

t a n g e n t  w i n e s

ecclestone

OVERVIEW

BLENDING HISTORY

Blending is an age-old technique, used by European winemakers for centuries. Even though strict laws prohibit wine grapes grown in different regions from being combined, it is perfectly acceptable, even expected in some places, that various varietals grown in the same region be blended together. The Rhone Valley and Champagne offer two perfect examples.

The Rhone Valley is France's second largest wine region. With only a few exceptions, virtually all white wines made here are blends. The best known areas are probably Cotes-du-Rhone and Chateauneuf-du-Pape, where white blends are logically labeled Cotes-du-Rhone Blanc and Chateauneuf-du-Pape Blanc. Winemakers generally blend for balance, and enjoy the more complex flavors and depth of character they achieve by combining varietals. Marsanne and Roussanne are always in the mix, and Viognier and Grenache Blanc are added to some.

In the Champagne region, most all of its wines are blends. Only three varietals are permitted: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. To put it in the simplest of terms, it is generally thought that the Chardonnay brings an elegant air, the Pinot Noir adds body and texture, and the Pinot Meunier contributes fruity characteristics. Of course these factors change from vintage to vintage and there is no standard "recipe" for making Champagne. After pressing, each lot is kept separate throughout the entire winemaking process, giving the winemaker up to sometimes fifty wines to choose from to make a final blend. As in the Rhone, blending of varietals allows the winemaker a wider palette from which to draw, ultimately creating a finished wine of intensity and complexity.

A third region known for its tendency to blend varietals is Bordeaux, also in France. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot are the most prominent red wine grapes, and make up over 80% of the wine made here. Ironically, these five varietals were originally chosen because they ripen at different times during the harvest season, not because they made such great wines when blended.

CALIFORNIA MODERN DAY

The more liberal laws of the New World don't stipulate that grapes grown in different regions cannot be blended together, hence the "California" appellation on many bottles. Most of these wines are made by corporations producing large quantities. The smaller producer tends to carefully choose grapes from their estate vineyards, or from their surrounding appellation. So when one of these winemakers decides to make a blend, the grapes at hand are usually different varietals, all from the same region. Much as it was and is in the Old World.

Inherent to California culture, it is not surprising many winemakers are willing to take it a step further and have a little fun. That's not to say the resulting wines aren't serious – they certainly are – they present an alternative perspective to the stuffy connoisseur stereo-type. These wines are all blends – some of traditional varietals that one would find in France, and some whacky combinations that were thought up by ingeniously creative minds. There are small Rhone producers in the Russian River region, some larger more well-known brands of the Napa Valley, and mavericks on the Central Coast making both red and white blends. It's a trend that is crossing many lines and breaking down boundaries with every vintage.

TANGENT ECCLESTONE

As each tangent wine is made to highlight its individual variety, Ecclestone represents characteristics of each. This wine is the epitome of synergy – the entire tangent portfolio rolled into one, and then some. The blending process provides winemaker Christian Roguenant an opportunity to harken back to his French roots, and to spread his California winemaker wings at the same time. The envy of many winemakers, he is provided the opportunity to be extremely creative each vintage with this wine. As new single wines are added to the tangent line-up, they also become available for Christian to add to the Ecclestone blend if he chooses. There are no limits here – if it's white and interesting, he'll consider it.

"a departure from the ordinary, tangent explores the limitless possibilities of alternative white wines"
