

OFF THE VINE



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Expect the best from Napa's 2012 vintage

According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, "What lies behind us, and what lies before us, are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." So we really shouldn't worry about the past, nor should we be too concerned about the future — because it is what is inside us at the present that counts.

The same is true when it comes to wine, every vintage is different and it is what is inside that particular bottle of wine that counts. The term vintage is descriptive of the year in which the grapes were harvested, not to the year that the wine was

bottled. In Napa Valley, the 2013 growing season has months to go before the grapes are even picked — this vintage is in the future, but right now the winemakers are focused on the wine that is starting to take shape from the 2012 vintage.

There were a number of early reports that questioned whether the 2012 Napa Valley wines could be the best vintage in decades or even ever, but it is way too soon to answer that question. So, why can one vintage be better than others? Weather is the answer.

Due to weather patterns, grapes don't always ripen evenly and therefore one very difficult decision for growers is timing the harvesting of the grapes. If you pick too early, the grapes may have too much acidity, causing a bitter taste. If you pick too late, then the sugars may be too high, creating a higher alcohol content during fermentation. When grapes ripen in an even manner, it takes most of the guesswork out of the equation.

WINE TO 2D

In 2012, the weather didn't create too many challenges that all start-

ed with a very mild spring. This allowed the grapes on the vine to set at the same time. Then there were not any heat waves during the summer and fall months, so the grapes were able to ripen slowly, over a long period of time. This created a very large crop, with yields for Cabernet Sauvignon grapes up 40 percent and Chardonnay up 50 percent over the 2011 yields.

For those of you who are Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Chardonnay lovers, once these wines are released, the 2012 vintage should be one to truly enjoy. Both the 2012 Raymond Vineyards and the 2012 Clos Julien Chardonnays are produced with Napa Valley grapes and they are well-made examples of this vintage.

However, there is one problem with a vintage like 2012 that yields a record amount of grapes — all of those grapes end up getting crushed, fermented, aged and bottled so that means there is a lot more wine being released with 2012 on its label compared to other vintages.

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