

Zero-Two-Wine-Three-Eight

The most opinionated wine Newsletter in America

Blended wines

Blended wines are like the well-kept secret of the Stone Soup recipe

Book of Bertil. 31

**Introduction:**

Blending, or "Assemblage" in French, is the method of mixing different grape varieties and/or different cuvée in order to obtain a wine that is as balanced as possible. Apart from very rare cases where the wine comes from a single clone of a specific grape variety, and from a single cuvée; all the wines produced and available for consumption are blended wines. If this concept may seem strange and incomprehensible to many of you, it is nevertheless quite simple to understand its origin, and the different stages of its evolution, either for religious or for commercial and economic reasons.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them." Matthew 18:20

**The tale:**

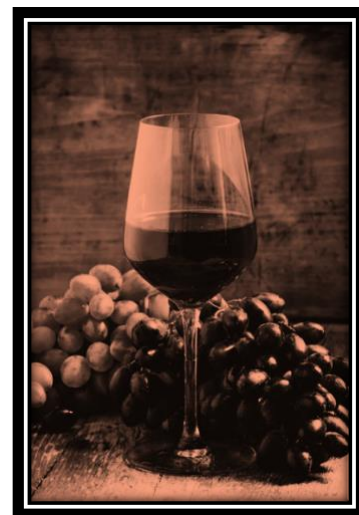
There are many versions of the tale of "The Stone Soup", here is mine and therefore my favorite.

A vagabond who traveled from village to village used to beg for his evening meal from the villagers in which he wanted to spend the night. But one day, although he knocked on many doors, none of the inhabitants wanted to feed him. Tired and hungry, he went to knock on the door of one of the houses in the village square to ask for a cauldron and water. The villager, intrigued by his request, asked him what he planned to do with it, so the wanderer explained that he was going to prepare his famous stone soup. He prepared first his fire in the middle of the square, and boiled water in it, and then added a large clean large stone. Intrigued, a first villager came to look at what was going on and asked the wander if it was going to be a good soup, because he didn't smell anything. Immediately the vagabond confirmed how delicious his soup will be, but that it would be even

better if the villager added a vegetable of his choice from his house. Curious, the villager placed a carrot in it, then they waited. After about fifteen minutes, there were more than ten villagers around the cauldron, all of whom had made their contribution, including leftover meats, bones, and herbs. Everyone was surprised by the very good smell of the soup and its taste quality, rich and appetizing. So, after this revelation, the villagers were satisfied to go home. It was then that the vagabond, alone and happy with this successful deception, had his fill of this providential and delicious soup.

Chapter 1 Verse 31.01.01:**A brief history of vine genetics**

Wild vines (*Vitis sylvestris*) are dioecious, which means that there are males and females that can interbreed but, generally speaking, the two genera are separate. The cultivated vine (*Vitis vinifera*) is a hermaphrodite, which means that the plant self-fertilizes, but it can also cross-fertilize with other grape varieties. It is possible that this genetic variation, according to Gabriel Marais (scientist from CNRS-France) already existed in a small part of the wild vine, and that the very first winegrowers (1500 BC) may have already selected these hermaphrodite mutants because they gave many more grapes than the others. "The first humans to cultivate vines may also have crossed these hermaphrodite mutants with male and female plants," he extrapolates. There are now more than 5000 varieties of grape varieties in the world, and more than 3500 produce wine grapes. Many of its clones are classified by large family such as: Pinot Noir (over 1000 clones), Chardonnay (80 clones), Cabernet Sauvignon (more than 60 clones) etc... which all represent clonal selections of natural crosses, cross-pollinations, genetic crosses, but above all grafts. The discovery and development of ampelographic genetics since the 60s (Dr. Sachs), the understanding of molecular genetics since the 90s, and the molecular labeling and then DNA sequencing (UC Davis) have now made it possible to increase the diversity of grape varieties in a scientific way, and not only empirically.

**Verse 31.01.02:**

The particular primary character of each grape variety and its clones

To understand the individual complexity of grape varieties more simply, let us take the example of "the Apple Tree", which in this case will be the representation of the "Vitis-producing wine grapes".

Each apple variety has its own DNA genetics for color, character, aromas, taste, and flesh texture. Now, if I plant two apple trees (of the same clone) on a soil with different mineral compositions, the resulting apple will have a particular physical and aromatic composition in each specific geographical location and therefore differ from the other apple tree. In addition, if the two apple trees are planted in opposite geographical climates, one in a temperate climate versus a continental climate, and moreover in different latitudes, south versus north, then the two apples obtained will have different acidity and sugar levels. And so, if I produced a fermented cider with each of these apples, I would get two different ciders, although the apples came from the same family and the same clone (example: Golden Delicious).

In an ideal climatic world, you would get the same typicity of ciders year after year. But as you know, no climatic year is identical to the previous one, and therefore the variability of temperature, rainfall, and the number of hours of sunshine will change the character of the apple and therefore of the cider. This is what defines the first part of the concept of "Vintage". For wine (or cider).

PS: I will also spare you all the possible variables depending on the age of the apple tree (the vine).

This explanation applies point for point for the vine.

"I have heard your prayer. I saw your tears. Behold, I add to your days fifteen years". Isaiah 38:1-5.

Verse 31.01.03:

Human Intervention

To complicate the concept, you must add the human decisions of the winemaker on the vine during the year of maturation, then on the winemaking method, then on the choice of vessel used during the ageing of the wine. The same grape juice will therefore differ depending on whether the wine has been fermented, then aged in concrete vats, stainless steel, wooden barrels, or terracotta amphorae. Even more particular, two identical wines both aged in oak barrels of the same Cooper, having the same age of use, and which have been toasted at the same level, will immutably give two different organoleptic wines. So, imagine when the barrels in a winery have different origins, different ages of use, and different toasts, etc.

Now it makes sense why "Assemblage" (blending) is necessary.



Chapter 2 Verse 31.02.01:

A brief history of blended wines Trade or Religion?

Originally, the wines produced come from grape varieties grown in a very limited geographical area, because the grapes were transported by cart over very short distances, and the tradition was to practice

co-plantation. That is, planting grape varieties from different families on the same plot of vines with the aim of harvesting and vinifying them together, which guaranteed an identical quantity and quality of grapes each year. As different grape varieties have a unique typicity (such as apples) that react differently to climate and disease, this allowed for a diversity of fruit quality. Wines made from blended grape varieties appeared in Roman times in production regions accessible to maritime transport, such as the Italian west coast, the Spanish, Portuguese or French Atlantic coast, as well as the entire Mediterranean coast, because the wines produced were intended for trade and not only for local consumption. This winemaking technique therefore made it possible to guarantee equal quality year after year, by modifying the percentages of each variety according to the quality of the grapes of the year. In addition, to produce a good balanced wine capable of travelling, it was (and still is) essential to blend several different types of grapes and vats to acquire the essential chemical combination of acidity, alcohol, tannin, sugar, astringency, and this in addition to the constraints of organoleptic aromatic harmony.

Now that you understand why commercial wines have always been blended wines of several different grape varieties, such as Rioja*, Pauillac*, or Chianti* for example, then why do some regions produce monoculture wines, either from a single grape variety like in the Côte de Beaune in Burgundy, which produces its whites from Chardonnay and its reds from Pinot Noir?

***Rioja**: Rioja red wine is a specific blend of Tempranillo (about 60 to 70%), Garnacha Black (about 15 to 20%), Mazuelo (Carignan) at 10% and Graciano (about 5%)

***Pauillac**: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Carménère.

***Chianti**: 100% Sangiovese, but can legally add 30% of other grape varieties, such as Cabernet.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and in whom I abide bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing. » John 15:5



Verse 31.02.02:

And what about Religion?

In more remote areas where the winegrowers are peasants and not traders, wine was produced for local consumption, and it was not uncommon to see two different productions. That is, one intended for everyday consumption, what was called the "petit wine", or "thirst wine" which came from blends of several types of grape varieties, and then the "great wine" or "mass wine" intended for the church, which were single-varietal wines.

In order to be able to compare a wine of one winemaker to that of another, the same identity of grape variety was necessary and only the most blessed lands (clos – single vineyard) of God, as well as the most religious winemakers, were able to produce wines holistic enough to touch the souls of the repentant during communion, and therefore only the best were chosen by the diocese. But these wines,

for example, Pinot Noir, came from very specific plots, but were still always the result of complex blends of different cuvées (which often

represented blends of 5 to 25 different barrels) in order to produce a wine that was as balanced as possible between acidity, tannins (bitterness and astringency), body, alcohol and aromatics.



Verse 31.02.03:

The New World and its single-varietal wines

To fully understand the reason, let's first look at the source.

European countries, such as France, created their geographical appellation regulations in the 1930s on the basis of ancestral and empirical practices. This means that the geographical designation of a wine contains a set of rigorous regulations encompassing all the constraints imposed on the appellation, from viticulture to viniculture. (see Vol. 21 "American Viticulture Area" AVA). This is the reason why European wine labels only inform you of the name of the producer, the appellation of origin, such as "Appellation Chablis Contrôlé", the name of the wine (which is the name given to a particular blend-style), and the vintage. You will never find the name of the grape variety(s) on the label, unless the grape variety is part of the appellation, such as Barbera d'Alba (Piedmont) or "Riesling – DOC Alsace".



Verse 31.02.04:

AVAs

American appellations (AVA) are based on the concept of geographical appellation alone. Which for viticulture happens to be more precise and defined than the geographical delimitation of a region or a county. The reason for this is that the AVA defines a "Sense of Place", based only on nature, i.e. geographical aspect (soil, climate, altitude), but does not dictate the human aspect (see Vol. 27 "Terroir or Climate?") i.e.: grape varieties, methods, viticultural and agricultural choices. As a result, the only simple way to inform the consumer about the product was through the inscription of the typicity of the wine via the naming of the main grape variety on the label. (read Vol. 5 "Genesis... Reading an American Wine Label")

The marketing of post-prohibition American wines was based on the notion of luxury and therefore for commercial production purposes. American wines are always the result of blended wines, and many are the result of blends of different grape varieties, even if on the label* only one grape variety is mentioned. As a result, the different styles of wine are generally copied from European wines with a reputation for great quality, such as in Napa Valley with blended

wines from the Left Bank of Bordeaux style, or the Willamette Valley with its blends of Burgundy-style Pinot Noirs, or the west coast of California from Santa Cruz to Santa Barbara for the Côtes du Rhône-style wines.

Conclusion:

So make no mistake, real "Stone" soup is only good because it is not from a single Stone, but from the participation of an entire village of grapes.

Addendum

Most American labels that do not indicate the main grape variety, but only a specific name on the label, inform you that the blend of grape varieties is different than what the American regulation imposes, i.e. a minimum of 75% of the registered grape variety must be in the final blend. So, to know what you are buying, read the back label, because it will inform you of the percentages of the grape varieties chosen.

Mr B.

*Memorandum:

My words and opinions in these newsletters are and would always be personal, and I intend to offend.

I always accept that others have the full right and duty to challenge me, to argue, and, if it is necessary, excommunicate me from their beliefs (often

bonde
FINE WINE SHOP

54 Church Street, Cambridge MA 02138

www.bondewines.com