

Efficiency In The Wine Cellar

by Don Panagapka (AWO News # 49)

I don't know about you but I get excited when I go down into my wine cellar during the fall and take in those fermenting odors of wine bubbling away. I also get excited about creating new (and hopefully) better wines and wine blends this year than last.

The creativity of making the best wine possible is the fundamental attraction of all winemakers (along with the consumption of the wine, of course). However, having said this there are times when winemaking is somewhat boring and laborious, especially while cleaning bottles and bottling the wine itself. The process is very time-consuming and not very exciting. Hence, what can we do to make the 'boring' part of winemaking more enjoyable so that we can keep that excitement and edginess that we need to make the best product possible?

Here are some suggestions that will help to make your winemaking more efficient and productive:

➤ **Do as much "bulk" work as you can all at once:**

That is, if, for example you have a lot of bottling to do why not assign a full day dedicated to your wine project? Get up early in the morning and work through the day (especially in bottling) and you will achieve a huge amount of work instead of doing the work 'piecemeal'. Using this theory you will be able to completely bottle numerous cases of wine and will feel great at the end of the day that you have accomplished so much.

➤ **Do much of the work ahead of 'crunch time':**

Especially with bottling, if you are bored some day and your new wine is in a "holding pattern" why not spend a few hours and clean all of your equipment and bottles so that they are ready for that big day of bottling.

➤ **Ready your labels ahead of time and have a common template for your wine labels:**

You can determine ahead of time what labels you need and how many. There are many programs (e.g. Corel) that will produce great labels. In my case I have a template (permanent information) for my labels and merely change certain information such as type of wine, year, vineyard, etc. Having your labels ready ahead of time makes the bottling more efficient. On a side note, use milk to dip your labels in as it is a great adhesive and the label washes off easily.

➤ **Bottling:**

Likely the most efficient piece of equipment that I own (and is worth its' weight in gold) is my Enomatic Bottle Filler. You put the bottle in and it fills automatically and stops when full so that you can be doing other minor things while you are bottling. No more splashing of wine, adjusting fill levels, etc. The bottle fillers (electric) are priced around \$400/\$600 but are an absolute must if you want efficiency.

➤ **Re-think the size/location of your wine cellar:**

I see so many winemakers working in closets, crawl spaces, and other small locations in their house. The problem is that these winemakers are spending excessive amounts of their time moving carboys around to make space for the 'new batch of wine'. Why not just make a decision to increase the size of your wine cellar so that you can operate more efficiently. After all winemaking is a serious hobby and you should be in the best environment possible instead of struggling around in some small location in your house that is cramped and inefficient.

➤ **Do group projects within your wine club:**

Our club has at least one group project each year, and, in many years more than one. Think of the efficiency. If you are busy when the project starts other members will take over. Mass crushing/pressing is more efficient than the individual can achieve (and less messy – spouses like this). One member of your club can be assigned as cellar master for the project saving duplication for all members. Have you considered a separate shed/building that one member may have access to to do all of your group work? There are tremendous efficiencies in club projects, let alone the sharing of knowledge that arises out of members being together.

➤ **Making bulk wine:**

Instead of making one carboy of 5 different wines why not make 5 carboys of one wine, or 5 carboys of 5 wines? Clearly space and consumption constraints are serious deterrents, but if they aren't then bulk winemaking should be considered as you only have to do one task at a time instead of 5 (and the excess wine has more time to age properly).

In summary, there are exciting and boring parts to winemaking. Why not decrease the boring parts and spend more time being excited about the art of winemaking. One small improvement in efficiency will re-generate your wine cells and put a smile on your face.

Happy winemaking

Don Panagapka