

Tannins are the backbone of wine

By Bill St. John, Santa Rosa Press Democrat

Michael Twelftree, the proprietor and managing director of Two Hands Wines in Australia's Barossa Valley, describes the experience of tasting a red wine this way: "The fruit is the engine and rail cars; the acidity is the rails; and the tannins are the brakes."

When we sip many a red wine, its tannins draw the taste to a close with an astringent, palate-puckering sensation. It's as if our tongue were sandpapered.

"Tannins don't have flavor," says Joel Aiken, winemaker for Amici Cellars in Calistoga and Aiken Wines in St. Helena. "They're tactile."

Tannins are phenols. In wine they come from the skins, seeds and stems of the grapes. That's why they are more prevalent in red wines than whites; red wines receive their color from their grapes' skins during fermentation.

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