

Voted Best Company to Do Business With



524-3000

We're here for you. Forever.



The Press Democrat

News | Biz | Sports | Opinion | Food+Wine | Events | Jobs | Homes | Cars | Classifieds | Place an ad

- MONSTER JOBS** new!
- HOMES
- CARS
- PD ADS

Place a classified ad

SITE SEARCH

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

HOME

LOCAL NEWS

- New:** Photos
- New:** Horoscopes
- Columnists
- Obituaries
- Weddings
- E-mail news alerts
- California
- Nation & World

BUSINESS

- Stories
- Stocks

SPORTS

- PD Preps
- Columnists
- Giants

Blended Varietal Meritage technique combines multiple wines to achieve vintage greatness

By VIRGINIE BOONE
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

As with all wines, the journey begins boots on the ground, with a winemaker walking the vineyards at harvest. But in the making of a red Meritage, or Bordeaux blend, there are five varieties to consider: cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, malbec, merlot and petit verdot.

This harvest, Dry Creek Vineyard winemaker Bill Knuttel has been juggling for months about when to pick and when to press each of those five.

"All the cab is late. It comes in at the end," he said in late September as his grapes began coming in. "A lot of the merlot will come in later. Malbec's probably the earliest, cab franc will be pretty late, and we got our petit verdot a couple days ago."

Knuttel will use varying percentages of all five to make The Mariner, Dry Creek Vineyard's proprietary Meritage (rhymes with "heritage"), a trademarked term used by many wineries to identify their highest-quality Bordeaux blend.

At least for Knuttel, the grapes for The Mariner are grown within the Dry Creek Valley appellation (with the exception of a tiny amount of malbec coming from Alexander Valley), meaning he and his associate winemaker, Lisa Bishop Forbes, can more easily maneuver through the vineyards several times a day to figure out when to pick.

"It's really the ultimate in blending," Forbes said. "If you've got great vineyards to work with, it makes it much easier, but it's still a challenge. You've got five varieties to work with, and

Published: Wednesday, Oct 31, 2007
E-mail article | Print article

Don't miss these clicks

Don't miss these clicks

1. Tree farm's finale
2. Motorcycle fatality ties up Highway 12
3. Fountain Grove traffic plan emerges
4. Fatal crash closes Fourth in SR
5. Filling boots for a cause

ADVERTISEMENTS

Voted Best Company to Do Business With



524-3000

- Athletics
- 49ers
- Raiders
- Running
- Fishing Report

OPINION/ LETTERS

- Editorials
- Letters
- Columnists
- Forums

BLOGS

SUDOKU

LIFESTYLE

- Movies
- Food & Wine
- Entertainment
- Home + Garden
- Life + Health
- Celebrate Community
- Advertise
- Contact us
- About us
- Work for us
- Photo Reprints

you're trying to hit that balance so no one really sticks out but instead it all works together."

Scott Tracy, sommelier at La Toque Restaurant in Rutherford, finds blended cabernet-based wines very versatile.

"I'm very fond of the potential for complexity in them," he said. "Especially with the pepper notes that cabernet franc can bring and the softness merlot can bring."

Joseph Phelps Vineyards' Insignia is one of the earliest and best-known examples of an American-made Bordeaux blend. So are Trilogy from Flora Springs and Cosentino's The Poet. Opus One, Quintessa and St. Supery also make well-known blends.

Several of these American wineries led the charge to come up with a better name for their Bordeaux blends, ultimately forming the Meritage Association in 1988, a group that now counts more than 200 wineries around the world as members.

The problem was that labeling requirements in the United States dictated that a minimum of 75 percent was required in order to label a wine by its varietal (i.e., "cabernet sauvignon" or "merlot"). But with five varieties involved in a traditional Bordeaux blend, none would likely reach that percentage, and so such wines were left to be called "Red Table Wine," a term many wineries felt didn't do their creations justice.

So they held an international competition to come up with a better name. After receiving 6,000 entries, they decided upon Meritage (meant to combine "merit" with "heritage"), a word suggested by a wine buyer from Southern California.

Today, the association requires that a wine labeled Meritage use anywhere from two to five of the Bordeaux varieties, with no single variety allowed to account for more than 90 percent of the blend.

"It's the highest form of a winemaker's art," explained Meritage Association spokeswoman Jane Hodges Young. "It stems from tradition in France, where the wines that got the highest honors were usually blended wines."

Dry Creek Vineyards was among the first to put the word Meritage on a label, for a blended bottling of 1985 vintage wine.

With vintage 2004, just released, the winery decided to hit another height, rededicating its Meritage as The Mariner and bringing on Knuttel, a veteran of Saintsbury and Chalk Hill, to further refine the winemaking.



Photos by KENT PORTER / PD

Lisa Bishop Forbes tests blends at Dry Creek Winery in Healdsburg. "It's really the ultimate in blending," she says. "You're trying to hit that balance so no one really sticks out, but instead it all works together." Zoom Photo | ?

524-3000
 Home ID#

CPS
 FOXGLOVE
 PROPERTIES
 &
 Empire Homes
 A Division of A&B Homes Inc.

Each office independantly owned and operated

*Real Estate,
 Manufactured or
 Modular Homes
 in Parks or on
 land.*



Your goal...
 Dream Home,
 Our goal...
 Make it Happen!

Call Us
 (707) 569-1400