



### REX'S PRACTICAL TIPS #12 Summer 2006

## It's Harvest Time

**What are the signs of maturity and how do we know when our grapes are really ripe?**

I'd like to take you on a quick journey through the last stages of maturation so that you can learn to look for the signs that everything is progressing as it should, and become familiar with some of the language.

#### CANE LIGNIFICATION

This is where the canes start to turn brown. It's caused by lignin being deposited in the cells and it is the process that changes soft cells into wood.



Yellowing of the canes is the first sign and it is an indication that the beginning of veraison is just around the corner. In the most balanced vineyards, cane lignification is normally complete before veraison has finished. Conversely, the photo above shows poor lignification of the shoots and failure to lignify completely by harvest are a sure sign of problems, often due to excess crop.

#### SEED MATURITY

You will sometimes see winemakers looking carefully at the seeds and crunching them in their mouth. The colour of the seed is directly related to the maturity of the tannins in the berry.



The vine ripens the seed first so we always look for evenly brown seed that comes apart from the pulp readily. Green colour on the seed indicates immaturity but do note that this varies somewhat between varieties. The taste of the tannin in the crushed seed is also important as the majority of wine tannin is derived from the seeds.

#### PEDICEL COLOUR

If you grow reds this is a dead giveaway. The little bit of stem that the berry is attached to is called the pedicel. In most varieties this will colour to a similar extent as the berry.



If you are growing for the premium market and can't see pedicel colouration you shouldn't be booking the harvester just yet.

#### RACHIS LIGNIFICATION

Some varieties do it and some don't do it much. The rachis is the stem of the bunch. After veraison it gradually changes colour at the stem end from green to yellow until just before full maturity when it turns quite distinctly brown.



The above photo shows a partially mature rachis on Syrah. This is normally one of the last signs that full phenological maturity has been reached. In some varieties like Sauvignon blanc it may not be a desirable character, but for most varieties, a vineyard with no rot and good quantities of lignified rachi will gladden the heart of any weary winemaker.

#### SAMPLING

Everybody has their own way of doing this. Years of

**Varieties Available**  
Varieties available for delivery 2006.

Cabernet franc  
Cabernet sauvignon  
Chardonnay  
Flora  
Gamay noir  
Gewurztraminer  
Malbec  
Merlot  
Montepulciano  
Petit verdot  
Pinot gris  
Pinot noir  
Riesling  
Sangiovese  
Sauvignon blanc  
Syrah  
Tannat  
Viognier

experience in the field has told me that whole bunches are better than berry samples. It's probably because the sample size is bigger and you never get to those green berries in the centre of the bunch when you do berry samples. So don't cringe when the field rep takes a couple of buckets of grapes away every week. It amounts to a few kilos that may make the difference between a Brix price bracket, or even a bonus. Do plot the results on a graph. The visual reality of the gradient of that graph is what the winemaker is looking at.



**MISTY  
VALLEY  
NURSERY**

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