

A standard blend of red wine from Bordeaux is made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, and Petite Verdot. Said another way, these wines are the master ingredients of a Bordeaux blend. What the winemaker does with these ingredients falls upon his creativity and the wine that he wants to present.

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The winemaker has an additional refinement to work with in that the Left Bank red wines of Bordeaux typically contain 60% to 70% Cabernet Sauvignon with the remainder a blend of the other four varietals. The Right Bank red wines are typically made with 70% Merlot with the rest being Cabernet Franc and/or Cabernet Sauvignon. This blending difference, plus the richness of the soil on the Right Bank, promotes a less tannic wine than those produced on the Left Bank. Think Terroir! Both styles are considered to be exquisite, each bringing their own special characteristics to the final product. The best examples of Bordeaux Wines that carry these blends are the First Growths from Bordeaux. They are Margaux, Latour, Mouton-Rothchild, Lafite-Rothchild, and Haut Brion.

Let's move on from Bordeaux to "in the style of Bordeaux," sometimes called the "Bordeaux approach." I find that Steve Pitcher, a freelance writer from San Francisco, describes it best. He tells us that there is no shortage of fans for California Cabernet Sauvignon, made from the noble red varietal that produces wines of depth, strength and lots of flavor not only in California but virtually all of the world's wine regions that are home to this varietal. Almost equal in quantity are the devotees of Merlot, Cabernet's softer, fleshier cousin. When a winemaker, outside of Bordeaux, chooses to blend these two varietals, often along with certain percentages of Cabernet Franc, Petite Verdot, and/ or Malbec, the aim is to produce a more elegant, complex, sophisticated wine that reflects the character and breed of the great wines of Bordeaux.

The above description of blending wines outside of Bordeaux is also referred to as the Meritage (pronounced like Heritage) concept. I was introduced to this concept at a winetasting in Boston some years ago. I still do not regret that it cost \$300 to get out of the door with all of my purchases. The presenter was explaining that Meritage Reds by definition must be made from only two or more of the Bordeaux varietal reds mentioned above. If such a wine is not labeled as Meritage, it usually bears a proprietary name that the winery has an exclusive right to use. When shopping for these wines you will see it clearly marked on the label front panel.

Permit me the luxury of talking about a few examples of "in the Bordeaux style" from California. A boatload of hard work and time goes into this blending process, which reflects the powerful influence Bordeaux has on the World of Wine.

Joseph Phelps Insignia. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot. 2% Cabernet Franc. It is now 2014 and the wine is still developing.

Alluvium from Beringer. The percentages of the varietals were not given however; it took two years of trial and error for the winemaker to put a product on the market that would truly represent the Bordeaux style.

St Clement Oroppas (my personal favorite). 62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot, and 25% Cabernet Franc. The winemaker was successful creating a Meritage using a significant amount of Cabernet Franc. The wine showed fine balance and depth and developed quite nicely over the next two to three years. By the way, if you should ever get to Napa, I strongly encourage you to include a visit to St Clement. Simply make an appointment, show up and you will be treated like royalty.

WINESPEAK

Blending wines "in the style of" does not end with Bordeaux. It carries over very successfully to The Rhone, Burgundy, and Portugal. California wines based on grapes native to France's Rhone Valley such as Syrah, Grenache, and Viognier have been blended into such examples as Le Mistrial from Joseph Phelps and many superior wines from the Calera Winery in the Central Coast. Going further into our style story we find that Burgundy has a significant scenario. Dr. Vinny of the Wine Spectator Magazine answered a reader's question by saying that Burgundian Wines, in particular those from the High-End wineries, are identified by their vineyard sites. In fact, their reputations are based on the idea of the wine's Terroir – its sense of place – whereas the New World Burgundies are more fruit centric. And finally there is Port. The wineries in Portugal have been trying for years to make "Port" exclusive to Portugal. That struggle will continue for a long time as wineries all over the globe are producing their own version of "Port." In view of all of this, it would appear that we have much from which to choose and satisfy our own palate. Good Tasting!