PRIZE-WINNING RECIPES FOR HOMEMADE WINES

with a Review of Techniques
to Help Improve Your Wines

Compiled and edited by Rodney Boothroyd

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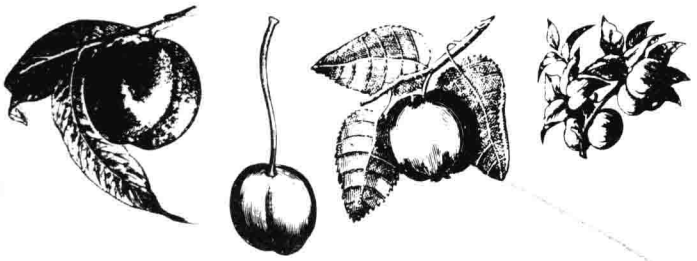

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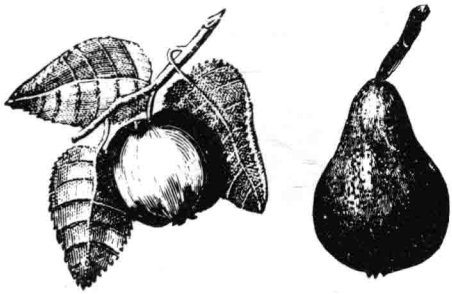
Introduction



The idea for this book was born from a discussion on how home winemakers could achieve better wines. We all agreed that having a set of recipes which had consistently produced successful wines would be very helpful for most winemakers, and that if these recipes were combined with a review of the techniques used by competition winners, the outcome would be a practical handbook of solid worth. So here it is: a guide to wines which have won prizes, produced in the hope that everyone, whether or not they are interested in shows and competitions, will find the book not only useful and interesting, but also a means by which they can improve the quality of their wines, and thereby gain even more enjoyment from this most fascinating hobby.

This book has been put together with both the experienced and novice winemaker in mind. It is not, however, a basic introduction for someone who knows nothing about the subject. If you would like more information on any aspect of winemaking, you will find all the details you need in my previous book *Home Winemaking Techniques and Recipes.*

As you will see, the recipes included in this volume are for wines that have achieved success at local, regional or national

shows or competitions in recent years. In many cases, the wine produced from a particular recipe has achieved many more awards than the one I have shown here — I hope the wine-makers concerned do not feel they have thereby been deprived of the recognition they deserve! Although most of the recipes are attributed to their creators, some contributors preferred to remain anonymous, and I have respected their wishes accordingly. Finally, my thanks are due to everyone who submitted recipes, and to all those who otherwise helped in the preparation of this book.

Rodney Boothroyd

PART I

Successful Winemaking

In winemaking, as in cookery, a good recipe isn't everything — although it certainly makes a big difference to your chances of success. This is particularly true of the recipes here, for they have all proved themselves in one way or another. You may well ask if this means that simply following the recipe is a guarantee of success. The answer, of course, is "*No.*" You only need to consider the difference in quality of different batches of fruit to realize why this is so. Although two batches may look similar, they can vary considerably in ripeness and flavour: so that if one winemaker compounds a prizewinning wine recipe from a particular batch of ingredients, next time the same recipe may produce what is simply a pleasant wine rather than a potential prizewinner.

When you consider how many other variables play their part in winemaking — the speed of fermentation, for example, or the type of yeast used, or the speed with which a fermented wine is siphoned off the sediment, or the time a wine is allowed to mature — you begin to realize just why so many wines are made and so few win prizes! Even so, the great majority of home winemakers would probably like to improve their standards, yet cannot be bothered with measuring acidity, or

carefully compounding the "must" to precise chemical specifications. It is here that this book will be at its most valuable, for each "prizewinning" recipe has achieved, either by luck or by design, a combination of ingredients which significantly increases one's chances of successful winemaking.

In addition, some interesting points of technique have emerged from the prizewinning wine recipes. I have set these out below in an order which roughly corresponds to the stages involved in winemaking: extraction of flavour, fermentation, and maturation. Since the ingredients are what gives home-made wine its basic character, this is obviously the place to start.

Fresh fruit

How much simpler it would be if winemaking were just a matter of extracting the flavour! The problem is that our basic ingredients usually need some preparation to ensure they are clean and unlikely to infect the must with bacteria or spoilage yeasts. You can see how this might happen if you think of the outer skin of a plum, damson or grape. The "bloom" you see there is actually a growth of wild yeasts, most of which would probably be unable to produce very much alcohol, and all of which would certainly produce curious "off flavours" during fermentation as by-products of their metabolism (the true wine yeast has been specially selected so that it does not do this). If these yeasts are not inactivated before the fruit is added to the must, they can spoil a fermentation completely.

Similarly, any small cut or bruise on a fruit rapidly becomes infected with moulds or bacteria: these, too, can ruin a wine. Clearly any soft or damaged fruit will present a greater risk of this kind of infection than firm, ripe, fresh fruit (although soft or over-ripe fruit can still be used if it is sterilized — see below). Curiously enough, some of these bacterial off-flavours do not develop until the wine has been stored for some time.

For example, in one case a gallon of raspberry wine made from fresh fruit tasted absolutely delicious after it was racked off the sediment, but four months later it had turned to vinegar — despite the precaution of adding two Campden tablets to the cold pulp must twenty-four hours before adding the yeast. Of course it is possible the infection occurred later during racking, but raspberries in particular do have a reputation for this kind of problem.

Many off-flavours in wine probably result from this kind of infection. What, then, can one do about it? The first answer is to use sound, good quality ripe fruit (except possibly when you are making gooseberry wine, for gooseberries are often said to give a better result if they are used while still hard and green, in other words when they are slightly less than ripe). If necessary, the fruit can be washed in warm water to remove any dust or dirt. Spoilage organisms can then be inhibited by the addition of sodium metabisulphite at the rate of fifty or a hundred parts per million, that is one or two crushed Campden tablets per gallon (4.5 litres); and twenty-four hours later, the yeast can be added. This delay is necessary to allow the sulphite to disperse to a level at which its bactericidal properties will not inhibit the wine yeast.

Unfortunately, sulphite added in this way does not kill all the spoilage organisms in a must: it simply inhibits them so that the yeast can get an upper hand. If you use sulphite as a way of cleaning the must, it is essential to add a vigorous yeast preparation so that there is the minimum delay before the fermentation begins: any delay might allow the spoilage bacteria to recover. These spoilage organisms are further inhibited by the anaerobic conditions which soon prevail as the yeast begins to work. Even so, it seems fairly probable that at least some bacteria may survive right through the fermentation and subsequently spoil the wine, even if a Campden tablet is added when the wine is racked off the sediment. Certainly this would help explain why so many

winemakers prefer to sterilize their musts completely with boiling water. In the recipes examined for this book, the use of boiling water was three times more popular than the use of Campden tablets in preparing a must for pulp fermentation!

The objection has been raised that the use of boiling water can produce a "cooked" flavour. I don't agree. Admittedly the flavour of some ingredients may be slightly altered by the use of boiling water (and even that is open to question in many cases), but this does not necessarily mean that the flavour thus obtained is inferior: in fact the opposite is often true. One only has to think of the intense concentration of flavour in canned fruits (all of which are cooked) and compare it with the weak flavour of so many modern fresh fruits to realize that heating can indeed aid the winemaker. This is particularly true where commercial pressures lead growers to select varieties on the basis of yield rather than flavour. However, one thing is certain; if you want to sterilize a must made from fresh fruit, you will have to use either boiling water or a steam juice extractor, or boil the fruit.

We can obtain more information about the relative advantages of hot and cold water preparation by looking at the techniques used in commercial wineries, many of which have taken the idea of heat treatment a step further. In some French co-operatives, and in many Australian, South African and Californian vineyards, red grapes are placed in steam or hot water for a few minutes so that the surface of the fruit is heated. The grapes are then cooled and pressed, and the resulting juice — which is a deep red colour — is fermented directly, without any pulp whatsoever. This is quite contrary to the traditional practice of fermenting red wine musts on the pulp to extract both colour and tannin from the fruit skins. Yet it has been claimed that this newer method can produce softer, less acidic wines with a better bouquet and greater fullness; and that the practice is not more widespread simply because of the expense involved.