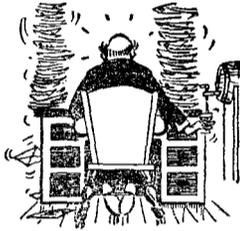


The Amateur Winemaker

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*From the
Editor's
Chair*



LEAD GLAZE

Experienced winemakers will have had many warnings of the very real danger of using for fermenting or storage any earthenware vessel with a lead glaze. Such warnings have appeared in these columns often enough, but they obviously bear repetition, for it is still not appreciated by everyone that such an error can result in a brew which can cause severe lead poisoning. Such a case, indeed, was reported in a recent issue of *The Lancet*, the medical journal.

The journal tells of a village butcher who was admitted to hospital on account of what turned out to be a severe form of lead poisoning—so severe, indeed, that he had two epileptic fits. In the end he made a complete recovery. The source of the lead remained obscure until the fact that the butcher was "an enthusiastic maker and drinker" of home-made elderberry wine, of which he consumed two pints a week, suggested an examination of the wine. This, described as "of a rich, red colour," with a "not unpleasing bouquet and a slightly metallic aftertaste," was found to contain 7.5 mg. of lead a litre, and was therefore the undoubted cause of the patient's illness.



SOFT LEAD GLAZE

The source of the lead was found to be the earthenware vessel known as a jowl in which the wine was fermented. This jowl, which the victim had inherited from an aunt, and was reported by the British Ceramic Research Association as being over 100 years old, had been used by the butcher since 1958. In other words, "it was a relic of the age when such containers were glazed with soft lead glazes" and, when examined, was found to be cracked and filled by the acidity of the wine.



DON'T USE JUNK

In both "First Steps in Winemaking" and "A Wine-maker's Companion" pains were taken to stress this danger, but certain books on winemaking suggest junk shops as a suitable source of equipment. Clearly this is bad advice; antique vessels, any with cracked or pitted glazes, and certainly any of Eastern or Middle Eastern origin, should be avoided. It is as well not to take chances and to buy only equipment of which you can be sure. Lead glaze is now rarely encountered in this country, for the use of a hard, salt glaze for modern domestic containers is now general. Such a glaze is hard, thin and colourless, and "rings" when tapped. A lead glaze is altogether duller in colour, being thick and honey-coloured, and does not. But if you are doubtful, use something else!



JUDGES AND STEWARDS WANTED

Since the 1961 National Conference is to be held at Harrow, well within the range of the many Circles in the London area, it is anticipated that the entry in the

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wine show will appreciably exceed even the large one at Bournemouth in 1960. This in turn will present certain difficulties, for many, many more judges and judges' stewards will be required. There must be many capable judges of whom the committee does not know and therefore the committee issues this invitation to all Circles: If you know of a capable judge (or judges) willing to judge at "the National," will you please forward the nomination to: C. J. Berry, North Croye, the Avenue, Andover, Hants, as soon as possible. The aim is to build up a panel of experienced and reliable judges for what will become an important annual show, but this year at least the committee is working on a financial shoestring, and it would be the greatest possible help to have judges who could come at their own, or their Circle's expense. The same applies to stewards. Many stewards will be required to assist the judges, and anyone who is interested in learning judging technique with a view to himself becoming a judge in subsequent years could obviously do far worse than gain the required experience by acting as a steward this year.

Anyone who can spare the half day (1.30 p.m. onwards) and who would like to steward should send their own name to the same address; we shall be most grateful. (Only would-be judges need the recommendation of their Circle or some other acceptable authority.) Any steward will be welcomed with open arms!



CORRECTION

One small correction to our last month's notes: the Conference is on June 2nd and 3rd, of course, and *not* June 1st and 2nd as stated. Wrong year's diary!



ELDERBERRY WINE

Two friends have commented this month upon my elderberry wine, saying that it is far better than theirs, which they variously described as "too tart," "too sharp," or "too rough." They were surprised at the simplicity of the solution. If you have some elderberry wine like that (and reasonably dry elderberry wine is always "rough," because of the high tannin content) just try adding a little sugar. It works wonders!



CASKS

During one conversation with two expert wine-makers this month I ventured the opinion that, in my experience, the best wine was always that made in a cask. I have proved that to my own satisfaction. But what is the scientific reason for it? One thought that an oak cask imparted a touch of tannin to the wine, (which many country wines lack), the other that the secret lay not so much in the fact that the ferment was conducted in the cask as in that the wine was *matured* in the cask. I'm inclined to think that the truth lies midway between the two. As an experiment next year I'll make one large brew and then mature half in glass and half in wood for a year, just to see which is best. I still have no really scientific reason to advance, but I'd take a bet on the outcome!



NEW QUARTERS

The many winemakers who have visited the offices of M. Augusti Hidalgo for a little winetasting session will shortly have an excuse for doing so again! The firm is moving before the end of February from its present quarters near Oxford Circus to larger ones at: 81 Ledbury Road, off Westbourne Grove, W.11. The telephone number is Bayswater 1302.