



Rick's Grape Skinny

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*"Drinking wine is as natural as eating
and to me...as necessary!"*
(Ernest Hemingway)

There are blends.... And there are **BLENDS!**

Blends are in and they always have been!

For sure, the past few years has seen an explosive growth in wine blends...but for those who think this is a recent phenomenon – it's time to set the record straight. Would it surprise you to know that most of the wines we consume are comprised of more than one grape variety! In fact, wines that are 100% varietal specific have been on the decline for a good many years...and for a good many reasons...from the nature and amount of fruit grown to reasons anchored in tradition. But, the fundamental reason behind blends is to produce better tasting wines!

Just so you know...

It is permissible for wineries to reflect a single grape on the label if a grape represents a specified percentage of the blend. In the US for instance, that percentage is 75%. In Europe the threshold is 80%...and in Argentina and Chile, it's 85%. All to say...there are far more wine blends in the world than meet the eye! But hey, that's a good thing!!

Classic varietal blends around the world

There are a good many wine regions in the world that are known for particular wines...and the vast majority of those iconic wines are blends. Here's a list of key regions and wines -- and the typical grapes from which their notable blends are made.

Bordeaux/Meritage red – i.e. Opus One -- Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, Petit Verdot, & Carménère in some instances.

Bordeaux/Meritage white – Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon & Muscadelle.

Penfolds' Grange – Australia's #1 iconic wine – Syrah...with varying "dashes" of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Champagne – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir & Pinot Meunier

Châteauneuf du Pape – Grenache, Syrah & Mourvèdre are in typical blends...but 10 other varieties are allowed!

Super Tuscan – i.e. the renowned Sassicaia and Ornellaia -- Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, & Cabernet Franc.

Amarone – Corvina, Molinara & Rondinella (with other native grapes also permitted)

Soave – Garganega (limited to 70%), Trebbiano, Chardonnay, & Pinot Blanc.

Prosecco – Prosecco/Glera must be 85%...and the balance can be a mélange of local grapes including Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco, & Pinot Noir.

Cava – Macabeo, Parellada, Xarello, & Chardonnay.

Rioja – Tempranillo, Mazuelo, Graciano, & Garnacha Tinta.

Priorat/Montsant – Garnacha, Carignan/Cariñena, Syrah, Merlot, & Cabernet Sauvignon.

GSM/Rhône Blend red – Grenache, Syrah & Mourvèdre/Mataro/Monastrell.

GSM/ Rhône Blend white – Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, & Bourboulenc.

Provençal Rosé – Cinsault, Grenache, Syrah, & Vermentino (aka Rolle).

The Back Label

Virtually all of the iconic wine blends above evolved after years...even centuries...of learning which grapes grew best in various regions and terroir...and which combinations of grapes worked best together when blended. A good many of these grapes and resulting blends enjoy protected status...meaning there are many regions where no grapes beyond those specified by the government may be grown and produced into commercial wines. All of the other blends in the world are either wannabes that aspire to achieve greatness and fame, or they're just focused on being all they can be and on becoming more univer\$ally appealing. Pro\$it! 🍷

Toast of the Month



*“Here’s to those who express their gratitude,
For it is the sign of a noble soul!”
(a slight corruption of an Aesop expression)*

A Great Bunch of Blends!

White Blend

Sokol Blosser Evolution 18 NV

**Fresh, Tropical, Off-dry, and Wonderful!
(Dundee/Drayton, Oregon)/\$16-\$20 –**

Wow...what a great wine...from one of Oregon’s best artisanal wineries. And when it comes to demonstrating the value of blending...this SF Chronicle Wine Competition Gold Medal winner does that in spades. Though small in stature, Sokol Blosser is otherwise huge in terms of quality, flavor and value. This “Rieslingesque” wine is comprised of nine grape varieties -- *Müller-Thurgau, Riesling, Semillon, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Muscat Canelli, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and Sylvaner* – and it’s one of the most delightful and versatile white wines you’ll ever find. The most commonly asked question about this little gem of a wine is whether the formula for using and blending nine grapes was “intended or was it just happenstance.” One taste of what many enthusiasts call “*the perfect white wine*” – and the answer to that question will be as obvious to you as the joy you experience with the first sip through the last!

www.sokolblosser.com/

Franciscan Equilibrium 2013

**Supple, Luscious and Mouthwatering!
(Napa Valley – St. Helena, CA)/\$20-\$25**

Talk about a marriage of grapes made in heaven, this majestic union of 72% *Sauvignon Blanc*, 17% *Chardonnay* and 11% *Muscat* is just that! To be sure...there are lots of succulent white blends to be had...but none in my view that quite match the unique and distinctive attributes of this perfectly balanced jewel of a wine by Winemaker, Janet Myers. From its mouthfeel to its exhilarating elegance, this is a wine that has few peers!

www.franciscan.com

Red Blend

d’Arenberg The Stump Jump 2012

**Fruit-forward, Spicy Backbone & Delicious!
(McLaren Vale – South Australia)/\$9-\$12**

Deeply rooted in a century-old family history of grape growers and winemakers, the current leader of d’Arenberg wines is Aussie Chester Osborn, who’s held the head winemaker’s reins since 1984. Named for a special kind of plow...or plough if you prefer...that “jumped over stumps” – this is a blend known as **GSM** for which the Aussies have become well known as a serious competitor of the renowned *Châteauneuf du Pape* and *Côtes du Rhône* wines. A blend of 62% *Grenache*, 20% *Shiraz/Syrah* and 18% *Mourvèdre/Mataro*, this very affordable wine exemplifies the superb difference a little foot-treading and resting on lees can make! Grab it when you see it...’cuz it’s winner that goes quickly.

www.darenberg.com.au/

Hahn Family Wines Meritage 2013

**Rich Mouthfeel, Perfectly Balanced & Yummy!
(Central Coast – Soledad, CA)/\$13-\$15**

You could go seek out a First Growth Left Bank (*Cab Sauv* based) Bordeaux red – which would no doubt be delicious...but it would also be quite pricey! Or...you could seek out this über delicious Bordeaux style red blend from California, aka a *Meritage*, that is comprised of all five of the Bordeaux grapes: in this case 31% *Cabernet Sauvignon*; 27% *Malbec*; 23% *Merlot*; 11% *Petit Verdot*; and 8% *Cabernet Franc*. If you want a blend that includes the “famous lost grape of Bordeaux” – the *Carménère* -- try a Bordelaise expression from Chile! It’s certain to be in the mix!

hwww.hahnwines.com/

Rosé

Caves d’Esclans Whispering Angel 2014

**(Côtes De Provence – La Motte, FR)/\$16-\$20
Aromatic, Peachy Keen & Lip-smackingly Good!**

Vigneron Sacha Lichine might have been born in Bordeaux, but he put his heart and soul into the Provence – which he helped put on the world’s wine map by crafting some of the most exquisite and dazzlingly delicious Rosés you can imagine. One of those salmon-colored gems is this phenomenal *Whispering Angel Rosé*. Named after a local 19th Century chapel, each bottle of this traditional blend of *Grenache, Cinsault* and *Vermentino* is blessed by the twin Cherubs that adorn the chapel’s apse. [www.esclans.com/](http://www.esclans.com)