

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 4: Harvest of the George Vare Vineyard with Steve Matthiasson

By **Hawk Wakawaka** - Sep 14, 2012



Harvesting Ribolla Gialla



Steve Matthiasson manages the [George Vare Vineyard](#) in Napa, which includes 2 1/2 acres of [Ribolla Gialla](#), the first plantings of the variety in California. This morning was the initial harvest of the fruit for the 2012 vintage, selecting Ribolla for the Massican label, Arnot-Roberts, and Matthiasson's own label of the same name. Early next week others that source Ribolla from the Vare Vineyard will pursue their picking. Steve was kind enough to invite me along for today's morning harvest.



This morning's Ribolla will be used by both [Massican](#) and [Matthaiasson](#) for their white blends. In each case, the labels pick early to take advantage of the higher acidity of the fruit at this stage. As Dan Petroski of Massican explains, he picks early, selecting fruit for varietal typicity, thereby

drawing out more of the grape's unique aromatics. Ribolla is also known for offering pleasing texture and weight in a white blend.

Tasting fresh Ribolla fruit with Steve Matthiasson, he describes the flavors. What he is impressed by with Ribolla Gialla is the way that the fruit itself tastes of mineral qualities. As he explains it, wines that show so-called minerality often do so because of choices made in the wine making process, without the original fruit necessarily offering those same flavoral components. Ribolla, on the other hand, shows the mineral flavors right off the vine. Matthiasson describes what he tastes from the fruit of the Vare Vineyard—a taste of wet stone, followed by a long finishing smell of rain on hot concrete. Minutes later I can still taste the steam and a slight tang from the pop of the grapes.



The last three years [Arnot-Roberts](#) have sourced Ribolla from the Vare vineyard making small bottlings of a full varietal with the fruit. In 2009 and 2010 they brought the fruit straight to press, making an ultra clean version of the wine. 2011 they chose to foot tread the grapes, leaving six hours of skin contact for a little more texture and phenolic presence. This morning's pick will bring something new for the winemakers. They have recently purchased a new Spanish-made Amphora, in which they intend to make Ribolla Gialla for the 2012 vintage. The Spanish Amphorae are made with denser sides than traditional to [Georgian-style Kveri](#). The difference is that wine makers using the Spanish Amphora, such as Alto Adige based [Elisabetta Foradori](#), often choose both not to bury the clay vessel, and also not to line it. Georgian-style Amphora, on the other hand, are both buried in the ground, and lined with beeswax before being filed with fruit for wine. Nathan Roberts and Duncan Arnot intend to follow the practice particular to the Spanish style vessels. *post edit: Spanish made clay wine vessels are called there Tinajas. Georgian style vessels, kveri, or qveri. In Italy, anfora. In English these are all generally called Amphora.*



Harvesting Ribolla Gialla, George Vare Vineyard, Sept 14 a.m. 2012





The 2012 vintage shows the greatest consistency of fruit for the life of the Ribolla Gialla plantings in this vineyard. In past vintages, there has been a higher proportion of chicks, smaller grapes, caused by a virus present in the Ribolla vines. In Chardonnay, hens and chicks (large and small size fruit) are prized for the textural addition offered by the size variation. The smaller fruit in Chardonnay add a waxier quality to the body of the wine because of the higher skin-to-juice ratio that many wine makers and drinkers appreciate. Steve Matthiasson explains that he likes finding hens and chicks in Ribolla too both for the textural benefit it offers, but also for the flavor complexity generated by the size differences. Others that prefer a riper style to their Ribolla, on the other hand, sometimes seek more consistency in the fruit size as a way of decreasing the potential for heaviness they believe could come with the extra phenolic content of the skins.



Ribolla Gialla, George Vare Vineyard 2012

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Ribolla Gialla picked and ready to be weighed, and delivered



Sharpening the Hook Knife used for harvesting the grape clusters



Gathering the picked fruit into bins for delivery



For previous installments in this series, visit the following links:

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 1: Meeting George Vare:

<http://wakawakawinereviews.com/2012/07/19/attending-ribolla-gialla-university-part-1-meeting-george-vare/>

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 2: (A Life in Wine) George Vare, Friuli and Slovenia: <http://wakawakawinereviews.com/2012/07/19/attending-ribolla-gialla-university-part-2-a-life-in-wine-george-vare-friuli-and-slovenia/>

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 3: Friuli Fest 2012, Ribolla Gialla Tasting and Discussion: <http://wakawakawinereviews.com/2012/07/19/attending-ribolla-gialla-university-part-3-friuli-fest-2012-ribolla-gialla-tasting-and-discussion/>

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 5: Russian River Valley Ribolla Gialla, The Bowland's Tanya Vineyard: <http://wakawakawinereviews.com/2012/09/29/attending-ribolla-gialla-university-part-5-russian-river-valley-ribolla-gialla/>

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 6: The Vare Vineyard Tasting, Arlequin Wine Merchant: <http://wakawakawinereviews.com/2013/04/23/attending-ribolla-gialla-university-part-6-the-vare-vineyard-tasting-arlequin-wine-merchant/>

Attending Ribolla Gialla University, Part 7: The Matthiasson Vineyard, Napa: <http://wakawakawinereviews.com/2013/05/01/attending-ribolla-gialla-university-part-7-the-matthiasson-vineyard-napa/>

Thank you to Steve Matthiasson for including me in the harvest this morning.

Thank you to George Vare and Matthew Rorick for keeping me informed on harvest dates.

Thank you to Dan Petroski and Nathan Roberts.