



## Rick's Grape Skinny

[ricksgrapeskinny@gmail.com](mailto:ricksgrapeskinny@gmail.com)



July 2015

“Where there is no wine  
There is no love.”  
(Euripides)

### Norton... the All American Grape!

What?! The Norton!? Yep...you heard it right...the Norton! Although this grape, its heritage, pedigree, and horticultural roots are among the most curious, questionable and maligned Pomological mysteries (look it up!!), one thing is certain...it truly is *America's grape*...lock, stock and barrel.

Owing its name to a Dr. Daniel Norton of Richmond, Virginia, the *Norton* grape first appeared – and was attributed to Dr. Norton as the hybridizer -- in official horticultural literature in 1832 with the publication of renowned nurseryman William Robert Prince's two volume tome, A Treatise on the Vine, Pomological Manual. (There's that word again, did you look it up?) But that's hardly the beginning or the end of this “vine!”

#### Much Ado About Nothing?

Maybe so... but for something as seemingly lowly as a grape, there sure has been a lot of fuss over whether this grape was “discovered” or “hybridized” by whom, where and when...and over what to call it – the *Norton* or the *Cynthiana*! (More about that later) In fact, those Pomological sleuths (You better know what this is by now!) are still offering up theories and opinions about the “origin of the orb”...and so much so that I'm led to believe that this purple little pill could very well be the original “*grape of wrath!*” At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter of course, but here's the version of the *Norton* story that is accepted by most scholars...and Virginia natives like me!

#### Inspired by T.J.?

Well, the official Virginia version of this story suggests that our third President and the official *Father of Winemaking in America*, Thomas Jefferson, was fundamentally responsible for fostering Dr. Daniel Norton's interest in finding a grape, or developing one, that might prove to be viable, sustainable and capable of producing wines that were as good as the European grapes and wines. So, while T.J. sparked his initial interest, it wasn't until Dr. Norton's wife and newborn child died that his passion to find or develop such a competitive grape emerged and flourished. As he is reported to have said, his choice at the time was to either absorb himself in this endeavor -- or take his life. Good on ya Doc...we're all happy you made the right choice...and we're indebted to you!

That combination of motives led Dr. Norton to begin his search for the *All American grape*...and by Golly, he succeeded! Ultimately, he crossed a native American *Vitis aestivalis* grape (aka Summer Grape) with a now extinct *Bland* grape...and the eponymous *Norton* was born.

#### The Norton Today

Well...while you might never have heard of the *Norton* grape, perhaps you've heard of its alter ego the *Cynthiana*...which is its preferred name in Arkansas...and a few other places who don't accept that it was rooted in Virginia. In any case, the *Norton* just happens to be the Missouri State Grape where it has been grown since 1830 when Dr. Norton introduced it. These days, the *Norton* is the basis of the Show Me State's entire wine industry...while Virginia has the largest acreage of *Norton* under cultivation! And if that isn't enough to convince you to go buy a bottle of *Norton* wine, please take note that at the Vienna, Austria Exposition in 1873, it was indeed an *All American Norton* wine from Missouri that was declared the world's best red wine in this prestigious international competition.

#### And Oh By the Way!

If this *All American Grape's* heritage isn't sufficient to send you packing for a wine store, did I forget to mention that *Norton* has more Resveratrol per volume than any other wine?! But here's the clincher! In 2009, the world famous Riedel glassmakers created a special line of *Norton* stemware! Yes, it's that distinctive!



# Toast of the Month



*“Here’s to a loaf of bread  
A jug of wine...and thou!”  
(Omar Khayyam)*



## The Monthly Bunch!

### Reds

**Norton (aka America’s Grape and Cynthiana)  
Chrysalis Vineyards – 2011**

**Deep, Dark, Delicious, and Delectable!  
(Piedmont AVA -- Middleburg, VA)/\$18-\$22**

With a distinction of having more *Norton* grapes under cultivation than any place in the world, the award-winning Virginia winery, Chrysalis Vineyards, can also boast that it makes one of the best expressions of the *All American Norton* wine in the country! While the history of the *Norton* is a contentious mystery among the eno-cognoscenti, there is no argument about the fact that this is one very aromatic, full-bodied and über-flavorful wine. And such is the reason it earned distinction as “*the best red wine of all nations*” in the 1873 Vienna Universal Exhibition! Yes, it’s that good!! To boot, this is truly the “*All American Wine!*” So versatile is this grape that Chrysalis winemaker, Curtis Vincent, makes four distinct versions...one of which he dubbed “*Schitz and Giggels.*” 🍷🍷

[www.chrysaliswine.com](http://www.chrysaliswine.com)

### Petite Sirah

**UNTI Vineyards – Dry Creek Valley 2012  
Fragrance Galore, Rich, Sultry, and Succulent!  
(Dry Creek Valley – Healdsburg, CA)/ \$30-\$35**

From a two acre plot, planted a year after father and son, George and Mick Unti, founded UNTI Vineyards and Winery in 1997, these carefully tended grapes produce a wine that’s as good as wine gets! This inky-dark, tooth-staining elixir is 100% *Petite Sirah* and it was aged in 20% new French oak for 13 months. Founding partner and head winemaker, Mick Unti, typically makes less than 400 cases of this highly unfinned, unfiltered and sought after wine, so if it’s one you set your sights

on getting...and it should be...get your order in early in the year of release. As Mick suggests...this is a wine that “...only carnivores should drink while listening to Led Zeppelin or Social Distortion.” And he ain’t kiddin’! This wine is a mouthful and a half...but one whose powerful tannins can be tamed with a dose or two of vigorous aeration. Open it, aerate it and set it aside for an hour or so before you start chewin’ on this baby. You’ll be glad you did!

[www.untivineyards.com](http://www.untivineyards.com)

### Red Blends

**19 Crimes 2014  
Fruit-forward, Rich and Supple!**

(Victoria, Australia)/\$8-\$12  
A Treasury Wine Estates Import, this absolutely delicious red blend was originally made exclusively for the Canadian market, but its reception and success there made it a must-have for both US and Aussie enthusiasts. A tad slow in showing up on all shelves, it’s now quite handy and very reasonably priced. It’s a union of *Syrah, Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Pinot Noir* and as such, it pretty much stands alone in the marketplace. So named after the *nineteen crimes* in late eighteenth century England...which if committed and convicted, the sentence was “transportation to Australia!” Hmmmm!! 😊 In any case, Baileys of Glenrowan winemaker, Paul Dahlenburg, used that distinctive heritage as inspiration for making a hearty and hardy wine that is both well structured and beautifully balanced. It’s bottled yum!!

[www.tweglobal.com](http://www.tweglobal.com)

### Whites

**White Blend  
Cuvée A – Amrita White Wine – 2014  
Bright, Crisp, Mouthwatering, and Scrumptious!  
(Willamette Valley – Carlton, OR)/\$14-\$18**

Wow...if it’s a new, exciting, versatile, and delicious white wine you’re looking for...search no further! This vibrant and ever-so-slightly effervescent blend made by *Anne Amie Vineyards* is the bomb...and a pack of nabs! Comprised of 32.5% *Pinot Blanc*, 19.7% *Müller Thurgau*, 17.7% *Riesling*, 14.9% *Viognier*, 12.5% *Chardonnay*, and 2.7% *Gewürztraminer* – this irresistible, off-dry union of varietals is made in white-wine-lovers’ heaven! The name of this elixir, *Amrita*, is the Buddhist word for ambrosia...or nectar of the gods. It’s a *spiritually enhanced* elixir whose components change vintage to vintage. [www.annemie.com](http://www.annemie.com)