

Wine Terms

Dennis Groth began planning a career in wine by planting grapes in Napa Valley's Oakville, a prestige area.

His first Cabernet off his property was harvested in 1983, and the grapes were taken a short distance to The Christian Brothers' crushing facility.

Once the grapes were converted to juice, Groth brought the liquid back to his property to ferment it. But the act of having his grapes crushed at another facility, no matter how close, robbed him of the right to use the term "Estate Bottled" on his wine.

Over the years, hundreds of wineries that do not have crushing facilities on the site of their wineries have suffered the same fate.

Estate Bottled is a prestige term implying a level of commitment and may be compared with the "Produced and Bottled By" line on a back label denotes a level of control (and thus quality) that's not conveyed by the words "Made by" and "Vinted by."

Not granting use of the phrase Estate Bottled is a good thing for consumers such as when it is intentionally compromised by the use of loopholes to preserve its use.

But the loss of the right to use Estate Bottled is sad when, for all intents and purposes, a technicality blocks its use.

For instance, imagine that a vineyard is located literally adjacent to the winery, but is inside a different appellation. Such a wine cannot carry the term Estate Bottled since grapes grew in a different appellation from where the winery is located.

In 1986, when his first wine was being labeled, Groth faced a

rule set down eons ago by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (now the Tax and Trade Bureau) that mandates that the move of the fruit off-site for crushing, then back on-site for the rest of its production carries with it elimination of the use of the Estate Bottled term.

For some wineries, notably those who make a tiny amount of wine and could use the phrase to justify the expense that went into it, loss of the term seems unfair.

A few years ago, I tasted a very good \$5 import whose back label said the wine was Product of Australia and "Imported by" a company located in a northern California business park, and "Bottled by" another company.

Clearly, this implied the wine came to the United States in bulk, likely in a giant tanker, and then was bottled here, thus saving a lot of money. Hence its \$5 price.

Unless the consumer knows how certain terms are used, it may not be possible to know the provenance of the wine.

Imported olive oils actually tell the consumer more than wine. In a blended oil, the countries of origin are often stated. To be sure, not all Extra Virgin oils from Spain are excellent, but there is more of a likelihood of it being excellent than a blended oil that says it's a blend from Greece, Tunisia, Spain, and Sardinia.

Getting to know the meaning of wine terms is thus important for consumers, but you'd have to do a dedicated search of government websites to find out what each term means.

And such a task is daunting for even dedicated journalists.