



BRIVIUM

Bravium Pinot Noir
Whole-Cluster Fermentation

In winemaking, as in life, the truth usually lies in the middle. In my 20+ years of making Pinot Noir, I've found whole-cluster fermentation to be a perfect method for getting the freshness, complexity, and spice I seek in my Bravium wines, but one that requires a good understanding of vintage, vineyard, and clone to find the sweet spot that delivers rather than dominates.

Whole-cluster fermentation is the fermentation of intact, whole clusters of grapes. Leaving the grapes uncrushed and on stem during fermentation can be beneficial because the stems contain large amounts of phenolics—tannins, flavanols, and other flavor compounds—which provide aromatic complexity as well as texture, and you get a gentle intra-berry fermentation that brings out the bright, fresh flavors.

When I started making Pinot Noir, I traveled to Burgundy to taste and study the practices there. Some producers I liked destemmed before fermenting, such as Domaine Marquis D'Angerville and Domaine Michel Lafarge, both of which are located in Volnay. Their wines are high-toned and approachable expressions, with beautiful red fruit notes. But then there were those who fell into the stem-included camp, some of whom fermented up to 100% on stems, creating wines with more complex aromatic presentations as well as more pronounced tannin structures, such as Domaine Dujac and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti.

That trip made clear that whole-cluster fermentation was a good, minimal-intervention tool, but one that required consideration of a number of variables—including site, clonal selection, vintage growing conditions, and farming methods. All of those affect the amount of sap in the vine, which in turn determines if whole cluster will contribute freshness and complexity or dominate the flavors.



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Linguistic origin: Latin / Meaning: prize, reward, gift



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Drier, more mature stems add aromatic complexity, spice and savory notes, and the resulting wine's flavors are fresher. The texture is more velvety. Sappy stems can add a vegetal character that can dominate the fruit. So when we bring in the clusters, I look at and chew on the stems to understand how much sap is in them. Over years of trial and error, I've come to understand how to identify which blocks are best fermented off the stem and which are amazing when left on stem.

I also have to determine how much of the fruit to ferment on stem. Some clones can't take stems at all. And using 100% stems can make a wine showy but unapproachable because of the stem tannin. All-stem wines can result in wines of a person rather than a place, losing their subtle, differentiating factors.

Wild yeast takes three to five days to start, and fermentation takes another two-plus weeks to finish. Given how delicate Pinot Noir is, pump overs are too harsh, so as the fruit and juice ferments, we very gently and infrequently punch down the cap by hand to keep it wet. This allows us to get that slow, gentle intra-berry fermentation.

The result is a Pinot Noir that offers vivacious, complex, fruit-forward flavors with freshness that lasts longer, making the wine more ageable, all without losing that all-important sense of terroir.

Derek Rohlffs, Founder & Winegrower



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