



This is, by the author's own admission, a rush job. Harvest season, or in wine lingo, "Crush", has occupied the greater part of the last 3 weeks of my life. Since September 30th I have had little time to live anything approaching a normal life, let alone the time to pen this column by deadline. Wine and the business of wine conjure powerful images of romance, elegance and class in many peoples' minds. I thought I would take this time to touch on a few points of the 1995 harvest and momentarily dispel any fancy notions you might have about the process of making wine.

**The Crush**

Perhaps the most aptly applied slang word in existence. The day the grapes start coming through the door is the beginning of a relentless grind that does not end until weeks later. According to many experienced sources this was the most physically brutal crush in 10 years.

Why? Winemaking is essentially glorified farming. Bad weather plays havoc with grapes. Grapes are moist little suckers to begin with and the addition of copious amounts of rain shortly before or during the harvest creates all sorts of problems. Rot is the foremost of these problems. Other problems arise from wet weather but I will confine my ramblings to this aspect of things. The best way to avoid rot is to get your crop out of the field. For us, at Torii Mor, it meant bringing in the vast majority of our grapes, about 60 tons or more, in the space of a few days. Wine grapes and the resultant juice may weigh tons but they must be treated as gently as possible. This requires moving them about manually whenever possible rather than with a pump. The 3 person crew of Torii Mor moved tons and tons of grapes and juice from one processing stage to another bucket by bucket. Since time waits for no wine this often means shifts of 18-24 hours for days on end. Back problems, swollen hands and sore feet are common.

Rot also adds to the problem by creating more work. Rotten grapes are not something you want to put into your wine, so intense sorting must be done. This requires going through every cluster of grapes and chucking out those clusters overly infected with bunch rot. The type of sorting required this year increased our workload in terms of hours by a factor of around 10.

**What's in your wine?**

If people only knew. Bees, yellow jackets, lady bugs, ants and earwigs all make it into the mix at some point. Of course dirt is involved to some extent. For several straight days I had to don a pair of (overly tight, I might note) hip waders and get into a large tank of Pinot noir and push the cap of grapes back into the juice. Needless to say some sweat dripped in there.

**The Media**

Three quarters of the way through crush a little blurb appeared in USA Today about how the 1995 vintage in Oregon for Pinot noir and Chardonnay is going to be lousy. Nothing like a little press to help you sell your wine. This statement is so general as to be ludicrous. Sure, this is a demanding vintage but there will be some excellent wines. There will also probably be some lousy ones, but there always are. Speaking from experience I can honestly say we have some excellent tasting juice in our cellar right now. The wines will probably not be big blockbusters, but they have elegance and style.

**What it takes**

Winemaker extraordinaire Patty Green says, "It takes a lot of cheap beer to make good wine." Truer words have rarely been spoken. We've got quite a returnable pile at work. In the time honored tradition of wine tasting we conducted a blind tasting of cheap beer to see which would be the "Beer of Choice" for Torii Mor. Included were Bud, Bud Light, Rainier, Hamm's, Busch, Olympia and Heidelberg. The Good Reverend will be happy to know that Bud was the hands down winner. Bud Light and Rainier were on the second tier while everything else fell far short of being potable.



**Recommended Wines for the Month:** I haven't had a lot of time to do much exploring but I have a couple of recommendations. November is one of the biggest wine buying months of the year so stock up soon.

**1992 Bethel Heights Pinot Noir Flat Block Reserve:** OK, this one will be a little tough to find but it is worth the search. The Flat Block section of Bethel Heights vineyard is legendary. The Casteels have let the vineyard show its strength in this wine. The fruits are supple, bold and exceptionally rich. The oak is present but very light. This is simply one of the best Pinots you can find in Oregon. It will run you \$30-\$35, but sometimes you simply pay for excellence.

**Torii Mor 1994 Chardonnay:** Again, another wine where the character of the vineyard is allowed to express itself. The grapes come from 10 and 20 year old vines. A short malolactic fermentation and modest amounts of oak allow the depth and weight of the wine to come through. This wine is still quite young and will gain complexity as time goes by. \$12-\$15 will get you a superb white.

**Peckinpaw 1992 Family Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir:** I've never tried this wine but it gets a nod for the name alone. All right, the name isn't exactly "Peckinpaw" but it is pretty damn close. Sam Peckinpaw was, of course, the director of the infamous and ground-breaking film "The Wild Ones", as well as other bizarre, odd and violent films. If nothing else, for \$15 you can get yourself quite a conversation piece.

Finally, a clipping from a recent Oregonian.

**PAPEETE, Tahiti-** A 1980 French army map of a South Pacific island used for nuclear tests shows the atoll was filled with cracks long before the latest blast, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

Some experts have warned that Mururoa Atoll, the site of a 20-kiloton nuclear test Sept. 5, could crack and release

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radioactivity.

The Le Monde newspaper in France said the map, drawn before about 100 more tests were conducted, showed that "large cracks developed in the structure of the atoll's volcano."

The sketched diagram that appeared with the article showed several fissures several miles long, as deep as 28,000 feet and as wide as 11 1/2 feet. No information was given about when or how quickly the cracks developed.

Last month I wrote about the insanity of these tests and the swearing off of French wines. While I realize that the good people of France and the wine producers in particular have nothing to do with these tests and are, by and large, opposed to them I still believe that a message must be sent. The French recently signed a treaty with other nuclear-capable nations outlawing tests in the South Pacific -- once the French have completed their current rounds of (unnecessary) tests. This is, at best, a step sideways. Chirac is a madman and since France operates in a semi-Democratic manner the people of that country must be sent the message that Chirac MUST go. My sympathies to the innocent wine producers of France, whose wines I miss dearly, but France has essentially declared war on the entire world.