



## Curt Dunham Interview

By Peggy Fiandaca, August 15, 2011



## WINE BLENDING

The art of wine blending is the mastery of the winemaker. Much of the wine we drink is not 100% one varietal without other wines blended into it. The winemaker uses blending to impact the flavor, aroma, color, and body of the finished wine. Ever had a California Cabernet Sauvignon? It probably had Merlot, Cabernet Franc, or Petite Verdot in it (or all three) and you didn't even know it!



Listed on many wine labels is a varietal designation that indicates the name of the dominant grapes used in the wine. Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, and Grenache are examples of varietal designations.

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Information on wine labels is regulated by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB). For this discussion, we are talking about wines made in the United States. Wines made elsewhere have a different labeling system and requirements.

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According to the TTB, a wine's varietal designation indicates that at least 75 percent of the grapes used to make the wine are of the variety identified. The label does not have to include information about what types of varietals might have been blended into the wine.

Therefore, if a wine label reads Syrah, it tells you that at least 75 percent of the varietal Syrah was used to make the wine. If a wine is less than 75 percent one varietal, it must be labeled "Red Wine" or "White Wine."

Our philosophy at LDV is to always tell you what grapes are in the finished wine and what type of vessel they were aged in. We think this is vital information for you to have to train your nose and palette to identify different characteristics in a wine – things you like and things you don't! We also use blending to enhance your food experience, since it's all about the food.

Blending allows the winemaker to pick and choose from different barrels of the same varietal or to blend in a different varietal to achieve or enhance desired characteristics of the final wine. Usually the blending process occurs once the various wines are made and have aged. It does not typically occur during the fermentation process although this does occur.

Here are some examples of blending and how important it is to the wine you enjoy.

Our 2008 Syrah is 97 percent Syrah and 3 percent Grenache. 3 percent? Doesn't seem like it would make much of a difference – but it does!

The 2009 Grenache is 90% Grenache and 10% Petite Sirah. We added the Petite to enhance the color and bring a darker fruit (blackberries) component to the lively raspberry and cherry characteristics of the Grenache. This added complexity and body to the wine as it sails across your palette. This wine provides another example of barrel blending. We used some Grenache aged in new French oak and some aged in neutral oak for this wine to obtain just the right balance of oak and spice provided by the wood.

Our 2009 Sky Island Petite Sirah contains 24% Grenache. We brought in the Grenache to lighten the body of the wine a bit and bring some lighter fruit notes. While our 2009 Petite Sirah (100 percent!) was made to be enjoyed with grilled red meats and bold flavors, we wanted to create a lighter version that would be great with pizza, chocolate, and lighter cheeses.

Is blending artistry or magic? Maybe, maybe not. We just want to make wines that taste, smell, look and feel good!

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