



Sunset

publications for Western living

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WINE BOOT CAMP

Take a crash course
on how to smell,
taste, and blend
your own wine

By Harriot Manley



(A blending seminar at St. Supery, pruning and barrel racing at Folie a Deus are part of the Napa Valley Wine Boot Camp.)

Cantaloupe, chocolate, green pepper – what do I smell? At 8 a.m., when I'm more used to sniffing Starbucks than Cabernet Sauvignon, I'm a little slow at picking up the finer points of a wine's bouquet.

But I quickly get into the swing of it. I'm in Wine Boot Camp a program offered at various locations throughout California's wine-growing regions. In just 12 short hours, joined by other "recruits" for a lively tour of Sonoma County vineyards and wineries, I'll whip my wine nose into fighting trim.

For the moment, here at an inn in Santa Rosa, I am a rank enlistee. Fronting me are 21 paper cups filled with likely smells – bits of fruit, spices, honey, jam. "Educate your noses," our instructor, "Major" Barbara Drady, commands as she pours wine for each of us. We swirl. We sniff. I raise my hand.

"Uh, it smells like wine."

This is not the right answer.

"Pencil shavings, a bit of smoke," declares another recruit in brisk tones.

"Excellent," responds the major. "Of course," she adds, "it doesn't really matter what you smell. If you like it, that's what counts."

My faux pas excused, we head off to Healdsburg's Peterson Winery, where we maneuver through casks of Cabernet, then tend the vines

At lunch, we sample pears, warm gorgonzola, and Chardonnay at tables flanked by gleaming fermentation tanks at Lake Sonoma Winery, then tour family-run Pedroncelli Winery. We blend our own wines, then finish with an elaborate dinner back at the Fountaingrove Inn.

It's been a whirlwind 12 hours, and I'm ready to test my knowledge. Over blood orange sorbet, I swirl and sniff a 2000 Johannesburg Riesling. Pineapple? Mint? Well, it still smells mostly like wine, but I like it, and that's what counts.

Wine Boot Camp is offered spring through fall in Sonoma, Napa, Santa Cruz, and several other locales. Starts at \$350 per person. (888) 844-2688 or www.affairsofthevine.com.