

# Quality at the right price

*Like most other winemakers today, Rob Lloyd of Lloyd Wine Consulting has a keen eye on efficiency in all aspects of production including quality control where a handy analysis instrument has become an indispensable item in his tool belt. Even so, he is keeping his senses sharp and will always have an ear to the barrel.*

Building on a career with local top-flight wineries, Rob Lloyd branched out with his own Napa Valley consultancy and own-label production in 2008, just at the start of the financial downturn.

The timing was actually not so bad for his fledgling business because he was in the first year of production and now he reports that business appears to be picking up. Many producers in the area are increasing production, his own label vintage has sold out and, as a busy consultant, time is his most precious asset.

While this corner of the winemaking world is perhaps sailing into calmer waters, for Rob, the last three years only serve to confirm convictions that are deeper rooted than a Cabernet Sauvignon. "I like to keep it mean and lean," he says. "And the smaller the set up the more important it is to do things efficiently."

His current clients include Jessup Cellars producing around 15000 cases, John Anthony Vineyards producing 8000 cases, and Vineyard 511 producing 200 cases. "Time and money is tight, everything has to be as efficient as possible" says Rob. "At one of my clients, the first thing I did was to get an OenoFoss in place."

## Instant control

The OenoFoss wine analyser is an easy-to-use instrument based on a technique called Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) which offers a rapid and effective way of measuring multiple parameters simultaneously from a single sample of must or wine.

Rob first came across the instrument when working at Rombauer winery and was blown away by its simplicity. "All this analysis within a minute or so – if I hadn't been using it for about three years now and someone told me about it, I wouldn't believe them," he says and continues: "I am extremely happy. Especially working at smaller wineries, it is important to be able to do a variety of things. The more control you have, the better you can run your own facility."

Previously it would take him around 15 minutes for a single analysis of volatile acid. Now he can get seven or so parameters within two minutes. In the past, getting all those different parameters would have required a whole room full of equipment. Now everything can fit on a desk.

## But is it worth it?

According to his experience with wineries producing around 15,000 cases a year, Rob predicts a payback time of about a year and half based on typical traditional analysis spending. "You have the up-front costs, but run your numbers and it becomes pretty obvious," he says.

Another aspect of the cost versus benefit discussion is that so much more data is available because tests can be run as often as required at no additional cost. If a strange result comes up, it is easy to do a re-test on the spot.

Then there is perhaps the most precious commodity of all – time. "Right now for me certainly time is the most valuable thing," he explains.



*Robert Lloyd with his wife Bonnie*

*"Time and money is tight, everything has to be as efficient as possible"*

"I can't afford to be doing analysis all day and I don't want to hire someone to do it."

## Winemaking on the front foot

In practice, the various parameters give a wealth of way markers to confirm that a wine is on the right track. For instance, results for ph and malic acid levels on grape must give a great indicator of how the wine is going to turn out, even before the grapes are even picked.

Of course, having the right numbers is no guarantee that you will arrive at a great vintage. Rather, it is a reliable supplement to winemaking judgment.

"I don't believe it 100%, I am still using my senses – I still have my ear to the barrel," says Rob. "But in combination with traditional skills, it is a great tool. The OenoFoss allows me to have more confidence, for example having those numbers to make sure the wine is stable."

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It gives you the backup to avoid panicking, thinking something is going wrong. When you see the numbers, you can relax and can push the envelope a little because people like what that risk brings.”

An example is in managing malolactic fermentation where close monitoring of malolactic acid and volatile acid allows a rational use of sulphur dioxide according to the balance between the levels. Now, instead of erring on the side of caution, test results give the backup he needs to follow through on instinct toward a better result. “No one wants to use too much sulphur dioxide, if any at all,” says Rob. “Some wines from 2010 don’t have any right now.”

### The pursuit of quality

Whether or not the wines make it to the table without any sulphur dioxide, they will be the result of a carefully monitored and balanced process where traditional skills and modern quality control work hand in hand. “Everyone has their own style but you can never have too much information. I’d rather have the choice,” says Rob who is quite certain that he will never get bored with his career. “Where and how you grow, what temperature do you ferment at, what barrels do you use - there are so many choices. I turned 40 this year and if I am lucky, I have another 40 harvests in me,” he says. “Maybe I can make the perfect wine.”

### Lloyd Wine Consulting

With the desire to assist vineyard owners in creating the finest wines from their grapes, Rob established Lloyd Wine Consulting and now works with his clients to craft world-class wines.

Rob is passionate about maximizing the potential of each vineyard and translating this into outstanding and unique wines.

[www.lloydcellars.com](http://www.lloydcellars.com)

### OenoFoss

OenoFoss provides instant analysis throughout the win-making process, measuring up to ten different key parameters within a minute: Sugar, pH, total acidity, glucose/fructose, malic acid, ethanol, volatile acidity, colour, tartaric acid, gluconic acid, yeast assimilable nitrogen, density.

The calibration for the instrument takes into account local conditions. “FOSS is doing a good job catering for California, weather patterns. The right data has been pooled and I am comfortable with the numbers,” says Rob Lloyd.



*The OenoFoss*