

WineEasy™ Winemaking System

Product Review – Part II

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This is the second of two product reviews of the WineEasy™ winemaking system developed by [Blichman Engineering](#). In [Part I](#), I provided a preliminary review of the equipment and its intended applications and operation. Here in Part II, I provide my review and assessment of the actual operation with grapes.

My overall assessment is that Blichmann Engineering has put “easy” into grape winemaking and taken out “messy.” If you have been shying away from making the jump into grape winemaking, you have no more excuses—make the jump!

Overview

The WineEasy system is an all-inclusive fermentor/press for making wine from grapes. It greatly simplifies pressing and racking operations without the mess of conventional equipment.

Fermentation and pressing is all done in the *same* vessel without the need to transfer grape solids to a separate press, and the wine is “racked” to a carboy under the action of a vacuum pump. The vacuum action draws down a piston assembly that acts as the pressing mechanism. Wine is transferred to a carboy in a fully closed system to protect the wine from microbial contamination.

The tank is designed with a false bottom and screen to allow wine to be racked free of seeds and other grape particles.

My overall impression of the WineEasy system is that it is a must-have for any serious winemaker looking to make wine from grapes. If you have been shying away from grape winemaking, this system makes the whole process simple, clean and fun—lots of fun.

The WineEasy system is also a great value-add product for brew-on-premise operators looking to provide grape winemaking services.

Assessment

I have conducted a thorough, independent testing of the WineEasy system using common home winemaking practices as well as more advanced techniques.

Following is my assessment based on key evaluation criteria.

Assembly, cleaning/sanitizing & disassembly

I found the assembly, cleaning and sanitizing, and disassembly of the system very simple. The tank is like any other stainless steel tank, but the various parts needed to operate the WineEasy system are easily assembled/disassembled for quick operation and clean-up.

Operation

Fermenting wine and pressing grapes with the WineEasy system is very simple and without the mess of transferring pomace to a basket press. The vacuum-operated piston deceives the eye at first, but once you work with it, you'll quickly come to appreciate its ease of use, efficiency and cleanliness.

Before you start using the WineEasy system, I strongly recommend that you practice a couple of times inserting and removing the piston assembly and operating the vacuum. The piston creates an air-tight seal—a really, really tight seal. It will seem hard to remove at first, but with some practice, you'll soon realize that it is actually very simple. The trick in removing the piston is to pull it up in slanted fashion by pulling on one of the piston handles.

As the wine is drawn from the bottom valve, sediments are also drawn out. There is no concept *per se* of free and press-run wine, and so, once the wine is vacuum pressed and transferred to a carboy, it will contain a higher-than-usual amount of sediments. The wine will need to be racked after 12–24 hours of settling to avoid any negative effects of extended contact with gross lees.

Uses

The WineEasy system was designed for making wine using red winemaking techniques, i.e. macerating grapes and juice, fermenting wine, and pressing. Grapes can be crushed using a conventional crusher/destemmer and then transferred into the WineEasy system or crushed right in the tank using a simple crushing tool, such as a potato masher, and then the stems removed by hand.

The WineEasy system was **not** intended for pressing whole clusters or crushed grapes as is done in sparkling and white winemaking. I would not recommend this be attempted. I did however try pressing Sauvignon Blanc grapes, both whole clusters and crushed, for the purpose of characterizing the system's behavior. The system was able to perform partial pressing and

delivered approximately one-third of juice compared to a conventional basket press when whole-cluster pressed and approximately one-half when pressing crushed grapes. The system is limited to atmospheric pressure of approximately 14 psi.

Punchdowns of the cap are easy as there are no access restrictions from the open tank top. Pumpovers also worked extremely well using a good impeller pump and 1½-inch hoses coupled to the 1-inch bottom valve (i.e. with the supplied ½-inch barb fitting removed) secured with Tri clamps. Do not attempt to use a diaphragm pump, even with an in-line strainer—it will quickly clog and damage the pump.

I was very happy to discover that I could use the WineEasy system to perform *delestage*, or what is known as rack-and-return. Delestage involves draining the fermenting wine to allow the cap to fall and to remove as much seeds as possible. The wine is then transferred back to the tank by pouring it over the cap so that the wine rises faster than the cap. This is repeated once a day during the active fermentation phase. It makes for a softer and more approachable wine in its youth. Since the WineEasy system has a false bottom with a screen, delestage as describes above is not possible; however, there is an easier method now. Simply scoop up the cap and transfer it to another vat or pail, rack the wine from the bottom valve and into another carboy or demijohn, and then simply lift the screen to pull up all the seeds. This is actually more efficient than in the traditional process. The pomace is then returned to the tank and the wine is poured over it as in the traditional process.

And if you like to run off a small percentage of the juice right after crushing to concentrate polyphenols, aromas, and taste, this is easily performed from the bottom valve. The screen performed very well without any clogging.

I also performed a post-ferment maceration and, again, there were no issues with the pressing and screen—all performed well and as expected.

Other Uses

The tank can be used for bulk storage of wine. The piston assembly is used as a “floating lid” placed right on the wine surface. The perfect seal ensures that no air gets in.

The current design does not allow for racking from the bottom valve as sediments would be racked too. I have contacted the manufacturer who is looking into a solution to allow racking from the bottom valve.

Efficiency

I was impressed by the WineEasy system’s pressing efficiency as, I must admit, I was skeptical at first—looks can be very deceiving.

Personally, I go for a more gentle pressing, and so, the WineEasy system delivered. If you expect to press out every last drop, you can expect the WineEasy system to deliver roughly 90% of the pressed wine volume compared to a conventional basket press of similar size. This test was accomplished using a 20-gallon WineEasy system and compared to a #30 basket press using Merlot grapes.

Overall impressions

Overall, the system delivered on my expectations without problems. The screen performed well without ever clogging, even when I used oak chips although I would not recommend oak mor. The pressing operation was very simple and made for very clean winemaking.

I would highly recommend the WineEasy system for winemakers wanting to get into grape winemaking or any serious winemaker looking to upgrade from their basket press.