



Portland Winemakers Club

February 2024

“Bob’s Blurb”

2024 Monthly Events

January 17th,
Discuss plans and ideas for 2024

January 26st,
Gala

February 14th,
Speaker: Dr. Rich DeScenzo from ETS Labs, “Indigenous yeast fermentation observations”. NOTE: This is in place of our normal Feb. 21st meeting.

March 20th,
Tasting & judging, members barrel samples.

April 17th,
Tips and tricks and demo night.

May 15th,
Tasting & judging, member produced Bordeaux Reds

June 19th,
Tasting & judging, members produced all Whites, Rose’ & sparkling

July - No meeting
Annual Picnic, Day TBD \$10 ea. fee

August 21st,
Tasting & judging, member produced other Reds & fruit wines

September 18th,
Speaker: Geologist Dr. Scott Burns, “Tasting Terror in the Pacific Northwest”

October 16th,
Tasting & judging, member produced Pinot Noir

November 20th,
Crush Talk

December 11th,
Elections, Planning for Next Year

Wine-related tours may be scheduled on non-meeting days.

It was great to see everyone that was able to make to the Gala in January.

We have a great year ahead and looks like it will be a busy one. The meeting is a week early this month because Paul Natale our chair of education/speakers has already arranged a speaker. Get ready for a great talk on the 14th. Hope you can make it. I will be going to the Oregon Wine Symposium on Feb 13,14. I will attempt to gather as much info as I can and bring it back to talk about at a meeting.

Tool of the month. I hope you already have one of these. If you don't recognize it, come to the meeting and ask. .. Bob



Wine Evaluation & Judging Online Boot Camp with Bob Peak (Feb.23, 2024 2-5 pm)
\$75.00

Description: Learn how to evaluate your own wines and other bottles in the same way as a trained wine judge during this live, online, three-hour workshop with WineMaker’s Technical Editor and experienced wine judge Bob Peak. He’ll walk through how to use sensory skills to improve your winemaking. You will be given a wine shopping list ahead of time so you can taste and evaluate the same exact wines with Bob live and in real time as you learn how to use the UC-Davis scoring sheet WineMaker judges use in our annual competition. Bob will go over evaluation techniques including the identification of common faults. This workshop will take place live on February 23, 2024 from 2 pm to 5 pm Eastern.

This workshop will also be recorded and as an attendee you will have access to video replays to practice your new skills.

[Wine Evaluation & Judging Online Boot Camp with Bob Peak \(Feb.23, 2024 2-5 pm\) - 1 WineMakerMag.com](https://www.winemakermag.com)

Upcoming events / Save the date

The next PWC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 14th, a week earlier than usual, in the basement of the Aloha Grange starting at 7:00 pm. We will have a speaker, Rich DesScenzo from ETS Labs. He will talk about indigenous yeast fermentation observations.

NOTE: There will be a pot-luck table for those who wish to participate. Bring a dish to share. If you would rather not participate feel free to bring your own snacks.

NOTE: *Bring a bottle of wine to put into a trading pool. Everyone who brings a bottle draws a number to pick from the wine trading pool. Numbers get picked until the pool is empty.*

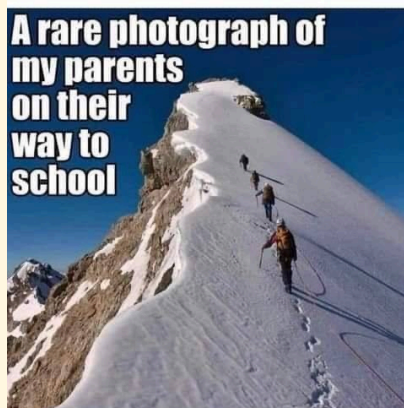
• Take time to visit the PWC website: portlandwinemakersclub.com where there are Newsletters archived back to 2007.

• Also, visit our public group Facebook page: "Portland Winemakers Club" [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/portlandwinemakersclub) Give it a look, join the discussions, and enter some posts of your own.

January Meeting Notes

Members present: 18

- Our February meeting will be held one week early on the 14th. Our speaker will be Rich DeScenzo from ETS Labs. We will need to provide a projector and screen for the presentation.
- Bob Thoenen. Grape purchase program. Bob passed out information sheets and program rules. Jamison is possibly having surgery next year and will not be delivering grapes to Portland as he has in the past.
- Mindy reminded us of the Gala at the Grange on January 26th.
- Brian Bowles passed out samples of a tasting sheet to consider using for our tasting nights to record our impressions of each wine tasted in 5 categories.
- Craig Bush suggested that we limit entries on tasting nights to one entry (2 bottles) per person with a maximum total of 12 entries per evening.
- Paul Natale has secured Geologist Dr. Scott Burns as a speaker sometime this Spring or Summer. He will discuss Terrior in the Pacific Northwest and its effects on wine character. He will need a digital projector and screen for this meeting.
- There was more discussion about the club conducting an amateur wine competition in conjunction with the Washington County Fair. Barb Thomson will contact the Fair management.
- The remainder of the year's schedule will be the same as last year with possible changes depending on speaker availability.



The Portland Winemakers Club held their annual Gala on January 24th at the club room in the Aloha Grange. Everyone brought their good wines to share and lots of food to eat. Officers were presented with a bottle of fine wine and a couple of glasses. Several prizes were raffled off. A very good guitar blues player provided the entertainment. Thanks go to Mindy Bush and Marilyn Brown for managing the event.

President Bob Hatt presented the 2023 Marj Vuylsteke Member of the Year Award to **Rob Marr** For leadership in managing two jobs at the same time, Chairman for speakers and educational content as well as chairman of competitions.

Gala photos





Winemaking Tips from Robert Foley

Written by Danny Wood



“I think the two biggest things for me were to get out of the science lab and get into the vineyard,” says Californian winemaker Bob Foley, known for decades of top-class Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Foley is referring to the mid-1970s when he graduated from UC-Davis with a degree in enology and fermentation science. He soon discovered that, beyond scientific know-how, making great wine is dependent on growing great grapes.

His career has always been rooted in California’s Napa Valley, these days at Robert Foley Vineyards and Switchback Ridge, where his sought-after bottlings are big and expressive. He also makes wine for Padis Vineyards and Engel Family Vineyards.

Foley came to fame during the 1990s at Pride Mountain Vineyards where he was Winemaker for 15 years. At that time he also made wine for Paloma Vineyard, whose 2001 Merlot was *Wine Spectator’s* 2003 Wine of the Year. He’s a *Food and Wine Magazine* Winemaker of the Year and wine critic Robert Parker has described his vino as “Virtually perfect.” He’s also known as a strong advocate for Petite Sirah and the lesser-known Charbono grape.

It starts in the vineyard

Perhaps more than many other top-flight winemakers, Foley is actually in the vineyard for much of the year. At a time in his career when many winemakers would slow down and delegate, he’s still at full throttle. At Robert Foley Vineyards, located on Howell Mountain, Foley himself still harvests 60 acres of vines (producing about 200 tons of fruit) together with his vineyard management team. He hired his first winery assistant in 2012 — before that, he did all his own cellar work. “I love it,” he says. “It keeps me like a kid in a candy store.”

If you want to up your game as a home winemaker, says Foley, the choice is clear.

“There are lots of really, really good grapes, so find someone who can sell you some grapes and make sure they’re handled properly,” says Foley. “If you want to make great wine, get great grapes. Find a great grape source, keep looking — raise that bar.”

So when asking for tips from the maker of “liquid Viagra” (Parker’s description of a Foley Merlot), they all begin in the vineyard.

“The first technical approach to making great Cab is making great Cabernet grapes,” he opines.

During the growing season, Foley is in constant contact with his vineyard manager. Together they sort out any water stress issues, nutritional questions, crop level determinations, the grapes’ sunlight exposure levels, and manipulating the canopy for more shade or increased airflow.

He recommends a meticulous and unforgiving approach to growing fruit.

“We look at every single cluster and if there’s something that’s not keeping up, or it’s

still green, or it hasn't gone through veraison while everything else has, we'll go through and cut those off," says Foley.

That has advantages later on. "By the time we're ready to harvest there are no anomalies," he says. "People ask me, 'What sort of sorting belt do you use?' I just laugh and say, 'We don't. We evaluate the fruit while it's not moving!'"

Choosing when to harvest is a question of understanding the changing flavors of a maturing grape. Foley recalls an amusing, slightly risqué anecdote that dates from well before the #MeToo movement:

"André Tchelistcheff (winemaking legend and a father of the Californian wine industry) told me one time, 'Pay attention to this: A Cabernet grape that's 25 degrees Brix is like an 18-year-old girl. She's really sweet, but she's not mature.'"

Foley explains in more precise wine terms: "In Cabernet, it's the green olive flavor that goes away, and then, all of a sudden you've got red cherry and three days later it's black cherry. That's what I'm looking for!"

And, he adds lyrically, a hint of chocolate in the finish also helps indicate Cabernet's phenolic ripeness. "You spit the pulp out, then you just hang out and ponder what you're tasting, now in your mouth, with the pulp gone. It's a chocolatey, cocoa thing (that you should look for)."

With Merlot, he says, the grapes start veraison with bell pepper aromas that by harvest time convert to cassis.

Foley calls this perfect harvesting moment an inflection point of ripeness. He says it can't be found by only measuring the Brix or pH of the grapes. Contrary to the norm, he doesn't measure sugars before harvesting.

"I don't even check sugars until we've picked it. Once it's in the tank then I worry about chemistry."

The little-known grape called Charbono provides a great example of how Brix levels don't always indicate phenolic ripeness.

"If you use a refractometer and it measures 22 °Brix and you say, 'Let's pick it!' You just screwed up royal!"

This rare variety turned Foley on to winemaking back in 1969. Foley was only 16 but his father's enthusiasm for wine was starting to impact him. A neighbor took Foley on a visit to the famed Inglenook wine estate where he tasted a 1968 Charbono.

"I'd never tasted anything like Charbono before!" Foley says this wine epiphany led to him studying winemaking at UC-Davis.

In the early 2000s, when Foley assumed all the Charbono was gone (in the mid-1970s when Foley moved to St. Helena, California, only a few local wineries still bottled it), he heard that one of the last growers was about to bulldoze his vines. This vineyard owner turned out to be the now former Inglenook Charbono grower.

Soon afterward, Foley was making wine out of these grapes and still does. Word spread fast.



“It seemed like every old hippie from North Berkeley showed up at my doorstep going, ‘Far out man! You’re saving it!’”

“The biggest challenge is knowing when to pick it,” he says. When it first reaches 22 °Brix, Charbono is not yet ripe. Foley says the sugar level won’t change even if you let Charbono hang for three more weeks.

“But the flavor development and the skins change. You can track that by feeling the softness of the fruit and by looking at the seed color as you wait for them to darken and harden.”

Perhaps Foley’s most important piece of winegrowing advice concerns the grape seed and its integral role as an indicator of phenolic ripeness.

“That whole system of phenolic compounds — that you and I and everybody else who enjoys wine experiences as texture, flavor, aroma, and color — the maturity of that tracks the maturity of the embryo,” he says.

“Once we’ve got dark brown seeds, soft fruit, and red stems, the last check is a pliability check. That’s by biting down gently on the seed and when the seed breaks, how does it break?” In the case of Cabernet seeds, if they break in half, usually with a slightly bitter taste, that means they are not ready to harvest.

“If the Cabernet seed breaks in multiple planes and it tastes as good as cereal, take the grapes; it ain’t going to get any better!”

Measurements begin in the winery

When the grapes are harvested, the chemistry starts. Foley does a juice panel for every cuvée that comes into the winery.

“I’m looking at the pH, but I’m also looking at the potassium and then the titratable acidities and evaluating that and asking, ‘So would this be healthier with just a dash of tartaric acid, just to bring the pH down a hair?’”

Inside the winery, he’s still a workhorse.

“I do cellar work, I do pump overs, and I stack barrels. My hands are blue! It’s just what I do, it’s what I’m passionate about.”

He’s happy to share the technical details for making his style of Cabernet. Foley has been described as the “God of Cabernet” and *Wine Spectator*’s James Laube said his Cabernet-based 2002 Napa Valley Claret is “Dark, rich and massive, with gobs of flavor.”

Picking is by hand and during the cool of night to reduce the chance of spoilage. The grapes come into the winery at temperatures in the 40s or 50s Fahrenheit (6–14 °C). Foley uses a “Garolla” crusher-destemmer, which he modified so the rollers can be moved closer or further apart to vary the intensity of the crushing. He also outfitted the machine with a variable speed frequency drive that helps control the integrity of the must.

The gently crushed fruit is deposited directly into a fermenting tank where 35 ppm of sulfite is added. Sulfite isn’t used again until the wine goes into a barrel unless it’s to maintain free SO₂ levels at about 20 ppm. This level avoids what Foley calls a “Brett party” — he’s not a fan of *Brettanomyces* at any level and prefers to prevent it from growing.

“We can cold soak it for a day or two and then we can warm it up, inoculate it, and have the fermentation take off and go evenly,” Foley says this cold soak duration gives the extract balance he wants. All the tanks

Foley says during the first fermentation inoculated yeasts (he gets them from Scott Laboratories) are the best way to deal with his high-gravity musts (high in sugar) and high alcohol levels.

“There’s a great Burgundy yeast that Scott Labs provide for the Pinot (Burgundy BRG Yeast), which is completely different from the Bordeaux yeast we use for the Cabs (Uvaferm 43 Yeast).”

“I do inoculate for primary fermentation, but I do not inoculate for malolactic.” He says in 42 years he’s never had an unsuccessful, natural malolactic fermentation. They’re usually over by Christmas — apart from one that took about a year to go through! Experiments suggest his malolactic bacteria comes directly from the vineyard.

“I like my primary fermentations to top out around 85 °F (29 °C),” says Foley. If yeast nutrients are needed, he uses Fermaid K.

“I let them extract at that temperature, pump over twice a day, then cool off down into the 70s (low- to mid- 20s °C) to finish up,” he explains.

The whole cuvaison period (the time when the juice is in contact with the skins) lasts about 10 days for Foley’s reds. Then it’s off to press.

Foley uses no more than one bar of pressure to press the grapes.

“I don’t keep my press fractions separate from my free run because I have a nice, gentle Euro Machines press (an open-style membrane press that can hold a full 10-ton fermenter’s cap) that doesn’t macerate the fruit or tear the seeds.”

Of course, many home winemakers use a basket press to press their grapes. Foley says this can work well if you go slowly and learn the technique. He recommends pressing first and then breaking up the cake, mixing, and then pressing again. The key is to be gentle.

After pressing, he allows the wine to settle for a week, sometimes 10 days. Then Foley racks it off the gross lees with aeration to blow off CO₂ and fermentation aromas. The aeration device is a simple splash rack, over the top into the receiving tank.

Then it’s straight to barrel — but neutral barrels, not new ones.

“To evaluate the work we did in the vineyard I go to dead neutral cooperage,” says Foley.

“This is where both Jim Laube). They said, ‘So do you go to 100% new barrels?’ I replied that Robert Parker was interested (wine critics with *Wine Spectator* and *The Wine Advocate*, respectively, ‘Absolutely not. For me, that’s like over-seasoning a sauce.’”

“The personality profile of each vineyard plot, and each pick, each cuvée is well ingrained into my memory,” he says.

He and his team evaluate the fruit for their Claret blend, the Napa Valley Cabernet, and their special Howell Mountain vineyard, and then prescribe both the type of oak — which is always French oak — and the percentage of new oak.

Foley says French oak marries best with the character of their grapes and he uses barrels with a medium-plus toast. These barrels are sourced from central France, mostly the Tronçais area.

The Claret varieties typically spend the most time in new oak — about one-third. The rest of the time is divided between used and neutral oak, with more new oak added as necessary. The Claret is racked a few times a year.

“The wines tell me what to do. As long as you just keep smelling and tasting them and staying on top of it.”

His Pinot Noir is aged in 100% new French barrels, which are then used for Charbono, whose flavor profile clashes with new oak, says Foley.

He says tannin extracts can be an excellent tool but he doesn't use them.

“I get great extract and a great balance of tannins just naturally, and again, it's what we do in the vineyard.”

So he says, for his wines, it's not necessary to add bentonite, egg whites, or other additives for fining or adjusting flavors.

Just before bottling they run the wine through a crossflow filter, a process that is gentle and does not disrupt the wine. He says pad filtration can strip character and some wines can't come back from that.

Foley says each new vintage revalidates that making wine is not about being a scientist and it's not about being an artist.

“Everything in between science and art is what we do; it's a craft.” He compares it to cooking the perfect meal.

“You stick your finger in the sauce and let it speak to you. What's it need? It finishes short, the aromas need to be lifted. It could be just that dash of salt, or that squeeze of lemon, or maybe just that kiss of tartaric acid at the beginning to make it perfect.”



Is there a way to stop corks from leaking?

Alison Crowe

I recently made my first batch of white Zinfandel from a kit. I followed the directions and it's coming along fine. I bottled and used synthetic corks in the bottles. I let them sit up straight for three days and then tilted them on their sides like it said. My questions are, do the corks have to go completely in the bottle, and if so, how do you get them there? What causes the bottles to leak even if they seem to be properly corked? I seem to be getting a little bit of wine leaking out of the corks. Is there a way to stop the leaking?

Wine Wizard answers: Synthetic corks are becoming more and more popular as commercial and home winemakers alike seek to avoid the 5 to 15 percent of bottles that can be ruined due to TCA or natural cork taint. Unfortunately, some synthetic corks actually can leak worse than traditional wine corks. Synthetic corks also can be tough to insert and can form imperfect seals, leading to higher rates of premature oxidation.

The principle of natural and synthetic corks is the same — a plug of compressible

material is squeezed down into a tight cylinder, after which it is forced into the neck of the bottle. The re-expansion of the cork, which ideally is perfectly tight and uniformly snug against the bottleneck, causes an elastic-static seal that should keep all wine from getting out and all air from getting in. It is a common misconception that wine needs a cork to “breathe” during the aging process. The vast majority of the group of chemical reactions that take place to develop a wine’s “bottle bouquet,” as well as the changed textures we associate with properly aged wine, are reductive reactions that take place in the absence of oxygen. The final “dose” of oxygen a wine needs is received during the bottling process. Any air that sneaks into the bottle after it is corked would cause the wine inside to prematurely oxidize well beyond what is needed for balanced bottle aging.

To answer your first question, no, the cork doesn’t need to be all the way into the bottle to form a sufficient protective seal. However, the less of the cork that’s inside the bottle, the greater the chance that the elastic-static seal will become ineffective with time. One hot day in the trunk of the car and it’s likely the cork would come all the way out due to the heat expansion of the liquid inside the bottle. If you want to try to force the corks back into the bottle by hand, then you can certainly try that. Often these corks just won’t go in.

Secondly, corks will leak when the seal created between the cork and the bottleneck isn’t complete and there is a small channel through which wine can escape. Interestingly, glass is chemically classified as a liquid, even though we may think that in real life it’s a pretty solid material. In the glass manufacturing process, it’s pretty easy to get bottles that are out-of-round or slightly squashed on one side. In my time I’ve inspected many truckloads of wine bottles from many different manufacturers. I once had to send back an entire truckload because one out of every 10 bottles was so football-shaped it wouldn’t even take the label properly! As you can see, bottlenecks aren’t often the perfect cylinders they seem. Add the fact that synthetic corks often have a harder time than natural corks re-expanding into that imperfect space, and the chance of leakage may be increased.

Is there a way to stop a leaky bottle? Unfortunately, not really, or not without extracting the cork and re-corking it with a different one.

The closure debate is raging in the wine industry right now, and it really seems to come down to six of one or a half dozen of another — natural corks often have better compression and re-expansion behavior than synthetics, but natural corks can often spoil wine since they can’t be sterilized properly. Many wineries are switching to screwcaps, which have none of the above-mentioned problems that corks of any type do. Screwcaps are often considered the perfect wine-bottle closure in technical terms, but a perceived lack of “tradition” or “romance” is keeping many commercial wineries from switching over completely.

Actually, for home winemaking, I think that we should all take a page out of our homebrewing buddies’ book. Why not try crown caps? The greatest Champagne houses in France, when they lay their bottles down for the aging and riddling process, top off their delicate, effervescent, and — it certainly can’t be argued — expensive product in Champagne bottles topped not with the familiar mushroom-cap cork but with the same kind of workaday crown cap we pop off a bottle of homebrew.



Portland Winemakers Club Leadership Team – 2024

President: **Bob Hatt**

bobhatt2000@yahoo.com

- Establish the leadership team
 - Assure that objectives for the year are met
 - Set up agenda and run the meetings

Treasurer: **Barb Thomson**

bt.grapevine@frontier.com

- Collect dues and fees, and update the membership list with the secretary.
- Pay bills

Secretary: **Ken Stinger**

kbstinger@frontier.com

- Communicate regularly about club activities and issues
- Monthly newsletter
- Keep an updated list of members, name tags, and other data

Chair of Education / Speakers **Paul Natale**

paulnatale6@gmail.com

- Arrange for speakers & educational content for our meetings

Chair for Tastings: **Brian Bowles / Mike Sicard**

bowles97229@gmail.com

msicard@willamettehvac.com

- Conduct club tastings
- Review and improve club tasting procedures

Chair of Winery / Vineyard Tours: **Andy Mocny.**

acmocny@gmail.com

- Select wineries, vineyards, etc. to visit
- Arrange tours
- Cover logistics (food and money)

Chair of Group Purchases: **Bob Thoenen / Tyson Smith**

bobthoenen@yahoo.com

tyson@tysonsmith.com

- Grape purchases and makes the arrangements to purchase, collect, and distribute
- Supplies – These should be passed to the President or Secretary for distribution.
- Encourage club participation in all amateur competitions available. Make information known through Newsletters, e-mail, and Facebook.

Chairs for Social Events: **Mindy Bush / Marilyn Brown**

mindybush@hotmail.com

brown.marilynjean@gmail.com

- Gala /Picnic/parties

Web Design Editor: **Barb Thomson**

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