

Meet The Cooper:

Crossing Vineyards Brings Barrelnaker To Washington Crossing For Winter Winemaker's Dinner

THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE
CHRISTINE CARROLL

Why is wine aged in oak barrels? Why doesn't it spoil or leak out during the aging process? What kinds of wine should be stored in oak and for how long?

If you thirst for more knowledge about the role of oak in quality wine production, meet cooper (barrelnaker) Brian Wilson at Crossing Vineyards and Winery's Winter Winemaker's Dinner on Saturday, January 19.

Wilson, whose family operates Keystone Cooperage in Jefferson, Pa., will address guests at a four-course gourmet dinner and wine-pairing at 7:30 p.m.

A graduate of the School of Forestry at West Virginia University and Ohio University, Wilson says growing up in the family business furthered his knowledge of wood and what makes it so valuable. He has traveled to all the large wine-growing regions of the world.

barrelnaking and winemaking are intertwined.

As far back as 92 AD, Pliny the Elder records the use of an "exceptional vessel" for storing wine. Prior to that time, only earthen jars were used.

In the late 1800s, Louis Pasteur was commissioned by Napoleon III to study the causes for wine spoilage. Pasteur made two important discoveries: Wine absorbs oxygen, and excessive amounts of it promote the growth of a vinegar producing bacteria. He also learned that slight amounts of oxygen can help mature wine and improve the taste.

Why Age Wine In Barrels?

With the all the scientific advances modern enology, many contemporary vintners still choose to age wine in oak. This stylistic decision is made because of the unique transformation that occurs in an oak barrel.

Oak admits small amounts of oxygen which helps wine lose its astringency. In other words, due to the porosity of the wood, barrel aging allows a slow, controlled oxidation process. Oxidation-reduction also causes wine's flavor to become more concentrated. Additionally, wood creates richer more complex aromas and a smooth, mellow taste.

Color is also affected by aging in wood. Red wines take on a warmer hue with brown highlights, and whites become more golden.

Why Use Oak Barrels?

Oak is the preferred wood in modern wine production for many reasons. White oak in particular is supple and easy to bend into staves. In addition, it is porous enough to admit small amounts of oxygen without allowing the liquid to ooze out. It also contains sufficient tannin to enhance flavors and aromas without overpowering the wine.

Each type of wood offers a different flavor profile, white oak being the most familiar and popular.

Chestnut wood, for example, is less suitable for barrel aging. It is more porous than oak, causing

more rapid oxidation and evaporation. It is also richer in tannin, which tends to make wine harsh and astringent.

Coarse or fine grain oak barrels can be used to create different flavors. Coarse grain gives a more "rustic" character with a touch of bitterness in the finish. Fine grain imparts woody character more quickly. For this reason, fine grain oak barrels are often preferred for white wine, which has a shorter life cycle. The natural polyphenol content of red wine makes grain choice less important.

The "toast" of the wood can also affect the taste of the wine. Degrees of toast can be light, medium or heavy, with flavors ranging from caramelized to charred.

To learn more about oak and its role in quality wine production, meet cooper Brian Wilson at Crossing Vineyards and Winery's Winter Winemaker's dinner on January 19.

The evening will begin at 7:30 p.m. with hot and cold hors d'oeuvres served in the Tasting Room. Included will be: onion tartlets with olives; goat cheese and rosemary with roasted pepper on crostini; terrine with pommery mustard on sesame canapés, paired with Vintner's Select White and Vintner's Select Red (NV).

Dinner in the Vineyard Room will consist of:
Soup course: Hot Vichyssoise with crispy angel-hair leeks, paired with Nouveau Blanc '06, Viognier '06.

Salad: Frisée Chicory with sautéed lardons and Gruyère cheese dressed in balsamic vinegar and olive oil, paired with Chardonnay '06 and Cabernet Franc '04.

Meat course: Roasted Duck magret with cranberry chutney and demi-glace Gratin Dauphinois, carrot mousse and sautéed spinach, paired with Pinot Noir '06 (new release) and Cabernet Sauvignon '06.

Dessert: Tart Tatin with almonds and apple cider English custard, paired with Apple Wine (NV) and Riesling '06.

Cost of the dinner is \$85, plus tax and gratuity.

Crossing Vineyards and Winery's Winter Winemaker's Dinner will feature a talk on the fine art of barrelnaking



education in some of the best cooperages in the world, including sites in Scotland, Australia, Spain and the United States.

According to Wilson, the history of



Above: Brian Wilson, whose family operates Keystone Cooperage in Jefferson, Pa will be guest speaker at Crossing Vineyards and Winery's Winter Winemaker's Dinner on Saturday, January 19.

Seating is limited. Reservations can be made by calling 215-493-6500, ext.19 or on line at www.crossingvineyards.com. Entrée substitutions may be arranged in advance. Directions to the winery, 1853 Wrightstown Road, may be found on the Web site.

Christine Carroll is a columnist for Wines and Vines Magazine in San Rafael California and one of the principals of Crossing Vineyards and Winery. She is an officer of the Pennsylvania Winery Association's Board of Directors, Penn State University's Enology Program Advisory Committee and is the Secretary of the Bucks County Wine Trail. You can contact her at info@crossingvineyards.com.