

About Vigo

Vigo has been involved with UK vineyards and wineries since 1984 and has a wealth of knowledge. We supply equipment for all scales of wine production. We understand the needs of both large and small scale producers and can offer equipment appropriate to all levels of production. We have a fully equipped engineering workshop and employ a team of engineers which underpin the service and support we offer to UK wineries. If you are intending to set up a winery, you may find this leaflet useful. Please contact us to discuss your winery plans. Once we have ascertained your requirements and objectives we can issue you with a quotation for suitable winery equipment.

Setting up a Winery

The Costs and Considerations

Before planting a vineyard, it is important to have a clear idea of what you intend to do with the grape crop. The options are:

1. To grow grapes to sell as a commodity
2. To grow grapes with the intention of making wine. This leaflet is aimed at growers who have planted grapes with the intention of making wine which they will then market. We assume that the grower has embarked on this project with a business plan that has carefully considered the eventual marketing of the bottled wine.

Growers who have set out on this course will have 2 choices:

1. Either to subcontract the winemaking to another winery
2. Or to set up their own winery

Both choices offer advantages and disadvantages.

Contract Winemaking

Taking the contract winemaking route avoids relatively large capital investment; avoids the need to either learn the skills of winemaking or to employ a professional winemaker and, if well managed; and gives a degree of flexibility that it would be difficult to achieve with one's own winery. A well managed contract winery will be able to respond to the marked seasonal variations in crop that are an inevitable part of UK viticulture – crops from even a good vineyard site are likely to vary a great deal from one year to the next owing to the vagaries of the British climate.





However, these advantages come at a considerable cost. The grape grower will have to invest in picking boxes suitable for delivery of the grapes to the winery, they will have to pay for transport of the grapes to the winery and the wine back to the vineyard, and they will have to meet often tight winery schedules for delivery and processing of grapes. Contract wineries are under immense pressure to make wine for many demanding customers and to be able to offer a professional service, they rightly demand that their customers meet agreed delivery deadlines. Some less experienced winegrowers have difficulty estimating their crop size and this again can cause problems at the winery. With intense seasonal pressure at harvest time some contract winemakers may have difficulty meeting their own high standards of winemaking. It may not always be possible for the grapes to be pressed in peak condition.

Assuming these drawbacks have been successfully overcome, the grapes have been delivered in perfect condition to the winery and immediately pressed, the grower should expect to receive a good quality finished product. This assumes that the contract winemaker is competent and experienced in the production of the style of wine required by the winegrower. This level of professional service understandably comes at a price. Setting up a contract winery requires a substantial investment and customers cannot expect good wine to be made using antiquated or substandard equipment, or at bargain basement prices. Typical prices for making still wines will range between £2.30 and £3.30 a bottle depending on the volume of wine being made. This price includes the cost of a bottle and closure which would typically be in the region of 40p. This means that the cost of winemaking is in the region of £2 to £3 per bottle. Given the risks taken by the contract winemaker, this level of charging is perfectly reasonable.

Establishing a winery

The alternative to contract winemaking is to set up your own winery. This requires a suitable building, which may be a new build or the conversion of an existing building. It is worth pointing out that winemaking is an agricultural activity and this should be born in mind when negotiating with planners. In addition to the building, you will need to consider the availability of electrical power, water supply, drainage, vehicle access, etc. Within the context of this brief talk we cannot go into further detail about building requirements.

It makes sense to have a good idea of the type of winery equipment that will be required before designing a winery building. On more than one occasion we have been asked to quote for winery equipment only to find that the customer has already built a winery which may lack sufficiently large doors to accommodate the winery equipment, may have a ceiling which is marginally too low or lack adequate drainage.





The equipment must be fit for purpose – it is difficult to make good wine with inadequate or unsuitable equipment. For convenience and efficiency all liquid connects throughout the winery should be standardised. Where equipment is bought from more than one source the buyer must be sure that the machines are compatible. Machinery bought direct from manufacturers is routinely supplied without components that we would deem to be essential, e.g., pumps without threaded connections, electrical equipment without switches or cables, tanks without valves. The long term success of Vigo has been built on our ability to deliver equipment that is fit for purpose and supplied ready for use. Do not take this for granted.

After sales service for the winery equipment is also very important. It is in the nature of machinery that it only goes wrong when it is being used. In the case of a winery, this is obviously more than just inconvenient, but it could ruin a whole year's vineyard production. For example, a press that fails at harvest time must be fixed within a few hours. Vigo is one of the few companies in this market to have a team of highly trained and multiskilled engineers to offer technical support for the equipment we sell.

It is difficult to give hard and fast guidelines for the costs of establishing a winery as there are large variations in cost depending on the styles of wine being made. To give an example of two different scales of production, the cost of good quality equipment for a winery for the production of still wines for a 20,000 bottle winery might be £80,000, and for a 40,000 bottle winery might be £100,000.

Winemaking skills are required. If the winegrower does not have the necessary skills to make his or her own wine, there are now a large number of well-qualified professional winegrowers available to attend the winery at each stage of the winemaking season. A typical 20,000 bottle winery might press on six or seven days, spend the same number of days bottling and require occasional days of professional attendance between pressing and bottling. Apart from the professional winemaker there will be a need for one or two unskilled workers on the pressing and bottling days. The total labour cost is therefore relatively small.

There are several practical advantages to making wine at the vineyard. The cost of equipment may therefore be less than the cost of three years' contract winemaking. The grapes can be pressed when they are at the peak of ripeness, there is no need to work to the schedule of the contract winery and no need to arrange delivery. In addition to this, many vineyards are developed as part of a broader commercial development and wineries provide a very interesting visitor attraction. A well-planned winery may enable the vineyard to sell a larger proportion of the wine at full retail prices rather than have to sell to the wine trade at a much reduced profit.





In the end, the decision of the winegrower will probably be influenced less by financial considerations than by their willingness to manage the winemaking process and whether they enjoy the thrill and satisfaction of making their own wine.

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