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SONOMA GRAPEMASTERS

FAQ

What do I need to know about winemaking?

Nothing. You're encouraged to think about what kinds of wine you like, and what you like in your wines. We provide a questionnaire to make that easy. From there on, it's all about learning the process and important points for decision-making from our assigned winemaker, as well as through experience. Is it hard? No. Can you learn everything at once? No. But like wine itself, your skills will improve with age.

What's different about Sonoma Grapemasters that sets it apart from Crushpad and other micro-crush operations?

We're not trying to compete with Crushpad, which does an outstanding job enabling folks to make wine right in San Francisco. We're located in a working commercial winery in West Sonoma's famed Russian River Valley, an hour or so north. Vive la difference, we say, for at Sonoma Grapemasters, a division of Owl Ridge Wine Services, you get to make premium wine surrounded by commercial boutique winemakers. No frills, no fancy tasting room or swans in the pond. You rub elbows with the best, and that interaction matters, because winemaking's a funny thing. Experts share their knowledge and experience much more than in other industries. It's a great environment to learn and work in, the real thing all the way, and great fun as well.

What's the real cost?

About \$18 to \$32 per bottle, all-inclusive except for cult Cabs from Napa—which can run up to \$50 a bottle. We charge more for them because those cult grapes cost more—up to \$13,000 a ton! Our fee includes everything from grape to bottle to label.

What's the payment schedule?

One-half of the total upon signing; ¼ in January of the year following crush; ¼ upon satisfactory delivery of your wine . We provide a participation agreement that spells every detail out in clear terms.

What's the minimum quantity?

One barrel, or 24 cases. That translates to \$5000-\$8500, except for cult Cabs.

Why so many cases?

We're a winery. We think by the barrel, and process by the barrel, like all wineries. We can't control quality at any lesser volume. If you form a group of 2 or 3, you'll be amazed at how quickly your share of the barrel allotment disappears.

Can I store the cases at Owl Ridge?

Probably not, but we provide information on storage facilities as needed. Most states now allow delivery of non-commercial wine cases.

When am I needed?

The grapes lead the way. To join in the picking and sorting process, you'll need to be at Owl Ridge—we recommend lodgings, etc nearby—for one or two days at harvest and crush—usually mid-September through the end of October. Grapes ripen early or late depending on variety. And this time frame depends on the weatherman, a tricky fellow indeed.

When should I sign up?

Yesterday, no kidding, and here's why. We make contracts with our small growers based on how many customers we have who want a certain variety from a certain location or AVA (appellation), The earlier we make these agreements—by handshake— in the year, the more choice we have. Come August, most of the best vineyards have been tied up. But the previous April, they might still have been available to our clients. You get the idea.

Can I really do this by remote control?

Yes, you can live on a canal in Amsterdam and welcome your cases of Sonoma Grapemasters Russian River as they float down on a barge to your home. This is the 21st century after all. It's jam-packed with ways to be in touch with the universe without ever leaving your bedroom. That said, even if you can't make more than one trip a year to the Wine Country, we urge you to participate in

person for at least a day—and then, no matter where you live, we'll keep you in intimate contact with your wine and winemaker.

What's the delivery time?

The answer to that is another question—what's the wine? If you make white wine, you'll probably take delivery in six or so months—Chardonnay being an exception that usually needs more time in the barrel. Pinot Noir? About a year or less. Cabernet? About 22 months to 2 years. Other reds fall within that range.

What do I do first?

Sit down, pour yourself a delightfully coy little Pinot with plenty of personality, think things over, but not for too long, and contact us:

info@sonomagrapemasters.com. We'll take it from there.