

## Wine and T-shirts

(Number 66 in a series of opinionated articles about grapes and wine)

By John Smith

As winery owners, we get to see a wide variety of what people feel is appropriate clothing to wear when going wine tasting, and every time we think we've seen it all, something new (and usually entertaining) appears. By far the most popular items are t-shirts that advertise, provide a means of self-expression, or glorify wine as the ultimate beverage.

It's said that Mickey Mouse and Davy Crockett in the 1950s were the first names and images to decorate t-shirts (or "tee shirts," if you insist) at about the time t-shirts made the transition from underwear to everyday wear. They were followed by the counter-cultural tie-dyed shirts of the rebellious sixties, and established as a permanent fashion statement by rock groups like the Grateful Dead. Somewhere near this time, possibly because of the opening shot of Jacqueline Bisset swimming in the movie *The Deep*, wet t-shirt contests also came into popularity, but since this is a family publication, that subject, together with the growing number of rude wine t-shirts, will not be further discussed.

### Being Well-Defined

Before we get to what's on the shirts, let's define just what is a t-shirt. The generally-accepted definition is "...buttonless, collarless, and pocketless, with a round neck and short sleeves, and in the short-sleeve version, the sleeves of the T-shirt extend at least slightly over the shoulder but not completely over the elbow." True t-shirts are unisex, but at least in our small circle, there has been growing distaff resistance to wearing "shirts clearly made for men," with the insistence on alternative scoop-neck and dainty-sleeved versions known generically as "girly shirts" (they named them, not me). Apparently, this sentiment has been expressed broadly elsewhere, so we will illustrate shirts of both shapes:



The first (and worst) wine joke we can remember seeing on a t-shirt was in the early 1970s when wine was coming into prominence just as elephant jokes were fading from

popularity: “What did the grape say when the elephant stepped on it? Nothing, it just let out a little wine.”

### **It Pays to Advertise**

The most frequently-seen t-shirts are those which carry the logo, slogan or emblem of one of the thousands of wineries in California (it’s strange, but we have yet to see a t-shirt decorated by Chateau Lafite Rothschild or Chateau Margaux). It’s the most frequently-sold item in any tasting room gift shop, and serves the needs of both the winery and the wine taster to spread the word about where people like to taste and buy wine. Some are quite refined, bearing only the name of the winery in small, tasteful letters, others include a logo or small label, while only the most outrageous establishments will feature a label that covers the entire front of the shirt and displays likenesses of the winemaking team or splash on a saying like “The Wine that Made Mediocrity Famous.” Notable winery t-shirts of the past include one from Terre Rouge Winery urging us to drink blended wines and “Subvert the Varietal Paradigm.”

Another theme is a shirt that describes an entire wine region, often with a tag line like “Winemaking At a Higher Level” or “Elevate Your Wine Experience” for El Dorado wineries, or “Wines with an Altitude” for our own humble Fair Play region. Occasionally, the sayings can become combative between regions, like the one that states “El Dorado Makes Wine, Napa Makes Auto Parts,” and to support the entire state, we’ve seen “Get a Tan with Your Tannins — Go Winetasting in California.”

### **Express Yourself**

The most recent trend is t-shirts that describe the wearer in wine terms and serve to introduce the entire genre of “bad pun” shirts. The most generic start with a simple “Wino” and range to “Recreational Wino,” “Wineau,” “Wine-No?,” “Winosseur,” and possibly worst, “Winot Noir.” Beyond this are a group of sayings related to the wearer’s love for wine, including the simple “I Love Wine,” the more symbolic “I (heart) Wine,” the misguided “I Love Box Wine;” then the theme everyone borrowed from milk: “Got Wine?,” and our favorite “Life Is Too Short to Drink Bad Wine.”

Others are a little bit more demonstrative, including “Just Give Me the Wine and No One Gets Hurt,” “Trick or Treat for Merlot,” “I Love Cooking with Wine — Sometimes I Even Put It In the Food!” “Wine Counts as a Serving of Fruit,” and “Bacchus is My Boyfriend,” plus a new favorite of ours, showing a wine glass on an open book, saying “Well Red.” Some even venture into other languages, including “J’aime mon vin,” “In Vino Veritas,” and “Veni, Vidi, Vino”

Most common today are those that use common terms or other bad puns to identify the wearer, such as “Official Wine Taster,” “Wine Nut,” “Wine Dude,” “Wine Diva,” “Wine Princess,” “Her Wineness” or even “Wine Goddess.” For those who need to express their gregariousness, there’s “Drinks Well with Others,” and pictures of multiple wine glasses with the title “Group Therapy,” Others seek to tell us something about the person’s age,

such as “Aging Gracefully Like Fine Wine,” “Perfectly Aged, Over 60 Years, 1940’s Vintage,” or even “Vintage 1943” to remove any doubt about age, while just “Vintage” or “Aged to Perfection” serve for the more discrete. Others turn the theme around to say “Age Improves With Wine,” or “Age Only Matters if You’re Wine or Cheese.”

A popular motif in recent years has been a white t-shirt with a large number of faux red wine stains, each above the name of a different wine. At a recent Passport event, we saw a variation on this theme where a group of friends all wore white t-shirts, and after tasting a wine, would throw the last remaining drops onto each others’ shirts. They had a lot of fun doing it, and they all wound up with unique and authentic souvenirs of the day.

### **Noble Causes**

In some cases, wine t-shirts have taken on notices of instruction or caution: “Save Water, Drink Wine,” “Warning — the Consumption of Wine Might Cause You To Think You Can Dance,” “The Liver Is Evil and Must Be Punished,” “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drink White Zinfandel,” “Wine Is Better than Therapy, and You Don’t Need an Appointment,” and the comforting words of Benjamin Franklin: “Wine Is Constant Proof that God Loves Us and Wants Us to be Happy.” On occasion, wine t-shirts have even entered the world of politics, with “Make Wine, not War,” and a clever one from a newer wine area says: “Annoy the French, Drink Texas Wine.”

I received one of the “group therapy” shirts mentioned earlier, and was very pleased with the cleverness of the saying. I wore it proudly to work in the tasting room, only to have four other people show up in a single day wearing the identical shirt. After that experience, I now select my daily wear from an extensive wardrobe of beer t-shirts!