happen [malolactic fermentation] and that you need titratable

acidity—Chablis, for instance, has higher acidity, 10 grams per liter. The Cuvaision Chardonnay Estate clone has high acidity; the wine can tolerate acid reduction from malolactic fermentation. The other Chardonnay is from Dijon clones. Steve calls keeping acid and sugar levels a real balancing act.

John Skupny asked what the wine does for the food. Steve said acid causes salivation, that one is drawn to the Carneros Chardonnay with food, less so when it is on its own, while the Estate is rich by itself. Both are fermented bone dry. The Carneros has a quality that complements stone fruit—they sing in harmony. Steve especially liked the green-leaf-thing with the vinaigrette brought about by Linda's skilled pairing. The Estate has a limited barrel selection, but both programs are from Carneros. The 2005 release will be more acidic than the 2004. They used 25-30% new French oak—complementary, reductive, smoky on the nose.

Sauvignon Blanc: Taming the *Sauvage Blanc*

Mia Klein,
Owner and Winemaker, Selene Wines

Paul Roberts,
Director of Wine and Beverages, French Laundry

A dozen tables were set out beside herb and vegetable gardens, under the olive trees at Copia. Petrale sole, celery root



puree and fresh beans were served. The wines poured were Selene Wines 2004 Sauvignon Blanc Hyde Vineyards Carneros Napa Valley and Cliff Lede 2004 Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley.

Mia said rather than give a formal presentation she and Paul would talk about the wines and answer questions at each table. By way of a general introduction, however, Mia did say she had been making Selene since 1991 and called Sauvignon Blanc the red wine of the white wines. She said Sauvignon Blanc runs the gamut in flavors: “Very gooseberry, herbaceous, savage; also oaky, creamy. You need a sommelier!” Paul nodded and both agreed Sauvignon Blanc goes great with foods.

The Selene Sauvignon Blanc poured at lunch has been made since 1992 from fruit from Larry Hyde: “Gotta have the raw material,” is how Mia expressed her loyalty to Hyde Vineyards. When asked which year was best for Selene, Paul said ‘at the French Laundry every year for Selene was the preferable one.’



Mia Klein (center)



Paul Roberts (standing)

With Mia's guidance at the table, members talked through the wines by look, smell, taste and the contribution of terroir. Then they tasted the wines with food. With Paul's help they analyzed their preferences, which for many had, as member Richard Jensen said, “completely flipped.” A dessert of lemon steamed pudding concluded the al fresco luncheon, tasting and free-range discussions.

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Looking through Rosé-colored Glasses

The wines poured were: Benessere Rosato di Sangiovese, Napa Valley 2004; Chateau Rostas Rouviere Rosé Provence, France 2004; Lang & Reed Wild Hare Rosé Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley 2004; Saintsbury Vincent Vin Gris Carneros, Napa Valley 2004; and Sinskey Vineyards

Vin Gris de Pinot Noir Carneros, Napa Valley 2004.

John Buechsenstein,
*Wine Instructor,
Culinary Institute of America*

The moment he was introduced, John Buechsenstein began to clarify what he called ‘the somewhat mélange character of Rosé.’ He outlined the significant differences defined by Robert Mayberry, a professor at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, based on the way in which a Rosé is made from red [also known as black] grapes, to whit: A) Throw all the grapes into a press and press out the juice. Brief skin contact yields a pale wine with minimum color (onionskin); color also depends on variety--some varieties bleed more than others; and temperature--more color higher, less color lower the degrees; and time in hours spent on the skins. B) Give some degree of maceration (soaking). For classic Tavel, dump whole clusters into the tank or increase maceration with a gentle pump (some juice is expressed just by the weight of fruit on fruit). Soak the must for hours up to overnight. There is also intentional partial crushing. After destemming, pump just the grapes in varying degrees of ‘crushiness’ into the tank. C) Finally, take the rest of the solids out of the tank and press these. With any maceration or crushing, there is some drawing off of the juice to concentrate the must, known as *la saignée* after contact. For Tavel, 5 to 10% of



John Skupny

the juice is held back, a quality selection. Rosé also depends on varieties of grapes used and their ripeness. As to alcohol, these are ‘full-service’ wines made from mature grapes in the 12-14% alcohol range, not rich in tannins, with inherently unstable pigments. Although the flavors are chiefly fresh fruit, they are not *bon-bons d'Angleterre*; there are esters, yes, but not a tutti-frutti flavor; a fruit berry character but not jam, not a simmered reduction. John said there is decent acid in many Rosés from warm regions. With the lack of interference by tannins, acid is more obvious with 12, 13, 13 1/2% alcohol. There is good viscosity. Rosés are great at a raw bar; they are perfumey, scented with

saffron and spices. They also go with cassoulet and saucissons secs. Year-round, Rosés go with almost everything.

Jerome Chery,
Winemaker, Saintsbury

Jerome Chery studied winemaking in Dijon. He explained Rosé this way, “You know, with food, you kill a pig and make many things. With wine, you make as many as possible.” Rosé is taken very seriously in Tavel. Saintsbury’s first Rosé was made with Pinot Noir. To make Rosé at Saintsbury, they crush, fill the tank, bleed it, drain and fill barrels for fermentation. They do add yeast. Once dry, there is malolactic fermentation. Although the



Traci Dutton