

**Rhone Rangers Press Seminar
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Notes on A Mavericks Approach to Rhone production presented
by Kerry Damskey
Non Traditional Blending of Syrah with Cabernet Sauvignon**

I have been a proponent of the blending of Syrah with Cabernet for a number of years. I have created wines with this flavor profile from India to Washington State with the same result—a complex and richly textured wine that transcends both Cabernet and Syrah.

In the pre AOC years of the 1850s, Hermitage was a regular supplier to the merchants of Bordeaux from the 2nd half of the 18th century for nearly 100 years... it's role being to strengthen the finer wines of Bordeaux... quotes H. Warner Allen from his book "The History of Wine"

Some flavors are just meant to go together. When examining the flavor profile in food such as simple combinations like peanut butter and jelly just intuitively work well together, such is the case of Cabernet and Syrah.

Syrah also has the innate ability to enhance the variety, and in this case, we're talking about Cabernet Sauvignon... that it is being blended with.

In the case of Cabernet and Syrah:
Cabernet Sauvignon holds the structure of the blend and usually is the defining blend signature.

Syrah, as in traditional Rhone blending with this variety, lends strength and structure yet processes an entirely compatible fruit component and color.

With the examples of the two Cabernet Syrah blends you taste:

Palmeri 2002 Stagecoach Vyd 68% Cabernet Sauvignon: 32% Syrah
Goal was to take a leading Napa Valley mountain Cabernet vineyard with defining features of sweet cedar, cigar box and cassis.
The addition of Syrah, doesn't subtract from the profile, but changes it in a positive manner.
Traditional, but non traditional

In the case of Dutcher Crossing's 2005 Taylor Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon:

The blend is 75% Cabernet Sauvignon : 25% Syrah

The blending goal here was entirely different:

Dry Creek Valley Cabernet Sauvignon tends to take on an herbal and sometimes weedy component.

My goal with this wine was to "change" the indigenous Cabernet profile from this vineyard terroir with the addition of Syrah.

The Syrah addition makes the wine more supple and interesting... or at least that was the intent.

The Traditional Southern Rhone Blending of Chateauneuf du Pape

Described as a wine lovers wine, that's fierce but loveable; Chateauneuf du Pape is considered one of the world's great blended wines.

Thirteen different varieties allowed. The predominant varieties are Grenache Noir, Syrah, Mouvedre

With smaller amounts of Picpoul Noir, Tarrant Noir, Counoise, Muscardin, Vaccarese and Cinsault

The blending of these "Grape Cocktails" were probably based on Chateauneuf du Pape's Appellation Controlee of 1935 , reflecting what was planted in the vineyards.

Chateauf du Papes are a warm distinctively southern feel

with mouthfilling charms and aromas of pine and spice.

Grenache provides the depth and richness while Movredre provides earthy tannin and Syrah the structure

Grenache Noir: usually between 50-80% defines the blend

Syrah: 10 to 20% of the blend

Mouvedre: Dark tannic wines of high alcohol. Particular affinity to Grenache ... softening it and adding structure. Wild games earthy flavors. Beaucastle uses a larger % ...30 to 60%

Picpoul Noir: Richly scented. Light in color

Counoise: Peppery note and adds to acidity

Terrant Noir: Light colored perfumed and tart

Cinsault: adds softness and bouquet

Muscardin: often substituted for Cinsault with attractive aromas .. with lightly colored colors

In terms of blending, the present AC rules leaves the grape mix totally elective with no guidance as to proportions.

It is a terroir driven blending principle with Ch. du Beaucastle as an example, lets Mouvedre be the defining grape varietal owing to the high percentage of clay in their soils.

So, defining typicity of Chateauneuf du Pape is difficult.

Prominent Producers:

Chateau de Beaucastle

Chateau La Nerth

Chateau Mont-Redon

Domaine du Vieu Teleraphe

Domaine Font-de-Michelle

Domain de la Solitude

In describing a red Chateauneuf du Pape wine,....The late owner of one of the best domains, Jacques Perrin of Chateau du Beaucastle put it like this.

“I can tell you that some Chateauneuf du Pape’s characteristic aromas resemble irises, violets and roasted almonds, for instance, but then we could turn to another bottle from another vat or another vintage and find that the predominating sensations were perhaps truffles, laurel and local herbs. In addition, these may alter the longer the wine is exposed to air...so you really can’t tell what a Chateauneuf du Pape should specifically resemble – all which, of course adds to the wine’s enticement”