



The Secret Life of Wine

Discovering the Biodynamic Difference

by Margaret Marchuk

Wine drinkers may be shocked when they discover the secret ingredients in many commercially available wines. Todd White, a writer and biohacker who's an authority on organic wine, revealed some of these secrets in a speech at the Florida Institute for Human and Machine Cognition, in Pensacola.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved 76 additives for use in wine manufacturing—and winemakers don't have to put content labeling on their products, White said. The purpose of these additives is to control the wine's taste or color and make it faster and cheaper to produce. Mega Purple, a grape concentrate, is a common additive, as are sugar, ammonia, GMO bacteria and yeast. Even fish bladder and casein, a dairy protein, may be added. Velcorin, a chemical found in some wines, must be added by workers in hazmat suits.

Why is This Happening?

Corporate consolidation. In the United States, three corporations own 52 percent of all wine production, according to White.

America's wine industry, like our food industry, is controlled by agri-corporatization.

So Where Does One Find an Unadulterated Glass of Vino?

There are many organic wines on the market, but biodynamic wines—the subject of White's speech—are more difficult to find. Owners of wine shops, supermarkets, bars and restaurants often don't even know what biodynamic means.

What is Biodynamic?

The term originated in the 1920s with Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher and educator who promoted agricultural practices based on the lunar calendar and astrological influences, among other concepts.

According to the Biodynamic Association, biodynamic farming is “a spiritual-ethical-ecological approach to agriculture, gardens, food production and nutrition.” It views the farm and vineyard as a single organism whose components are interconnected, affecting and benefiting each other. Only natural materials, soils and composts are used to sustain the land. A range of

animals—such as chickens, goats, sheep and horses—usually lives on the farm too.

The effects of sun, moon and stars are also considered in biodynamic farming as Steiner proposed it. While this might sound like a hippy-dippy approach, it is not a new way of thinking. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians looked to the sky for guidance, as does the Farmer's Almanac, first published in 1818.

Biodynamic viticulture focuses on maintaining balance between these various connections—a concept drastically different than the manufacturing approach to growing grapes and producing wine.

Winemakers who adhere to biodynamic practices feel their wines capture the essence of the terroir where the grapes are grown, since they are farmed in harmony with the earth's cycles. They believe modern viticulture—with its irrigation, pesticides and chemical fertilizers—breaks the vine's natural connection to its environment.

Organic and Biodynamic Certified Wines

Organic and biodynamic wines are not the same. Both are products of practices that forego chemicals and heavily restrict the use of sulfites, which are added to most conventional wines to preserve and stabilize them. However, biodynamic winemaking takes other factors into account, such as the lunar calendar. The farming is about the entire life cycle of a vineyard—insects, animals and other plants—and not just about the grapes.

With certified organic wines, all yeast and other agricultural additives must be organically grown as well. Non-agricultural additives can't make up more than 5 percent of the product and must be included on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. The exception is bottles produced in Europe and Canada, where organic wine standards allow small amounts of added sulfites.

Biodynamic wines can be certified by third-party organizations, such as Demeter, Biodyvin and Renaissance des Appellation. You might see one of their logos on a wine bottle. However, some small biodynamic vineyards don't pay for certification, as

they find it too costly. Instead, their labels might indicate that they follow biodynamic practices, and their websites usually detail how their wines are grown and made.

A Consumer-Driven Trend

As more people become aware of the darker secrets of conventional wine production, they are seeking other choices. Mark Spalding, a sommelier and luxury specialist with Republic National Distributing, says biodynamic wine is not a fad, but a permanent change.

“The younger generation—the millennials, Generation Z and others—are concerned about their health, their diets and the affects of alcohol, and are looking for the most natural product,” he says. “Any great winemaker will tell you that great wine is made in the vineyard.”

And that’s just the way biodynamic winemakers feel.

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More about Biodynamic Wine



- Todd White lecture, “Dirty Secrets of the Wine Industry”: ihmc.us/lectures/20190513
- Biodynamic Association: Biodynamics.com
- Demeter Association: Demeter-usa.org
- *Natural Wine: An Introduction to Organic and Biodynamic Wines Made Naturally*, by Isabelle Legeron
- Raw Wine Fairs: RawWine.com
- Biodynamic Conference 2019, November 20-24, Lake George, NY: JPIBiodynamics.org

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