

## Blending in: Wine blends add dimension

Some may be dubious of wine blends. Over the course of history, mankind has had a right to be dubious. Ancient man often dispatched enemies with wines blended with poison.



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Uncorked

America's first oenophile, Thomas Jefferson, often wrote of his concerns that his purchased wines might have been adulterated with lesser wines or were in fact totally not what they purported to be.

Before the French growing regions of Burgundy and Bordeaux were as heavily regulated as today,

it was common practice in both regions to blend stronger red wines from the southern Rhone, Portugal, Spain and northern Africa to bump up vintages less than stellar.

In truth, most wines are blends of various varietals, various batches of the same varietal and, in some instances, blends of both red and white varietals.

Even an American 100 varietally labeled wine is a blend. For example, wine labeled as 100 percent chardonnay is a blend of chardonnay sourced from several different vineyards each containing different clones of the same varietal. Some lots of juice might be aged in oak barrels while others are aged in stainless steel. Some lots may have gone through secondary malolactic fermentation while other lots did not and various lots may have been inoculated with different strains of yeast.

It is the winemaker's job and prerogative to blend various batches from a single varietal into a harmonious whole. Wines would be one dimensional without blending.

If a vintage year is shown on an American wine, 95 percent of the wine must come from the harvest indicated. It is not illegal and sometimes it's even desirable that wines like Champagne be made from blends of multiple vintages. If a date is not shown on a wine, assume it is made from a blend of multiple vintage years.

Some blends are so famous they are used in the vernacular to describe particular wine styles. For instance a Bordeaux blend is a red wine descriptive term indicat-

ing a wine is made from all or some of the following varietals: cabernet, merlot, malbec, petit verdot and cabernet franc.

American vintners by law are prohibited from using the word Bordeaux on wine labels. Many have adopted the word Meritage for labeling wines to indicate they are made from a blend of varietals typically found in a Bordeaux blend.

These vintners must be members of the Meritage Society to label their wines accordingly. Nonmembers of the Meritage Society simply may elect to call their blended Bordeaux style wines by invented proprietary names.

So, gentle readers, blends in the right hands are a good thing. Try one of the following good blends:

**Franciscan Estate Napa Valley Equilibrium White Wine 2012.** In the \$23 range. So new it has not made it to local wine shelves, but look for it at Publix where other Franciscan Wines can be found. New exciting proprietary blend of 72 percent sauvignon blanc, 17 chardonnay and 11 muscat. Perfect summer quaff with the crisp clean mouthfeel of sauvignon blanc mitigated by slight sweetness on the approach. Floral nose. I served with grilled sea scallops.

**Cosentino Winery "The Novelist" Meritage California White Wine 2008.** \$15.75 at Tyson Fine Wines and Things in Golden Springs. A white Meritage from a typical white Bordeaux blend of sauvignon blanc and semillon. Fermented and aged in batches divided among large oak tanks, stainless steel tanks and French oak barrels. Small production wine with flavors of citrus and melon. Balanced with a nice finish.

**Robert Mondavi Private Selection Meritage Central Coast.** \$9.99 at Winn Dixie. A blend of 42 percent cabernet, 30 merlot, 20 malbec and 8 petit verdot. Amazingly good red wine for the price. Rich dark berry fruits on the palate, nicely integrated tannins with a smooth finish.

**Lyeth Meritage 2010 Sonoma.** \$14.99 at The Wine Cellar on Quintard. Made by one of the founding members of the Meritage Society. Has all the bells and whistles of a Bordeaux at a fraction of the cost. Big delicious red wine that cries out for a big succulent steak.

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