

THE AMERICAN WINE SOCIETY

# WINE JOURNAL

SUMMER 2021

History of  
the  
**Wine Cork**

2021 AWS  
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**Perfect**  
**Pairings**

**Amateur**  
**Wine Makers**  
Surviving 2020

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# Wines for the Times

How amateur and pro winemakers survived 2020

by Jessica Zimmer

**A**cross the United States, amateur and professional winemakers who belong to the American Wine Society have continued making wine through the pandemic, with video guidance from professionals and by adapting to the new offerings from grape brokers. Many winemakers were able to continue the process of winemaking as usual, with grape brokers playing a huge role behind the scenes in ensuring that conditions remained close to normal.

“I continued winemaking the same as I’ve done for close to 11 years, relying on the education I received from AWS and the University of California, Davis. This year, I’m making blends from grapes from Lodi and Amador County, and a Syrah from grapes from the Suisun Valley. I followed the models from my prior wines that have won prizes in local and state competitions,” said Chris Creasey, an amateur winemaker and the founder of AWS’s East Las Vegas Valley chapter.

Barry and Sissy St. Pierre, amateur winemakers based in Connecticut, also continued making wine through the pandemic rather easily. They utilized cold hardy-Vinifera and hybrids from their hobby vineyard of approximately 300 plants. They also bought wine grapes from the Suisun Valley through Musto Wine Grape Company.

“Since we’re retired, COVID-19 did not stop us from making wine. We were able to go to the Eastern Winery Exposition in early March 2020 before the pandemic began. I’ve also been attending webinars throughout the pandemic,” said Barry St. Pierre.




Mark Diehl, co-owner of Stonewall Creek Vineyards, shows the temporary sign he put up in April 2020 to restrict sales to carry-out. Photo by: Stonewall Creek Vineyards



Chris Creasey, founder of the East Las Vegas Valley chapter of the American Wine Society, with some of his award-winning wines. Photo courtesy of: Chris Creasey

So look for a light to medium-bodied, low tannin red wine, such as Gamay, Sangiovese or Cabernet Franc, to pair with a board of sliced salumi, sausage and local cheeses. Looking over the local selections I find in my favorite wine shop, I might choose a Chateau Grand Traverse Gamay Noir Limited, with its light-body and tart cherry, red plum and black pepper flavors, or a Brys Estate Cabernet Franc.

With a board filled with more spice and smoke, look to a refreshing and fruity Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, or the less common Albariño, avoiding wines with more mineral or herbal profiles, “mineral tones will melt into the smoky flavors while herbal tones may skew bitter leaving behind only searing acidity,” (Wine Enthusiast, Jenn de la Vega, May 2019). And should you have a richer presentation of duck or goose foie gras, rillettes and rabbit pâté, falling back on the classic pairing of a sweet Sauternes or a domestic ice wine such as Michigan’s Old Mission based Chateau Chantal’s Estate Ice Wine would be magic in your **mouth**.



**About the Author**  
*Madeleine Vedel was initiated into the world of wine by her wine-loving parents who had a prized — if small — wine cellar to be shared only with those who knew the difference. While married to a French chef in Provence she ran food and wine tours for nearly 20 years. She is currently based in Bellaire, Mich., honing her cheese and pastry skills and happily consuming both local and international wines within her budget.*

*It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Hot That Zing*  
 Trish Rogers, author of *The Zing Thing: Fearless Food and Wine Together*, spoke recently during a Facebook Live group chat on Riesling (March 10, 2021 Episode 4), explaining: “The taste network [includes] the five taste receptors. The receptor that triggers spice, where we feel heat is also [where we] feel temperature changes, and it is next door, co-localized with our sweet receptors. If we ingest something that touches the spice guy, he’ll get excited, then if we also get something sweet with that, these two together suppress each other. If you have something sweet and heat, put Riesling beside it.”

Acid availability – a key element to food appreciation – it turns on the salivary spigot – acidity is an aversive taste. Continue to bring acid into the picture, you will smother. The acid in wine can denature the proteins in mucins – take another sip to clean the slate. There is constant “refreshing” via the salivary action. Cured Meats and the Smoke factor [are] salt dominant foods such as hams and smoked fish. Pairing a dry or semi-dry Riesling offers the balance of acidity which suppresses salt.”

Doug Frost, author of *On Wine, An American Wine Master Tells All*, contributed during this same discussion: “The heat receptors can be buffered by fats, and by sugars. [It is] somewhat mysterious why that happens. So [do we] eat more cheese? Or glug more wines?” The take-away from this conversation among experts is how perfectly the relatively high acidity, and strong fruity notes in a well made semi-dry Riesling pair with the salt, spice and fat in charcuterie. The acid in the wine cleanses and balances the palate, cutting through the intensity of the cured meats, allowing both to tingle the taste buds with alternating beats creating their own rhythm on your tongue.

## TRY THESE perfect pairings

*Pro Tip:*  
 Start with the available charcuterie at your local grocer and pair with bright, sweet fruity wines for a perfect start!



**EAT THIS**  
 Goat Cheese, Salami, Saucisson d’Arles

**PAIR WITH**  
 Chianti or Provence style Rosé



**EAT THIS**  
 Cured Meats, Smoked Fish, Ham, Salty Foods

**PAIR WITH**  
 Dry/Semi-Dry Riesling



**EAT THIS**  
 Sausage, Salami, Local Cheese

**PAIR WITH**  
 Gamay, Sangiovese or Cabernet Franc

Photos courtesy of: totalwine.com

St. Pierre, who made a Sangiovese blend for the first time in 2020, said his and Sissy's years of establishing contacts through **AWS** helped them continue their hobby. "It's been a lot of comfort, this year and through the years, having friendly souls and people to talk to about making wine and growing grapes," said St. Pierre.

Howard Paul, who co-owns Wedgewood Vintners in Vallejo, California with his wife, Skippy Paul, said the couple made the transition from amateur to professional winemakers during the pandemic. The rapid changes that COVID-19 posed were extremely challenging. "Restaurants closed, it was hard to do any marketing, and it was even hard to sell through collectives such as the Vintners Collective in Napa. Right now I'm looking into the possibility of starting a cooperative. Then I can get access to equipment to make my wines from start to finish," said Paul.

Mark Diehl, co-owner of Stonewall Creek Vineyards in Tiger, Georgia, said the pandemic drastically changed how the winery invited guests and sold wine. He and his wife Sandi Diehl started a wine club as well as online sales and shipping. "We're busier than ever, welcoming guests from all over the country who may not be able to visit their usual travel destinations like Europe. We're anticipating a busy outdoor season, encouraging guests to socially distance and wear masks. We're also continuing our shipments of wine to over 40 states, which we learned how to do last March. We'd had to temporarily close for six weeks," said Diehl. Diehl said Stonewall is now developing its outdoor space with more family-friendly areas, including picnic tables, firepits, bocce ball, corn-hole, and disc golf.



Howard Paul (left) and Skippy Paul (right) co-owners of Wedgewood Vintners. Photos (above and below) courtesy of Howard Paul.



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Mark and Sandi Diehl, co-owners of Stonewall Creek Vineyards



Photos courtesy of: Stonewall Creek Vineyards

## How AWS Faced COVID-19



**AWS** entered March 2020 with an advantage, its large online community of home winemakers. "We launched **AWS** Online Communities in April 2020, which was timely. That helped amateur winemakers nationally stay in touch and interact meaningfully during the pandemic," said David Falchek, executive director of the **American Wine Society**.

Falchek said under normal circumstances, amateur winemakers often rely on competitions to gauge the quality of the wines or how they are progressing as winemakers. "In 2020, many competitions closed or went (on) hiatus. Our competitions team developed a means of conducting a competition safely for the judges. We were able to continue that great tradition and service to home winemakers," said Falchek.

The **AWS** held its 2020 Amateur Wine Competition between October 26 through 28, with Donnie and Betty Nettles of Palm Bay, Florida, taking the Best in Show prize for their 2019 Lime. Falchek said digital events provided new opportunities for **AWS**. "We've had about a dozen virtual tastings with vintners and winemakers since the start of the pandemic and we continue (to hold these events)," said Falchek. **AWS** is already planning its 2021 conference, which is scheduled to be held November 4 through 6 at Harrah's Resort in Atlantic City.

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## Working Around the Fires

Wildfires in numerous wine growing areas limited what some winemakers could create. Gordon Gribble, an amateur winemaker based in New Hampshire, is used to making red and white wines from grapes grown in Sonoma or Napa counties in California, the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and the Columbia Valley in Washington. "In 2020, Charles Smith Vineyard lost many wine grapes to smoke damage. Sonoma County experienced such severe fires that we couldn't buy grapes from his vineyard this year, losing my 100 lb Cabernet Sauvignon order," said Gribble.

Gribble said the fires encouraged him to think creatively. He drew on his years of experience in amateur winemaking and the knowledge he'd gained from attending **AWS** seminars to pick grapes that were not exposed to smoke taint. Ultimately, Gribble reached out for "200 lbs of red grapes and 30 gallons of white juice" from two grape brokers, Steven Fulkerson of Fulkerson Winery in Dundee, New York and Peter Brehm of Brehm Vineyards in Albany, California, respectively.

Brehm Vineyards supplies crushed and frozen wine grapes from

California and Washington to winemakers across the country. "In 2020, I was fine on sourcing grapes. Many customers, including **AWS** members, wanted to make wine. I did feel a lot of strain having to decline fruit from areas that experienced fires. I have experience with making those choices, given the fires in 2017," said Brehm.

Fulkerson said he saw a slight increase in home winemaking in 2020. "A lot of the younger crowd picked up the DIY bug. We provided a wide range of vinifera, hybrid and native varieties, using people's interest to heighten consumer consciousness," said Fulkerson. Fulkerson had staff stagger appointments and encouraged customers to wait in their cars "until the lines died down." "Fortunately, the space that a carboy container takes up in front of a person in a line helps with social distancing," said Fulkerson.

Christina Musto, head of marketing and sales at Musto Wine Grape Company in Hartford, Connecticut, said sourcing from more remote regions, like Chile and South Africa, has not been easy. "There may be delays because of shutdowns and staffing issues. The California vineyards from which we source in the Central

Valley and the Suisun Valley did not experience fires,” said Musto. Musto said some amateur winemakers did not make wine this year because of the pandemic. Those who did made less wine. She added the 2021 harvest looks promising because this year “has been a good year, growing-wise.” “It definitely was a difficult year. Nobody took a lot of chances. Yet customers showed they want to continue their home winemaking traditions,” said Musto. Musto said her company has supplied wine grapes to amateur winemakers for four generations. In 2020, Musto Wine Grape Company substituted its usual in-store classes with videos, handouts, and social media outreach through Instagram Live and Facebook Live. It also offered a new online winemaking video course.

### Shaking it up

A number of AWS members avoided the concerns of 2020 by changing their standard practices. Al Guber, an amateur winemaker and AWS member based in Virginia, said he did not make any wine in 2020. “That’s because I made double the amount in 2019. Most of my fruit was from California. Some was from Virginia via Effingham Manor and Winery in Nokesville, Virginia. This is a small, historic winery in which I’m an investor-owner,” said Guber.

Guber said he was shocked that Effingham’s sales went up during the pandemic. “We had to increase production, though most of the sales happened at the winery. Since we are lucky to have a very large venue, we set up socially distanced tasting rooms. We

also had 20 to 30 socially distanced tables outside,” said Guber. Liza Munion, an amateur winemaker and AWS member based in Florida, said her family was disappointed that U-Pick farms were closed due to the pandemic. “I prefer getting grapes to juices. I want to touch it all, smash the grapes and see how sweet they are. I also enjoy picking blueberries, which are widely available in Florida. We make wine from them, too,” said Munion.

In 2020, Munion was able to source from Pardo Wine Grapes, a grape broker that has offered grapes and juice to home winemakers in Florida for 70 years. “We also picked up an order of blueberries from a farm, paying ahead of time and getting them through an appointment,” said Munion.

Munion said one of the most rewarding experiences she had in 2020 was using the knowledge she has gained through AWS to introduce a friend to home winemaking. “I started her off on a kit, and we used Facetime calls to go through the steps. It was fun, even from a distance,” said Munion. Munion said she and her friend each created a Malbec. “She also made wine from a juice. She did pretty well. I really appreciate the guidance of Betty and Donnie Nettles (the 2020 AWS Best in Show Winners) for their years of tips and tasting suggestions,” said **Munion**.



**About the Author**

*Jessica Zimmer is a news reporter, attorney, and educator based in northern California. She has worked in journalism for over 20 years. She covers a wide variety of industries, including alcoholic beverage production, transportation, law, and the arts.*



The entrance to Musto Wine Grape Company which provides wine grape juices and winemaking advice to many American Wine Society members in Connecticut. Photo courtesy of: Christina Musto



Team members help load wine grapes into a customer's truck at Musto Wine Grape Company in Hartford, Connecticut during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Photo courtesy of: Christina Musto

