

# The Art of Blending Wines

by Don Panagapka (AWO News #48)

In my previous article I mentioned that blending wines is normally better than having a single grape variety to produce a better product. There are exceptions to this of course. For example wines such as gewurtztraminer, pinot noir, plus a few others (e.g. fruit wines) are wines that do not necessarily benefit from blending as their purity of flavour is an important element in their attraction. One might ask oneself “what is the advantage of blending”? Well, as we know bordeaux blends and meritage blends, for example, are made for a reason. The reason is that they generally produce better and more complex wines (certainly the prices would show that). Another reason to blend wines is to balance them. One wine may be light in fruit and could appreciate an injection of fruit to balance the wine. On the other hand a wine may be low in acid and adding a wine of a higher acid content would help the low acid wine. Now let’s look at areas where you can increase your blending prowess.

## Maximizing your blending potential

First of all having multiple examples of one wine (e.g. different years, different yeast varieties, different winemaking techniques) will allow you to experiment with blending that particular grape variety with different wines made from the same grape. In the end you will have a blend of a single grape variety which should be better than any of the individual wines. In other words when you first make a grape variety (e.g. Cab Sauv) why not make a number of different carboys with different yeasts and winemaking techniques. If you do, then you will have more possibilities to produce superior wines.

Secondly, having a number of different wines that can enter a particular class allows you to blend different types to produce a different blend (e.g. having Cab Sauv, Merlot, and Cab Franc available as single grape wines will allow you to experiment with various blends of these wines.

## Don’t sacrifice a fine wine by blending it with a mediocre wine

Often time we will (normally out of convenience) blend a superior wine with a poor wine to make an “acceptable” wine in bulk. The result is usually an “ok” wine but nothing special. So, why not keep the superior wine on its’ own and the mediocre wine on its’ own. That way you at least have one great wine to be proud of. Take the mediocre wine and see if there are other mediocre wines in your cellar that can be blended together and likely you will produce a “better than mediocre” wine that can be consumed regularly and enjoyed.

## Blind tasting of blended wines

Let’s say you want to make the best blend of Cab Sauv, Cab Franc, and Merlot (with possibly smaller amounts of e.g. Malbec). Set up a blind tasting of 5 or 6 blends (differing the amounts of each blend) and bag them so that it is a blind tasting. Then have another person arbitrarily number the wines. Then have at least yourself plus one or 2 others taste the blends and discuss the wines (e.g. balance, taste profile, tannins, finish, etc.) and determine which blend is the best. Subsequent to that tasting you can fine-tune the best blend to perhaps produce a wine that is slightly better. The advantage

over doing this on your own is that you are getting feedback from others which may help you make a better wine.

## **Blending young and old**

So, you have a fabulous young wine but the tannins are too astringent to be drinkable. Why not take one of your older “mature” wines and blend to reduce the overall tannin level and add complexity to the wine. Conversely, a small amount of a newer wine can bring up the fruit of an older wine that is at the top of the hill and ready to descend. You will likely end up with the best of both worlds.

## **Some logical blends that you might consider**

### **California Cab Sauv with Ontario Merlot**

Reasoning: the high alcohol content of most California Cabs will be balanced by the lower alcohol content of the Ontario Merlot. The Merlot will also fill in the middle palate and add fruit to the Cab Sauv

### **Vidal with 5% Muscat**

Reasoning: the Muscat will bring out more fruit on the nose and the flavour for the Vidal

### **Apple wine with white wines for Social class**

Reasoning: apple wine being fairly subtle can add some complexity and flavour to white wines to produce a nice social wine

### **Cab Sauv / Syrah blends**

Reasoning: the Aussies are making great wines in this style and are becoming very popular. In the Red Blend class this combination is logical.

### **Any fruit wine with grape wines**

Reasoning: this is a classic “social” blend that can produce some great wines

Happy blending, and keep playing with those wines.

Don Panagapka