



## Training Day

**'We know barrels, it's what we do.'**; that is the Barrel Builders motto and as it should be. Phil, Barrel Builders president, has been working in the barrel industry for over 40 years and you'd be hard-pressed to find a barrel related question he doesn't know the answer to. Yann, our Master Cooper has been working with barrels for over 25 years and can take apart and reassemble a barrel blindfolded (ok, so I've never actually seen him do it blind folded but if he could I wouldn't be surprised). The guys in the shop make removing barrel heads look easy and anyone who has ever tried to do it knows how arduous it is. But when I read **'WE** know barrels' I felt that EVERYONE at Barrel Builders should know barrels, which means sale associates, office staff, and even our accountant. This is what brought on the inspiration for our company wide Barrel Training Seminar. When I brought the idea up it received an overwhelming positive response.



Yann teaching Patti, Alberto, and Dave about barrel leaks.

We had never really done anything like this before so I wasn't sure how it was going to turn out. I started by making a list of every product we sell so we could have hands on training with each item, Phil pick out a couple of his Power Point he uses for lectures, and Yann found a few old barrels we could beat up. On Friday June 19<sup>th</sup> we closed down the office and traded in our cushy office chairs for hoop drivers and spiles.

We started the day by learning about sulfur discs and wicks and actually got to sulfur a barrel. **Yann Fact #1 - if your sulfur keeps going out before it burns to completion remove the sulfur burner, fill the barrel with water, dump the water out, and then try sulfuring again. Filling and emptying the barrel will replace the anaerobic atmosphere with fresh air.** Thanks Yann!

Next we went over how to fix a leaky barrel using spiles and wedges. We watched Yann diagnose and repair a leak on the head of a stave. He started by scraping away the wine soaked wood and seeing where origin of the leak was. He then placed the spile above where the seeping was to block the path the wine was taking to the head of the stave. He had a spare stave that we used to practice inserting wedges. I had seen it done many times but had never tried it myself and it was harder than it looks. I awkwardly tried to pound in the chiseled shaped metal into the wood and almost hit my finger more than once. Richard, who does our accounting/workers comp. stuff, almost had a heart attack when he saw the cooper's hammer come within millimeters of my fingers. Inserting flagging was a bit easier. Flagging is pretty much just dried cattail reeds. It is used to repair barrel heads or it can be inserted in the croze, the groove where the head sits near the end of the stave, if the barrel head is too small barrel. You just peel off a section, wet it, twist it, and then pound it into the croze using a chisel and cooper's hammer.



Patti inserting flagging around a barrel head

**Yann Fact #2 – If you have a leak on a stave or head of a barrel you need to determine the direction of the grain before you know where to insert the wedge. An easy way to tell the direction of the grain is to run your hand along the wood. The wood should feel smoother going in one direction than the other. Whichever direction the grain feels smoother insert the wedge above the leak on that side.**



Phil giving a lecture about Oak

**Yann Fact # 3 – If you have leaks in a line along the ends of multiple staves it is most likely that the barrel head is too small. If you have multiple leaks in between staves closer to the top of the barrel the barrel head is likely too big.**

The point of this Barrel Training was to familiarize everyone at the company with all the products and services we offer but it was also supposed to be fun. For Lunch we had Buster’s BBQ sandwiches (so good!), beer, and even had chocolate cake for Dave’s birthday which was on Saturday. Happy birthday Dave!

While enjoying our BBQ sandwiches, beer, and cake Phil did his ‘Oak’ lecture and ‘Barrel Sanitation’ lecture, followed by barrel head removal/replacement (another ‘harder than it looks’ activity). Yann and the guys in shop got a kick out of us office workers clumsily trying to pound hoops. I managed to drop the barrel head only once.

By the end of the day we were a little smarter and everyone still had all 10 fingers and toes so I’m counting this as a successfully endeavor that I think will become a yearly event. Hopefully next year I’ll manage to remove a barrel head without dropping it.

