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## Making Great Wine - It's (Almost) All in the Yeast

By [Daniel Pambianchi](#) | Submitted On March 19, 2009

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The difference between an average homemade wine and an award-winning one often lies in yeast selection—an unknown or often ignored practice in home winemaking. Sure. Making good wine involves growing or buying good fruit and sound winemaking. But making wine—and certainly making great wine—goes beyond buying grapes or juice and then pitching yeast, any yeast, and waiting for fermentation to complete before bottling. And gone are the days of relying on indigenous yeast to get to work; results can be unpredictable and unreliable, or even cause spoilage.

If you want to make award-winning wines that can outscore even commercial wines, then you need to select a wine yeast and choose wisely. With the plethora of specialized yeast strains now available, you can select a strain specifically for your grape or juice variety and desired wine style. But it shouldn't end there. There is no *one* magic yeast strain, though there are preferred ones. So try experimenting with different yeast strains by fermenting several batches and then comparing wine from different batches. You may find that one strain produces better aromas and flavors, perhaps which are more typical of the varietal. Then try blending batches from different strains and in different combinations—the results will surprise you. And avoid the practice of combining two or more strains for fermenting the same batch; this can cause the strains to compete and perhaps yield unpredictable results in terms of aromas, flavors, and mouthfeel.

Yeast manufacturers' websites and home winemaking literature now provide useful information and performance specs to help you choose the right yeast for your needs. Become acquainted with some of the terminology describing yeast characteristics such as optimal fermentation temperature, hydrogen sulfide production, nutrient requirements, as these provide key usage information and clues on expected results.

And remember the first rule of home winemaking—be patient. Making wine takes time. Don't expect to ferment, bottle and drink all within a couple of months, unless you are making wine from a kit, and even then, I would recommend going slowly. Wine needs time to reach its peak; aromas and flavors do not develop overnight. Wine is not an end result, but rather an evolution of aromas, flavors, mouthfeel.

Once the wine has finished fermenting and has been stabilized, taste each batch at least once a month; you will notice that your wine will be much improved after six months, perhaps more depending on the style of wine you are making. Reds generally benefit from a longer aging, for example, twelve months.

Once you have selected which batches are best and how to blend, you are then ready to bottle, and again, I recommend some bottle aging to let the wine settle and improve. Your patience will be greatly rewarded.

Daniel Pambianchi is an avid home winemaker now running Maleta Winery in beautiful Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario (Canada). He is also the author of *Techniques in Home Winemaking* and *Kit Winemaking*. You can catch up with Daniel's latest news and discussions at <http://www.techniquesinhomewinemaking.com/blog/>

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