

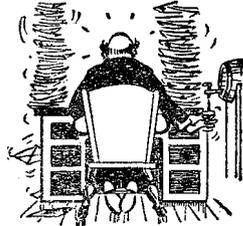
The Amateur Winemaker

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From the Editor's Chair

Yet another invention

Lt.-Col. W. Sherrard-Smith, M.C., who already has many useful winemaking inventions to his credit, sends me the details of his new "automatic filtration" jar for use in pulp fermentation depicted in the facing advertisement, which illustrates quite clearly how it works. Every winemaker knows the laborious daily task of stirring and mixing the must, to ensure that the ingredients which float to the top and form a "cap" get a thorough soaking. Then, at the end of the initial fermentation, comes the job of sifting and straining through sieve, jelly-bag or muslin, sometimes a messy procedure. "I hated clogging siphons and a lot of messy hard work with the sludge," says Col. Sherrard-Smith, "and with this idea a nightmare has been eliminated." The process is quite straightforward, but was not devised without some headaches. The jar is a normal stone one and the other parts, which have had to be specially manufactured, have been adapted to suit it. The sinker is made of stone and the filter of plastic, cut to size. Both will last indefinitely. The filter proved the most difficult obstacle during the repeated tests he made. If it is too fine the fermentation "heaves" at regular intervals; if it is too coarse, solid particles slip through. The happy medium, as embodied in the manufactured filter, allows a steady, uninterrupted fermentation. It seems an excellent idea and quite practical. I personally would prefer to call it a "straining" jar, (reserving the word "filtering" for the finer, ultimate clarification process with pulp or paper) but this is perhaps a quibble.



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In the wood

My comments last month about the beneficial effects of maturing wine in the wood evoked a sympathetic response from Mr. Stuart Smith, of C2 Nugents Court, Hatch End, Middlesex. He believes, with me, that what type of vessel is used for fermentation is comparatively unimportant, but that the use of a wooden vessel for maturation can have great influence on wine quality. He writes: "The usual explanation is that an oxygen exchange occurs through the pores of the wood and that oxidation is one of several processes involved in maturation. Since wine goes out-in most areas wine stored in the wood gradually disappears-it seems at least possible that air can get in. Some months ago I stored freshly made wine in a polythene bag and left as it happened a slight air space. Two or three weeks later I found that the air had completely disappeared - oxygen, nitrogen, the lot! I admitted more air and plugged the bag securely. and that air vanished too. It had presumably been absorbed by the wine."

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Editor: C. J. J. Berry,
North Croye, Croye Drive,
The A venue, Andover, Hants.

Tel.: Andover 3177.

Canadian Agents: Wine-Art,

P.O. Box 2701, Vancouver 3, B.C.

Semplex of Canada. Box 1343, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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Racking a substitute ?

"Presumably, also, the rigidity of a glass container prevents absorption and gaseous exchange at the interface is interfered with. I do not know whether there is any substance in the idea that the wood less amateur should pour his wine from one vessel to another at frequent intervals. Aeration of that kind makes no difference whatever to the dissolved oxygen content of water, but it may be a different matter with oxygen-starved wine. The amateur's claim that frequent rackings are essential seems to support the idea. If this is the explanation it would seem not to matter what kind of vessel is used for fermentation. High grade commercial wines, after all, are fermented in a variety of things-closed barrels, open vats, cement lined masonry, glass, tiled baths-but they are almost invariably matured in wood. In some cases pigment from the wood colours the wine (Cognac is matured in black oak) but that does not affect the maturation. Oak, however, is commonly used for barrel making and has been for centuries; and it is a very wide grained wood."

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Her experience too

Mrs. S. M. Tritton, of Grey Owl Laboratories, observes in the course of a letter: As for fermentation and storage in barrels giving you better results, I am quite sure you are correct, as I have proved this point myself. What happens is that you get some esterification due to the oxygen which gets in through tile staves and this cuts down the time of maturing. I find grape wine made in glass and bottled has next to no quality compared to that made in barrel.

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Going well

There is encouraging news about the 1961 National Conference and Show at Harrow, preliminary arrangements for which are now going very well indeed. All Circles have been sent an appeal to lend their help financially under the "Bob a Nob" scheme (to donate 1/- per head of their membership) and the first response has been very encouraging indeed, some £31 having been subscribed, the treasurer tells me. One happy aspect of it is that Circles in the Midlands and North have "chipped in," and that some of the smallest circles were the first to respond. So far donations have been received from: Bournemouth, Andover, Cheltenham, British Timken (Northampton), Emmer Green, Harrow, Rugby, Hesa (Hayes), Ilkeston, Wakefield, Youlgreave, South Essex, Portsmouth and Farnborough. To all these Circles, the committee sends warm thanks for their generous reaction. There is often a time lag between letters being received by Circles and any action being taken on them, since the committee or club may not be meeting for three weeks or so. Consequently there are probably many more Circles which intend to contribute but have not yet

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done so, and whose help will be welcomed. The total so far is a good start, but the committee would like to feel that they have reasonably adequate funds in hand. The treasurer's address is: Mr Ivor Morgan, The Cottage, Newbndge, Cadnam, Southampton.

Would you like to judge or steward?

There has been a good response to the call for volunteers to steward the judges at the judging of the wines on the Friday afternoon, but since it seems likely that an even larger entry than last year can be expected, still more will be required. The judging will take place at the Rest Hotel, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, at 1.30 p.m. on Friday, 2nd June, and judges and stewards are asked to be there by 1 p.m. sharp. A panel of judges is being compiled, and I would be most grateful if Circles could give this matter their serious thought and suggest names of those who would be willing to officiate and whom they could recommend. It will be preferable for us to have too many judges rather than too few. to reduce the burden on individuals if the entry is even higher than expected. A steward will accompany each judge, and will obviously gain valuable experience, and the intention is that in future years gaps in the judges' ranks will be filled from those of the stewards, so now's your chance! If you wish to steward, just send me your name and address.

Long meeting

The Conference Committee, incidentally, had another long meeting, this time at the treasurer's home on Sunday, 15 January, and did succeed in hammering out most of the basic arrangements. (A schedule sub-committee had met previously at the chairman's home and drawn up a revised schedule, which will be circulated as soon as possible). The meeting lasted some five hours and the agenda was a very long one, and I think everyone was impressed with the grasp of the organisation of such a conference which our secretary displays. So Clubs can rest assured that their committee is working hard for a successful conference and, incidentally at least five of them had to travel considerable distances (from Cardiff, Hertford and Harrow to Southampton) to do so. -The Editor