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## 10. The grape cluster

*The degree of ripeness and health of the grape condition the quality and type of wine. If the grape is not perfectly ripe, the resulting wine will not be of the best quality.*

*The years of a “good harvest” that lead to quality wine, are only achieved when the grape clusters develop over a summer with excellent climatic conditions. It is in this period that the grape berry grows, changes colour, and ripens. Harvest begins when the grapes reach optimum ripeness.*

*The grape cluster or bunch has two parts, the woody stem and the grape berry. Each berry is made up of skin and the pulp that contains seeds or pips. The pulp is the fragile, sweet, and watery tissue that yields juice or must when broken open. The juice that results from crushing or pressing the bunches is a cloudy liquid that contains lees, which are suspended solids such as cellulose and pectic matter from the cell walls of the skin, coagulated protoplasm, protein substances, and bits of skin.*

*The pomace is the solid part of the grape, made up of the skin and pips after pressing the grapes after the crush. Generally, a bunch is 4-5% stems and 95-96% grape berries. The skin represents 8-9% of each berry, the pips, 3%, and the pulp, 84-85%. The grape cluster forms during fruit set or fertilization, which normally occurs in late November. Over the course of the next approximately two months it acts as a green organ that grows every day. This phonological period, called the herbaceous period, ends with veraison, when the grape changes colour. During, this short period of just 10-12 days the berries become elastic and swell. White grapes turn greenish-yellow and black grapes turn reddish-violet. During those few days, the grapes lose acidity and gain sweetness.*

*The ripening period follows and lasts for 40-60 days from late January to late March. The grapes continue to grow and become sweeter and less acidic. Colour increases and the varietal aromas appear that will later be present in the wine. Meanwhile, the polyphenols, especially the tannins, stop forming.*

*This ripening period that ends with “harvest maturity” defines the composition of the bunch and largely conditions the quality of the wine to be produced.*

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