



the winemaking process

It's the beginning of April, the days are still hot, but the nights are starting to cool down, exactly what we want to ripen Sauvignon Blanc. The vineyards have stopped growing and the vines are starting to shut down. All the vine's energy is now concentrating on ripening fruit.

The fruit is looking clean and very nice. Strong ripe berries with green golden colors. Each berry full of juice and flavours, two winemakers walking through the vineyard tasting and talking about what flavours we can taste. The refracto has been dusted off and we are testing for sugars. 22.5 brix, almost perfect. The weather is looking clear and the fruit is in great condition.

"Let's do it" the decision is made. I make a call to the harvester and the winery and the fruit is booked in. Forty minutes later the harvester rolls in and starts to set up. We follow along to make sure the machine is picking well and taking all the fruit. The machine rolls over each row, shaking and beating the fruit onto the conveyors and into the holding bins on the harvester. The harvester runs up and back down the next row and has to empty straight to the truck. An hour or so later, 10 tonne heading down to the winery.

We are in the car again and moving to the Pinot Noir vineyard. The block has been looking really good. We had been in there two days earlier but thought it needed a little more time. Each vine perfectly manicured by the vineyard guys. Each cane of each vine producing two beautiful black bunches of fruit. Small black berries and strong skins. We taste for tannins and they are tasting ripe, the colour stains our fingers. Yes, time to go. The hand picking gang pulls up and they start to toss out the picking bins. Ten gang members to a row. Best way to do this so only the cleanest fruit comes in. Eight hard working hours later and the truck is loaded and the fruit pulls into the winery.

The winery is about 10 mins drive from the main Sauvignon Blanc vineyards. It pulls in and then backs up to the ramp. Paper-work is handed over and the load is dumped into the receival bin. 10.24 tonnes. The destemmer is switched on, must pump is primed and the press has been cleaned. Ready to go. 20 mins later the fruit is in the press and we are closing it up and setting the program. Now we wait for 3 hours. The press works away making its puffing noises as the air pressure is released and then it rolls and starts to blow up again to press out more juice. The first juice flows fast; it smells clean and full of tropical fruits, cut grass and tastes fantastic, sweet, cool and bursting with flavors. This is going to be an outstanding tank. All the buzz of the winery, staff running everywhere and in every direction, another truck rolls in with the next load and another press starts up.

The hand pick Pinot Noir is unloaded and weighed. Then through the destemmer and the must chiller and the whole lot, skins, pips and juice are left to soak, each open top tank holds 6 tonne of crushed fruit, and its black and a mass of skins. The cellar hands climb to the top of each tank and start to hand plunge the fruit back into the juice. We need to extract the colour and the flavour. I roll up my sleeves and plunge my arm in. Pull it out again and my skin has changed colour to bright purple. Looks great. I wash my hands but the color does not come off. Yes, vintage is here when your hands are purple.



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We add the yeast to the Pinot Noir. Still on skins, it has been soaking for 3 days. The colour of the juice is now deep purple and it's time to ferment. I like to pour the culture into a little nest. Start it off slowly, because when the reds take off fermenting it's all done in days. And all the way through the cellar hands are plunging. Four guys to a tank, four times a day. Every day, every tank until done. Then we let it soak some more. Time to extract the tannins and develop the palate of the wine.

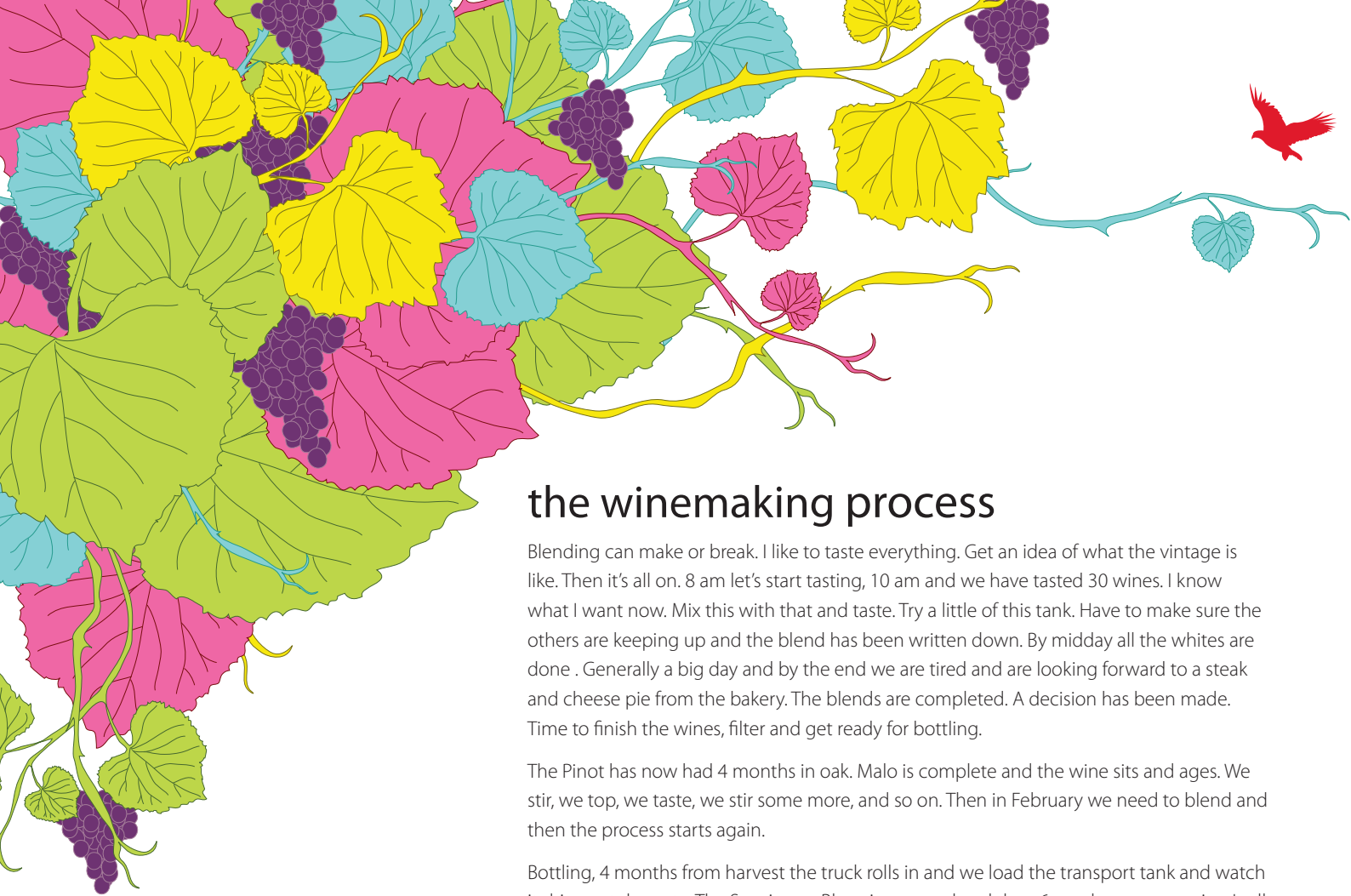
The Sauvignon Blanc is now settling in a stainless tank. The cooling is set at 8 degrees. All looking good. Time to let gravity do its thing. 2 days later we test the racking valve to see if it is clear. Perfect, as clear as water and still tasting fantastic. Time to rack the tank. One of the cellar hands hooks up the pump, sets up the lines and cleans everything. The destination tank is gassed and we let it go. All valves are opened and the clean, clear juice flows into the next tank. Three hours later the door is opened and we finish the racking. All we can smell is full on Sauvignon aromas that are just pouring out the door.

The Pinot has been soaking post ferment for 5 days, we have tasted every day and finally time to press the wine off the skins. The cellar hands set up the gear and drain the wine off the tank. Then, when wine is not flowing anymore and the free run tank is looking full, it's time for the best job in the winery. Digging out the reds. The rookie cellar hand is told to get their boots on, harness up and they are handed the red shovel, and they are told to dig. Six tonne of Pinot Noir needs to be dug out and loaded into the bins then tipped into the press. Good chance to show how fast you can go and the records for fastest time are openly boasted about in the smoko room later that day. Time to clean out the tank, and get ready to load it with the next truck load of Pinot Noir that has just arrived.

The Pinot Noir now needs time in oak; we go through and select which clone is going to go to the best suited Barrique. All wine has been inoculated with malo to give some more complexity on the palate. Once the oak is full, they are moved into the warm room and left. Stirred every couple of weeks and then topped as each barrique loses some volume... the angels share.

Now what... which yeast are we going to use for the Sauvignon? Which yeast will enhance the structure and produce the best ferment? Yeast is mixed up and left to hydrate. Good fermenter this one, the culture is strong and the yeast smells good. Fresh baked bread, we add a little Sauvignon just to get it used to the extra sugar in the juice. Then we tip it into the tank, "Go forth and multiply little yeasties" is the prayer offered as the last of the culture is added. And now we wait. Two days and the tank is starting to prickle and the tell tale signs of CO₂ are being released, well through the lag phase. Now onto the growth phase, 12 hours later the temp is lowered as the ferment is rolling over. Foam and CO₂, and a fantastic aroma of tropical fruits, capsicum and cut grass are floating out the top of the tank. Temperature set for 12 degrees and the tank is perfect. We taste every day and make sure that all is looking good. Finally, after 15 days the ferment is done. All the sugar has been fermented and the alcohol is present. We now have wine.

Multiply this by 30 other tanks of wine and we have a vintage. Now for the best part. Blending.



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Blending can make or break. I like to taste everything. Get an idea of what the vintage is like. Then it's all on. 8 am let's start tasting, 10 am and we have tasted 30 wines. I know what I want now. Mix this with that and taste. Try a little of this tank. Have to make sure the others are keeping up and the blend has been written down. By midday all the whites are done. Generally a big day and by the end we are tired and are looking forward to a steak and cheese pie from the bakery. The blends are completed. A decision has been made. Time to finish the wines, filter and get ready for bottling.

The Pinot has now had 4 months in oak. Malo is complete and the wine sits and ages. We stir, we top, we taste, we stir some more, and so on. Then in February we need to blend and then the process starts again.

Bottling, 4 months from harvest the truck rolls in and we load the transport tank and watch it drive out the gate. The Sauvignon Blanc is prepped and then 6 am the next morning I roll into the bottling company and one final taste and the final sign off, everything is gassed off. No air around here, the labels look good, and the guys are keen to get rolling, big day today. I watch as the glass rolls down the line, a blur of glass and wine, the color of the labels as the bottles whizz past and then into the cases. But it does not stop there. Time to get it to market.

Winemaking in Marlborough, where Sauvignon Blanc is king and we do the best in the world.

Murph

