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Demystifying Wine Aromas

Ah, the pleasure we derive from our sense of smell—particularly when enjoying fine wine exquisitely matched with a good meal. Some smells can flood us with associations and memories of comfort and pleasure. Others can stimulate and transport us with their exotic newness. Then there are those that can raise a “red flag” and let us know to avoid something unpleasant. But how do we know? How does our brain interpret the signals it receives?

Smell and taste work together, through our body’s chemical sensing system. Our taste buds, which number somewhere between 5000 and 10,000, detect five categories: sweet, sour, spicy, bitter and umami. Each taste bud has between 50 and 100 specialized sensory cells. As impressive as that sounds, our sense of smell—located in our olfactory tract—is in fact responsible for about 80% of what we taste. Smell is believed to be the oldest of our senses and is most associated with memory.

A spectacular range of aroma compounds are associated with wine—in fact, there are about 1000. When their chemical signatures pass through our sensing system, detailed messages are sent to our brain to be analyzed, identified, and *hopefully* enjoyed. Following are a few aroma compounds of particular interest to the wines we make and enjoy:

Esters: These volatile compounds are organic acids that form during the fermentation process. They are responsible for most of the fruit and floral notes in wines.

Phenols: These compounds are present in grapes and can also be derived from oak aging. For example, guaiacol imparts smoky, toasty, and roasted aromas, while eugenol can give clove notes.

Terpenes: These compounds are responsible for herbaceous notes. They can also come across as floral or sweet, depending on the wine.

Rotundone: This distinctive terpene gives some wines that classic peppery aroma. Think Shiraz! It is also found in the essential oils of black pepper, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, thyme.

Pyrazines: These distinctive compounds are responsible for the herbal and “green” aromas in some wines—most notably, Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties.

Read on to learn how these components contribute to your enjoyment of your shipment wines...

In this shipment:

2016 Petite Sirah, Estate (Club Pre-Release)

Harvest Brix: 25.5 pH: 3.61 TA: 4.30 Alc: 15.0% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 180 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Our Estate Petite Sirah consistently displays hearty tannins, intense blackberry and plum fruit, smoke and spice notes, and excellent acidity and balance for this variety. With age, this wine acquires an amazing elegance. We typically release it after five or six years, by which time the tannins have softened to a velvety texture. This stunning new vintage is no exception.

Aromas: This wine's predominant fruit characteristics are dark fruits—particularly blackberry and plum, brought to our sensory receptors by its abundant *esters* formed during our long fermentation process. Its full body has some smokiness and subtle baking spices—even a hint of chocolate. These come from its abundant *phenols*.

2016 Troubadour (New Release)

Harvest Brix: 25.3 pH: 3.43 TA: 5.19 Alc: 14.8% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 223 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

The new vintage of our signature Cabernet-Shiraz blend just blew us away! It consists of 66% Cabernet from Goedeck Vineyard and 33% Shiraz from an Australian-clone planting—both grown in Fair Play. It's a marriage of concentrated cherry characteristics from the cabernet, and decadent pepper and blueberry notes from the Shiraz. The wine is rich and velvety—an amazing treat for the holidays.

Aromas: This wine is loaded with abundant berry characteristics—particularly cherries and blueberries—thanks to the stunningly fragrant *esters* that form during our long fermentation process. It also has abundant peppery spice, thanks to the *rotundone* compound that forms on the skin of the shiraz in the late stages of ripening. Also contributed by the shiraz is the *terpenes* that give the wine its earthy character. And finally, we have the *pyrazines*, a signature part of the varietal profile of cabernet. These lend an herbaceous “bell pepper” note. Together they make a complex and harmonious combination!

2013 Zinfandel, Herbert Vineyard (Library)

Harvest Brix: 25.2 pH: 3.54 TA: 6.83 Alc: 15.3% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 342 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Finally, we have yet another special treat for you...a venerable library wine from our cellar! Made in our signature classical style, our 2013 Library Zinfandel is loaded with raspberry and pomegranate fruit notes, and hints of anise and clove. It is balanced, elegant and exceedingly versatile with food. After nine years of aging, this wine has deepened into a delicate complexity while maintaining its vibrancy.

Aromas: The *esters* of this lush, perfumy wine hint strongly of fresh raspberries. Again, our fermentation—which is longer and cooler than standard industry practices—encourages a profusion of these fragrant volatiles. Our clean winemaking style also allows a distinctive anise spice to shine through—thanks to the wine's *terpenes* and our non-malolactic method.

Alright. Now that we've thoroughly geeked out, it's time to set aside the jargon, open a bottle and let your sensory receptors have a field day!