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Meritage and blended red wines are fastest growing wine category

Healdsburg, CA, Wednesday, April 6, 2011—Step aside Pinot Noir. Meritage and other blended wines were the fastest growing wine category in 2010, according to research by Symphony IRI Group, which studies domestic table wine sales at major U.S. food and drug stores for *Wines & Vines Magazine*.

Sales of Meritage and other blended red wines were up 14% in 2010, bypassing Pinot Noir for the first time since the release of the 2004 cult movie *Sideways*, which had a dramatic impact on the demand for Pinot Noir nationwide. Pinot sales are still on the rise, up 11% in 2010, the survey showed.

“Meritage wines and blended wines in general have been making great gains in popularity over the last few years,” said Kim Stare Wallace, Vice President at Dry Creek Vineyard and Chairman of The Meritage Alliance, the not-for-profit marketing organization that owns the Meritage trademark. “Over the last couple of decades, the wine industry basically focused on promoting specific varietals, but the centuries-old tradition of blending wines is making a comeback. Meritage wines are more complex, age better and are a better match for many different foods, plus they’re more approachable when they’re young,” Wallace explained. “They truly are the highest form of the winemaker’s art.”

Meritage wines are crafted from specific Bordeaux grape varieties. A red Meritage must be a blend of at least two of the following — Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot or Malbec, with no variety making up more than 90% of the blend. Most Meritage wines, by a long shot, are red, but white Meritage wines are also crafted by a handful of wineries. The varieties used to create a white Meritage are Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Muscadelle du Bordalais, sometimes called Sauvignon Vert.

The Meritage movement began 23 years ago when a handful of Napa Valley and Sonoma County winemakers founded The Meritage Alliance to help promote New World wines made from the Bordeaux varieties. Today, more than 280 wineries in 23 U.S. states and six international countries make Meritage wines. The word Meritage rhymes with “heritage” and refers to the merit of the grapes and the tradition of blending wine. For more information, go online to www.meritagealliance.com or www.facebook.com/meritagealliance.