Damiani Wine Club News

June | 2026

Damiani
WINE CELLARS

An Ode to Oak in Wine: A Plea to All Who Will Listen

Steaming Barrels to prepare for the next filling

It's hard to think of something currently more debated by both industry professionals and consumers than using oak barrels in wine, and rightfully so. Oak in winemaking has gone through monumental shifts in usage, ideology, costs, and quality since its Roman establishment and we will certainly see more changes in the years to come. But why is this seemingly ubiquitous and deeply traditional thing so controversial? Like most aspects of modern winemaking, it all starts with Parker.

Robert Parker, bless his heart, had a vision for wine and that vision was big, bold, and bigger. The influence of the now infamous critic in the 1990s and 2000s should not be understated; his reach was worldwide and we're still seeing the effects today, both on shelves and in cellars. Parker's ideal wine was made up of only two things: very ripe grapes and wood, and he gave high scores to those who obliged; thus, the Parker Style was born. With excessively ripe fruit you get aromas and flavors of exactly that – for reds, cooked, stewed, or "jammy" fruit and fuller-body ("fatter") wines, and for whites, ripe tropical notes (think pineapple versus lemon/lime), plusher-body ("sweeter") and low acidity.

The Parker style favored barrels with notably higher wood tannin, "toasty" or "charred" aromas and flavors, and accentuated compounds like sweet molasses, coconut, and vanilla because those are the barrels that help give overly ripe wines some dimension. Now marry those elements together and you get big, bold, and bigger on all fronts.

Oak plays a different role for every winemaker, and that's where the controversy arises. A winemaker can use oak to stabilize a wine as well as lift and encourage existing aromas, flavors, and mouthfeels, or it can dominate and mask those aromas, flavors, and mouthfeels that didn't hit the mark. If the winemaker is chasing a high Parker score, they know the recipe for success. But not all barrels lead to an excessive wine, and it is critical to understand your fruit, the site, the vintage, and your cellar to put the right wine in the right barrel for the right reason.

My winemaking philosophy is quite simple: take the time to get to know the vineyards and the vintage and let the wines be an expression of those things. I utilize the natural grape components first (sugar, acid, and tannin) and then apply the same approach to decisions in the cellar like vessel choice and aging management.

Filling Barrels

Katey Barrel Tasting

When it comes time to put your juice or freshly pressed-off wine into a vessel to age, the culmination of millions of tiny decisions made through the year, that vessel matters *a lot* and will have a dramatic effect on the final wine. So, let's not mess it up by putting it in a barrel that may mask or manipulate.

A lot of folks talk about oak as only being used to create pleasant flavors and aromas, but wood vessels are so much more than that. Unlike stainless steel, oak is porous. It allows a very small amount of oxygen (micro-oxygenation) into the juice or wine over time and has significant effects on wine chemistry, notably its stability. Structural stability is derived from the polymerization (increasing strength by forming long molecular chains) of grape tannin from oxygen. This process stabilizes color, tannin, proteins and acidity, the core foundations of ageability in wine. Think of softening aggressive tannin over time by rounding out the texture and mouthfeel. If you had your tannic wine in a stainless-steel tank with no oak, the wine would not benefit from these processes and would remain harsh. If the right oak is used, the wine can benefit from it immensely. But when the options are endless, where do you even start in selecting the right oak barrel?

The variable components are numerous, from oak species/country of origin, specific forest sourcing, cooperage (barrel maker), seasoning length, barrel size and toasting preference. To say it is a daunting task to find the perfect barrel would be an understatement – it is incredibly challenging. And that's where fully understanding the grapes, site, the vintage, and the final blend allows you to make the best decision possible for that wine. But you do need to experiment over time and get to know those various elements really well.

If it isn't obvious enough, I love using oak barrels. I also completely understand how influential they can be on a wine and how many folks are tired of just tasting the Parker style, me included. But my plea is for people to understand that just because a wine has wood on it, doesn't mean it's going to be overpowering or lack freshness. My hope is that in tasting our wines, you aren't handed something that is clearly one style or the other. Instead, it tells the story of a certain place in a certain time and allows its full expression to shine with age. That truly is the beauty of wine.

-Katey Larwood,
Damiani Wine Cellars Winemaker

June 2026 Featured Wines

2024 Cabernet Franc, *Valois Vineyard*

94 Points - James Suckling

Graphite • Perfume • Gushing Fruit

Drink now – 2029 – 2036 | Best enjoyed at 55°-60°F

The 2024 Cabernet Franc from our estate Valois Vineyard is our first single-vineyard cabernet franc in our growing single-vineyard portfolio. Valois Vineyard overlooks the hamlet of Valois, just north of Hector. It was planted between 2014 and 2015 on 10.6 acres of land consisting of 50% Howard gravelly loam, 40% Valois gravelly silt loam, and 10% Lansing gravelly silt loam. The vineyard is home to cabernet franc, chardonnay, lemberger, pinot meunier, pinot noir, and pinot gris, west-facing on a slope varying between 3 and 15%.

2024 Pinot Noir Reserve

Dried Tobacco & Pine •
Concentrated Cherry • Plush

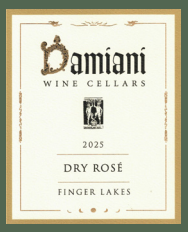
Drink now – 2029 – 2036 | Best enjoyed at 53°-60°F

The 2024 Pinot Noir Reserve is the product of an exceptional vintage. 2024 was a near-perfect growing season, creating concentrated flavors in our 100% Finger Lakes-grown grapes. Our Estate Valois and Davis vineyards together make up 50% of the wine, contributing to its delicate, distinct character. Along with the vineyard, the barrels used during winemaking can help distinguish quality worthy of a reserve bottling. The forest where the wood is sourced, the length and location of seasoning, the length and intensity of toasting, and the cooperage's touch all have immense effects on how the barrel interacts with each vineyard.

2025 Dry Rosé

Strawberry Cream Soda • Lifted • Driving

Drink now | Best enjoyed at 45°F

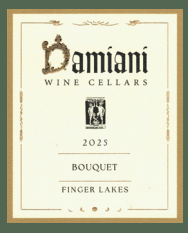


Our Dry Rosé wine is made from two different winemaking techniques – from directly pressed fruit and from the saignée method. The direct press source is from our hard pressings of sparkling pinot noir, which is picked almost a month earlier than still pinot noir. The other portion of the blend is saignée from still pinot noir ferments. Saignée is a process used to enhance concentration in red wines where juice is removed before a red ferment begins, so it is very light in color. The diverted juice gets sent to a separate tank where it's fermented as rosé.

2025 Bouquet

Marzipan • Marine • Plush

Drink now | Best enjoyed at 45°F

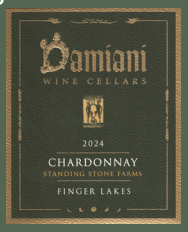


Our Bouquet wine is unique in that it is made solely from saignéed juice. Saingée is a process which concentrates flavor and tannin in red wines, whereby juice is removed from a vessel prior to fermentation, leaving behind skins, stems, and seeds. We saignée most of our red wines, yielding a consistent supply of slightly pink juice. We then tank ferment each batch separately, often by varietal, blending once dryness is achieved.

2024 Chardonnay, *Standing Stone Farms*

Dried Jasmine • Honeysuckle • Tension

Drink now – 2028 – 2035 | Best enjoyed at 43°-52°F



We've had the pleasure of working with Standing Stone Farms Chardonnay fruit for many years but 2024 gave us the opportunity to make a single vineyard distinctive bottling. Sourced from original Charles Fournier plantings from the mid-1970s, this block of Chardonnay is characterized by its shorter vine size, low vigor-canopy, and moderate crop size, all features allowing the fruit to be full of flavor but retain its bright acidity throughout the season.

2024 Pinot Gris

Key Lime • Hibiscus • Chalky

Drink now – 2027 | Best enjoyed at 42°-51°F

The 2024 Pinot Gris is made up of two vineyard sources, our estate Valois Vineyard and grower partner, Caywood Vineyards. Planted in 2014, the pinot gris on our Valois Vineyard sits on Howard gravelly silt loam soils, a well-drained series formed in medium textured glacial outwash deposits from valley terraces and outwash glacial plains. The Caywood Vineyards block is on Honeoye silt loam soils, soils that were formed in loamy glacial till.

2023 Gewürztraminer

Orange Peel • Flinty • Viscous

Drink now – 2028 – 2030 | Best enjoyed at 42°-51°F

The 2023 Gewurztraminer is from the Sunrise Hill Vineyard, located in Interlaken on western Cayuga Lake, one of our longstanding grower partnerships. It sits on Lima silt loam soils, a soil series unique in our cellar. The Lima series are moderately drained soils, nearly level to moderately steep, formed in glacial till that incorporate limestone and calcareous shale.

2024 Dry Riesling

92 points - James Suckling

93 points - Cristaldi & Co.

Key Lime • Saline • Zesty

Drink now – 2027 – 2032 | Best enjoyed at 42°-51°F

The Dry Riesling wine was born from having two very distinctive blocks of riesling and wanting to highlight the difference. Within the Davis Vineyard, one block was planted to the 239 clone in 2002, and the other planted later to 239 and 198 clones in 2018. The older block makes up the Davis Vineyard Dry Riesling, a wine of rich, textural fruitiness and more Alsatian-style winemaking techniques, while the younger block is what makes up the Dry Riesling – a very different fruit profile with more zesty lemon-lime quality, made in stainless steel. These blocks are only a stones-throw from one another but represent the wide range of style and complexity riesling can offer from the Finger Lakes.

You can customize your quarterly orders. Login through the link in your announcement email or contact Brandy to ensure you get your favorite variety in your next shipment.

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Damiani Wine Cellars | 4704 Route 414, Burdett NY 14818 | wineclub@damianiwinecellars.com | 607-546-5556