

Don't get barreled by trouble in your timber

You might think what you can't see can't hurt you, but fourth-generation Wine Barrel Cleaning director Murray McDonald says get it wrong and the wine barrel can seriously impact wine quality.

Tanks & wine storage

WHEN IT COMES to giving something a good clean, most people follow the rule that if the water runs clean, then everything must be clean.

However, most of us know when it comes to cleaning the dishes or washing your clothes, it takes more than just hot water to provide a deep clean.

The same goes for wine barrel cleaning. Hot water is not enough to completely disinfect a barrel.

We wouldn't do it to our dishes or clothes, so why would we do it to oak barrels which produce wine that is going to be sold to customers?

Wine Barrel Cleaning machines produce a dry steam which cleans, sanitises, detartrates and rehydrates wine barrels. With more than 25 years working with our dry steam machinery, Wine Barrel Cleaning's cutting-edge equipment has incorporated our wine-industry experience into its design.

And the first big message it has to deliver is warm water alone merely provides a rinse.

Although it may be at a warm temperature when it leaves the pressure washer it is only 60-80C once it gets to the wall of the barrel.

This temperature isn't high enough to effectively safeguard your barrels from a number of factors which impact the quality of wine.

The following are just three of the negative outcomes which can occur when your wine barrel is not given a proper deep clean.

They may be factors that you can't see, but they can alter the quality of wine and/or can eventuate into unnecessary costs for your winery.

BRETTANOMYCES

The buildup of brettanomyces can be a major risk to the wine making process. Once there is a buildup of this yeast, it will spoil the wine and alter its taste.

The elimination of any bacteria only occurs when chemicals or high temperature steam are used.

Since chemical use isn't viable for the wine making process, high temperature steam is the only process which will safeguard wine barrels from brettanomyces and other volatiles.

High temperature steam is a leading method of cleaning all bacteria.

To see its power, we only need to look at the healthcare industry. The healthcare industry has bacteria and diseases which can be fatal – and can survive on surfaces for days, to months to years.

Today, hospitals are using high temperature steam as part of their regular and outbreak cleaning routine to kill all hospital acquired infections from gastro to golden staph.

Brettanomyces, just like any deadly hospital bacteria, can be killed within seconds upon contact with high temperature steam.

DRYNESS

As oak ages, it slowly dries out. As an oak barrel becomes dry, the barrel will shrink and the staves can begin to separate. With barrels costing approximately \$1200 each, enabling your wine barrel to prolong its life is a cost effective activity for a winery.

Ensuring your barrels are cleaned using high temperature steam prolongs their life by up to 25 per cent from its average lifespan of 3-5 years.

High temperature steam at 180C-plus hydrates not only the



All steamed up: A Wine Barrel Company unit gives a bung hole a high-temperature overhaul and the overall clean will extend the life of an average wine barrel.

surface of the wood, but because steam is a vapour it can also perform a deeper hydration through entering the pores and hydrating the inside of the wood.

Unlike using water, this type of hydration is long lasting as the wood is kept swollen from the inside out.

TRAPPED OLD WINE

As mentioned with the hydration of the barrel, because steam is a vapour, it can penetrate deep within the pores of the oak.

Steam can disintegrate and extract old wine build up that has been trapped within the pores.

Buckets of old wine can actually be extracted from a barrel that is previously thought to have been "clean".

The use of steam to extract impurities is not a new concept. It has even been used for decades to cleanse pores within the beauty industry and is regularly used for the elimination of mould to kill spores. For any cleaning routine that involves deep cleaning, high temperature steam is a leading and convenient method.

The most important element to remember is the use of warm water is not the same as high temperature steam. Warm water can only rinse old wine from the surface. High temperature steam actually deep cleans, disinfects and prolongs the life of a barrel.

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