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Egg-Heads In The Winery

Why winemakers love egg-shaped concrete tanks.



It usually seems that the more expensive a weird tool or product is, the more likely it is that a winemaker will buy it. Fittingly, concrete egg-shaped fermentation tanks are becoming all the rage in wine country--but many

swear they make better-tasting wine.

Concrete tanks, though not egg-shaped, have been used by winemakers for centuries. Concrete went out of fashion once stainless steel--which is easier to clean, heat and cool--took over, but now concrete is back and booming. [Sonoma Cast Stone](#), in California, only in its second year of making egg-shaped tanks, boasts winery customers beyond Napa and Sonoma, to Arizona and Canada. So what's the deal?

Jeremy Baker, president of [Thomas George Estates](#) in Sonoma, extols the virtues of the egg tank. While the wine is fermenting, the juice moves up the sides of the tank and down the center in a naturally occurring circulation, ensuring that all the juice ferments. There are no corners where juice, skins or seeds get stuck. Also, the eggs are made of two layers of concrete (one more breathable, one tighter), so the egg acts just like an oak barrel--allowing for a little oxidation without adding oak flavor.



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Whether using the eggs for red wines or white, "The aromatics are heightened, more expressive and exotic," says Baker. "You don't get as much tannin, but you get bright, clean fruit. Consistently, whether Chardonnay, Syrah, or Pinot Noir, that brightness is exaggerated out of a concrete vessel."

Of course, a concrete egg can't turn bad-tasting grapes into good-tasting wine. But the eggs are expensive (\$12,000 for a tank that can hold about 200 cases' worth of wine--pricier if a heating/cooling system is added), so winemakers are likely to ferment only their best grapes in them. Therefore, when you read a bottle's back label and learn that the wine was fermented in a concrete egg, give it a try. The egg might make all the difference to your taste buds.

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