



After 15 years in the wine industry, Von now writes a monthly wine column, has co-authored a recent book, hosts a weekly radio wine show on KSAV.org, and conducts a monthly Tasting Panel for website publication. She has made wine, taught numerous wine courses, and serves as a competition wine judge. Send questions or comments to: wynelady@sonic.net

IN WINE COUNTRY

Resistance is futile!

(Or where do they get this stuff?)

by Von Hurson

How would you describe the acid in a lemon, for example? Sour or tart? What about bracing or sharp? Do any of those words lead you to expect something tasty or desirable? Not likely. But what if I said crisp or refreshing or lively? Does that change your expectations of what you're about to taste? Why not just low or high acidity? Relative, to be sure, and not quite as picturesque, but at least that communicates! And think of the flip-side to crisp acidity – fat, flat and flabby!

OK, that was acidity. Before I launch into full phrases, let's tackle another major wine element – “tannin” – that dry, astringent, mouth-puckering sensation found in big, flavorful, age-worthy red wines like Cabernet Sauvignon. There's one descriptor that completely drives me around the bend: “fine-grained” tannins. It's used so often, it's scary – and you should see people wiggle and squirm when asked what it means. I've asked around, believe me. Even gone online for hours, searching for something I could scrape together

as a definition. But what did I find? Nothing actually useful, I'm afraid. I did, however, find the phrase used a LOT, as if everyone instinctively knew what it meant – but, alas, no explanations. I found “wide-grained”, but that just made matters worse.

Actually, my favorite explanation attempt came from a wine-savvy friend who said, “Well...uh.....it's sort of like fine grains of sand – just before they start to melt...”(?!?!?) I took that to mean something closer to soft, supple or smooth – maybe even silky or velvety. The other end of that spectrum would be words like aggressive, harsh, green or angular, but these don't work since “grain” implies texture – and words like rough, coarse, or chewy don't make any sense at all. We would say rustic if we like them, coarse if we don't. Tannins are fickle things.

So, I've come to the conclusion that it's all just Words, words, words, and the more that get thrown together to make a wine description sound mysterious, and what

should be delicious by the sound of it, the better.

I've dug through a staggering number of wine descriptions that I've saved over the years to bring you some of the more picturesque and fun ones. See if you can figure out what a wine that was described like that would actually taste like. How would it feel as it glides across your palate? And, most important to wine marketing people – would you buy that wine based on the adjectives?

Off we go!

Huge, juicy yet elegant; Excellent persistence; Highly extracted and intense cassis, mocha, saddle leather and pencil shavings coat the mouth; Muscular structure; Velvety, open-textured and appealing for its blackberry and tar flavors; Smooth yet toothsome; Lots of jazzy fruit; Compact and round at the core; Big, broad-shouldered wine; Abundant, firm, fine-grained (awk!) tannins; Subtle oleander, blackberry, and a hint of cigar box linger on the finish; The tannins are abundant and supple and bedded in a voluptuous body.

Let's wrap up with an actual description of a 1996 HAUT BRION – a Bordeaux, and one of France's finest Premier Crus. “Opaque black-red. Intense cedar, cassis, pipe tobacco, chimney soot, and graphite on the nose. Abundant tannin continues to mount as do the deep and multiple layers of flavor. Bright cherry, cassis, pencil lead and porcini are followed by cigar box and blackberry. This a marvelous wine which will continue to offer tremendous pleasure for decades.”

Yum! Now enjoy the Wine Waffle in the box below and create your own description magic. Most of all – enjoy that wine. Cheers!

I can't help it – I just can't resist! I keep coming across them and shaking my head in sheer amazement. Of what do I speak? Well, those “Wine-Speaky”/“Wine-Geeky” terms and phrases, of course.

Frankly, I'm not sure whether to ask for a cease and desist order so I can stop chuckling uncontrollably and get some work done, or just ride the wave – throwing my hands up in sheer disbelief. These people can't be taking themselves seriously, can they? The question must be asked: do they find their comments as hilarious and mind-boggling as I – and probably you – do? Or is it all a strange attempt at esotericism (new word). I mean how can they possibly come up with these things? Seriously! It's like we live in an alternate universe, where the concept of words carrying meaning has evaporated.

In so many wine comments/descriptions I've been reading lately, I've been not-

ing a strong tendency toward the absurd – which I can only conclude is either a serious attempt to befuddle and impress, or a conscious attempt to be funny and entertaining – which accomplishes a goal in itself. But using these words to describe a wine to someone who hasn't sipped it before? Silly, silly, SILLY.

Let's start out by picturing a wine barrel – filled to the top with little pieces of paper – each one with a different adjective written on it. That's about as good an image as any when it comes to explaining some of the wildly crazy wine descriptions. In fact, trying to make sense out of many of them is a bit like jumping into the barrel with great enthusiasm and splashing around with all those adjectives – tossing them merrily in the air.

First of all though, I should point out that words carry more than just meaning. They carry emotions – and cause reactions. Take the word “acidity” for example.

WINE WAFFLE

The Wine Waffle is amazingly simple. Pick one word, at random, from each column and presto, you have an opinion!

For example, from Column A – stimulating. From Column B – fruity. From Column C – elegantly.

And from Column D – structured. Thus your evaluation of the wine: “**Stimulating, fruity, elegantly structured.**”

Imagine dropping *that* in the middle of a conversation!

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C	COLUMN D
STIMULATING	VITAL	REFRESHINGLY	HONEST
SOFT	MELLOW	STYLISHLY	POSITIVE
CHARMING	ROUND	CHARACTERISTICALLY	REFINED
AMUSING	FRAGRANT	ELEGANTLY	AUTHENTIC
GRACEFUL	FRUITY	CLASSICALLY	SENSUOUS
CLEAN	AROMATIC	TYPICALLY	FORWARD
HEDONISTIC	LIMPID	EXQUISITELY	STRUCTURED
SMOOTH	SCENTED	GRACEFULLY	BALANCED
SUPPLE	FINE	DELICATELY	DEVELOPED
SUAVE	SOPHISTICATED	PROPERLY	WELL-CONSTITUTED

