

# A Forum for Winemaking Discovery

Winemakers find value in talking about trials

Stacy Briscoe

**Stacy Briscoe** is the assistant editor of *Wine Business Monthly*. She has been writing about wine professionally since 2015, freelancing for multiple publications including *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Edible Communities* and *Napa Sonoma Magazine*, among others. She also maintains her own website, *BriscoeBites.com*, dedicated to wine reviews and tasting notes. Outside of wine writing, she also contributes as a freelance editor for the independent publisher She Writes Press. Stacy has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English-language literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz.



**YOU'RE MAKING ADVANCEMENTS IN** your vineyard management. You're taking innovative approaches in your winemaking. You're running tests, conducting trials, taking notes and implementing changes.

Want to share those achievements? Looking for feedback from fellow grape growers and winemakers? Care to learn what others in the industry are working on?

The **Research Oenovation Collective** (ROC) is a non-profit organization that supports the research and experimentation of grape growers and winemakers and provides a venue for sharing that applied research. "From implementation of new tools and practices to simply creating contextual understanding ... of the winemaking process, the ROC is a much-needed link between discovery research and application development," ROC CEO **Peter Salamone** said.

In January 2019, the non-profit announced its official partnership with the former **Sonoma County Wine Technical Group** (SCWTG), launching ROC-Sonoma. ROC hosted its first North Coast regional meeting in June 2019, and the local chapter now holds regular quarterly meetings at the **Santa Rosa Junior College**. Other regional chapters, thus far, include ROC-SLO (San Luis Obispo), ROC-OR (Willamette) and ROC-WA (Walla Walla).

Expansion into other wine regions is in the works for 2020.

"We're going to separate out the North Coast," Salamone said. This will include the more region-specific chapters of Napa County, the Sierra Foot-hills and Monterey. Outside of California, the organization looks forward to welcoming ROC-WA (Columbia Basin), ROC-Texas, ROC-NY and ROC-HI-Volcano.

The point of the regional meetings is to offer an open forum for discussion about what grape growers and winemakers are working on, whether in the field or in the cellar.

Today, ROC has secured more than 70 trial commitments from 35 different wineries, according to Salamone. Topics include studies in viticulture, yeast strains, enzymes and cellar processing.

## 2019 Vintage Trials

**Aimée Sunseri**, winemaker at **New Clairvaux Vineyards** in Vina, Calif., is conducting a trial with ROC that explores the use of sur lie aging in white winemaking. Specifically, she's curious how different techniques during the aging process, such as regular bâtonnage and the addition of dry ice, create different mouthfeels in the resulting wines.

When asked about her trial experience, Sunseri said, "I highly encourage other winemakers to experiment and collaborate. The platform that ROC has put together has been mind-opening. I love hearing about other people's trials and am learning so much, just from participating."

Terroir is a debatable term in the industry—can one truly study the essence of the vineyard? **Casey DiCesare**, assistant winemaker and enologist at **Scheid Family Wines**, wanted to learn just that. So, he and his team are conducting an experiment to observe the effects of in-vineyard native fermentation:

A portion of Pinot Noir, harvested from the Scheid Family Wines' River-view Vineyard, was left in the vineyard to undergo native fermentation in a refrigerated trailer. A separate lot went to the main winery to be processed with house yeast. Each lot experienced the same punch-down regimen and additives throughout the process. DiCesare and his team closely monitored the wine's transformation, compiling both sensory and analytical data.

"Doing trials like this can be a large investment for a winery in time and capital," DiCesare said. "We find great value in doing trials on a production scale in order to learn more about our vineyards and winemaking. Not every trial is a success, but we always learn something."

Ashes & Diamonds Winery's portfolio is led by the classic Bordeaux varieties. As such, production winemaker **Andrew Brooks**, along with his winemaking colleagues, finds studying cap management techniques imperative to improving wine style and quality. Brooks' ROC experiment takes a look at two different extraction methods and how those methods affect the fermentation process and the resulting wine.

"I was pretty excited to work with the ROC folks," Brooks said. "Especially since we work with a limited number of vineyard sources and wines, our ability to experiment is somewhat less. Getting to do this within a community of like-minded folks that are also interested in bettering their winemaking technique helps us all learn faster and more conclusively than if we were doing this only by ourselves."

In a quest to bottle more organic wines, the winemaking team at **Castoro Cellars** is studying new techniques in reducing total SO<sub>2</sub>, including introducing a non-Saccharomyces yeast strain immediately after harvest, when the grapes enter the receiving hopper.

"We are very excited to see what the non-Saccharomyces yeasts can do to help with bioprotection of organic grapes," said **Castoro Cellars** associate winemaker **David Sailer**. "Trials are a great way to add knowledge to the winemaking vault, as well as a fun way to keep harvest even more interesting. It's like having a science fair project and hoping you get the results you wish for!" **WBM**

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**Aimée Sunseri**, New Clairvaux Vineyards

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