

The most important element to consider when judging a red wine is its BALANCE. In order to understand what 'balance' really means, we have to consider the following:

Tannin (present in the grape skin, stems and pips, as well as in the wooden barrels used for ageing) gives wine its longevity and structure whereas acidity (basically the PH of the grape pulp) is related to the sense of freshness and wine's primary aroma.

Unfortunately, tannin and acidity do tend to reinforce each other. Although per se desirables, an excess of tannin and/or acidity can make the wine very 'harsh'.

The alcohol (and the residual sugars) tend to compensate the tannin-acidity levels, i.e. an higher alcohol degree balances out the higher acidity and tannin levels.

Wines with high acidity and or tannin content must therefore have high alcohol content (and vice versa). When the sugars available to be transformed into alcohol are not sufficient to impart the required alcohol content, the balance can be reached either by reducing the level of acidity (starting the so called malolactic fermentation) or reducing the tannins and/or their harshness.

The active tannin levels tend to decrease with ageing (they 'polymerize', i.e. aggregate into larger molecule chains settling at the bottom of the barrel or of the bottle as sediments), explaining why certain red wines are relatively unbalanced when young and reach balance after ageing. Tannin astringency is also reduced thanks to the so called 'sweet tannin' exchange, when the mild tannin contained in the barrel's wood combine with the harsher tannin of the grape.

A properly planned viticulture and vinification strategy can also lay the basis for an intrinsically well balanced must, for example by starting the harvest at certain point of ripeness or by blending different but complementary grape types.

The interaction of so many factors, some beyond the human control or negatively correlated to each other, make very difficult to obtain a really balanced wine showing, at the same time, structure and longevity, freshness and bouquet: when it happens the gates of pleasure open and we are ready to start a unique journey, really hard to forget!