



# Rick's Grape Skinny

[ricksgrapeskinny@gmail.com](mailto:ricksgrapeskinny@gmail.com)



September 2015

*"Of all things known to mortals,  
wine is the most powerful and effectual for  
exciting and inflaming the passions of mankind!"*  
(Sir Francis Bacon)

## Let's All Get Smashed!!



OK already...don't go frettin' and gettin' all fired up thinkin' I'm encouraging drinking to excess! I absolutely am not. Nor am I an advocate for going backwards and reverting to those good ole days when great wines were made "between the toes!" I definitely am not! So let's hear it for responsible drinking and modern day winemaking technology!

That said however, I am otherwise a very strong proponent of enthusiasts enhancing their overall wine education and enjoyment of wine through experiencing first-hand as much of the winemaking process as possible and practical. You'll not only learn a lot more about winemaking per se, but I guarantee that you'll also begin to appreciate and enjoy wine like you never before thought possible!



### Experience "The Crush!"

In a general sense, there are essentially six parts of the winemaking process –

*Growing, Harvesting, Crushing/Pressing, Fermenting, Aging, and Bottling.*

From my spot on the bench, there is no better way to expand one's wine knowledge than to become immersed in the winemaking process. And the absolute easiest and most effective way for one to accomplish that is to visit a winery -- and instead of just tasting samples and asking questions -- **ask to become a volunteer part of the winery team during Crush** – that magical time of the year when grapes are picked, crushed or pressed and the juice is fermented. And lest there be doubt, it doesn't matter what kind of wine is being made or how much wine is being made...because every winery will go through the same basic processes in producing a finished wine. Live it and learn it!

All but the largest wineries will have programs where patrons and enthusiasts can volunteer to perform a host of fundamental functions...from picking grapes and working in the Tasting Room to helping label the bottles once the wine is ready for distribution and sale. I guess it's possible for one to also help with aging...but you better pack a BIG lunch... 'cuz you might be there a while! And believe it or not, there is every likelihood that there are wineries near enough to you that you could actually volunteer and participate if you chose to!

### There Also are "Crush" Festivals!

A related endeavor that helps optimize one's overall exposure to the world of winemaking is to attend what's generally known as *Crush Festivals*...where participants can learn about and typically participate in a number of activities that serve to replicate some of the key winemaking functions. Stomping and smashing grapes with one's bare feet of course is a favorite *Crush* activity – but if that's your choice, make sure you take a change of clothes!! Oh...and rest assured, none of the juice produced by the stomping of grapes will ever be made into wine!

If perhaps you've got California on your Wineau Bucket List of places to visit this year, here's a link to this year's *Cali Crush Festivals* and Events!

<http://www.seecalifornia.com/wineries/california-grape-stomps.html>



## Toast of the Month



*“Here’s to Happiness and Laughter  
And to Postponing the Hereafter!”*

*Anonymous*



## Bunch of the Month!

### Red

#### Cabernet Sauvignon

**Liberty School 2012 (Hope Family Wines)**  
**Rich and Smooth...it’s the Definitive Cabernet!**  
**(Paso Robles, CA)/\$12-\$16** – If you want to experience and taste a modestly priced and classic *Cabernet* that showcases both the grape and the art of wine making, then make it Liberty School. The 2012 Vintage is one of the most approachable – and enjoyable – I’ve seen since their storied 99 Vintage. The classic *Cabernet Sauvignon* attributes are largely a product of winemaker Austin Hope’s commitment to using only the finest fruit available...and to achieve that, he selects the best he can find from a community of more than 50 grape farmers! It is also a product of Hope’s use of mostly (90%) used oak during its 9-12 months of aging...and approach that showcases the fruit!

<http://www.hopefamilywines.com>

### Merlot

**Oberon 2013 (Michael Mondavi family)**  
**Fruit-forward, Plush Mouth Feel...Awesome!**  
**(Napa Valley – Napa, CA)/\$18-\$22**

For more than 40 years, Oberon Winemaker, Tony Coltrin, has been a contributing part of the Michael Mondavi family... one of Napa Valley’s oldest and most widely respected producers. With early ripened fruit sourced from some of Napa Valley’s best vineyards, this luscious vintage of 100% *Merlot* was aged with an abundance of TLC for 18 months in new French oak. With so many *Merlots* tasting alike, you’ll not be saying that about this amazingly distinctive gem of a wine! Wowzer!

<http://www.oberonwines.com>

### Blend

**Cantine Di Ora *Amicone* 2011**  
**Inky Dark, Bursting with Flavor & Delicious!**  
**(Veneto Region – Ora, Italy)/\$15-\$18**

Wow...this is a phenomenal wine for the money – and so much so that I’m very surprised that it doesn’t sell for much more. It’s every bit as good, and mostly better, than similar IGT Veneto red blends that sell for twice or three times the price! In fact, this amazingly tasty blend is made from the same union of grapes used to make the iconic *Amarone della Valpolicella* – my very favorite Italian red wine! This vintage is 60% *Corvina*, 20% *Rondinella* and 20% *Molinara* -- and it’s so good that once you taste it, you might not want to share it! Oh yeah...it’s that good!

<http://www.wsselections.com/docs/amicone>

### White

**Cortese** (*The only grape grown in the DOCG of Gavi*)  
**La Toledana *Gavi* (*Raccolto Tardivo*) 2013**  
**In a Few Words...Utterly Majestic!**

**(Piemonte Region - Gavi, Italy)/ \$20-\$25**  
For those who know that the Piemonte region of Italy is renowned for its red wines (Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera, Dolcetto, etc.), it might come as a surprise that the region is also acclaimed for its exceptional white wines from Piemonte’s DOCG of Gavi. Known simply as Gavi, and made only from the *Cortese* grape, these white wines are supplanting *Chardonnay*, *Sauvignon Blanc*...and even the almost sacred *Pinot Grigio*...as the preferred white wine of the Italian *cognoscenti*! To be sure, it’s becoming more common to hear that Gavi is now Italy’s best white wine! As well, because critics from all over the world have written so positively about Gavi, merchants in many venues are having a difficult time keeping Gavi in stock! This particular gem is comprised of grapes that were all grown on one of Italy’s most famous and prized wine estates, Gavi’s *La Toledana*...which was built in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For this *Tardivo* (*Late Harvest*) vintage, a significant portion of the grapes used were picked late in November – an approach that adds body, complexity and richness to this off-dry, tropical-in-character and stunningly wonderful wine. Agricola La Toledana is now owned by highly acclaimed winemaker/producer Gianni Martini -- who is also the President of the Consorzio di tutela del Gavi (Consortium for the Protection of Gavi) and a Counselor with the Italian Wine Union.

[http://www.latoledana.it/home\\_uk.htm](http://www.latoledana.it/home_uk.htm)