



... WHEN THE CONVERSATION IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE WINE

SUMMER 2014

The Mad Scientist

...ON THE ART OF BLENDING

They say if you want to discover a winemaker's true talents, taste his or her wine blends. So, we sent our writer to sit down with Winemaker Chris and find out why blending wine is such an art form.

Q: Let's address a basic question first. Why blend wine?

Chris: Picture a new box of crayons and you want to use them to draw a seascape. You wouldn't use one crayon for that. You need blue for the sky, tan for the sand and blue-green for the ocean, and so you make the drawing better by using different colors. The same goes for wine and using a variety of grapes.

Many people may not know this, but most wines are blends. The label may say Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, etc., but that doesn't necessarily mean the bottle contains 100% of that varietal. The government has specific guidelines on wine labeling. For example, a blend must contain at least 75% Cabernet Sauvignon in order to be labeled as a Cabernet Sauvignon. The other 25% can be whatever grape the winemaker chooses to use to bring out the best notes of the Cab Sauv.

Q: Your blending sessions must be a lot of fun. How do those work?

Chris: I start with an assortment of wine samples from different barrels and a lot of wine glasses that are specially made for aroma work. I pour some of each sample in a glass and sniff and taste and write a lot of notes. Then I take what I want my base wine to be – let's say it's a Merlot – and I start with at least 75 percent Merlot in a graduated cylinder. I then add other components based on my notes. I have an idea of what I want the final product to be so it's just a matter of getting there. I keep playing with the ratios and do a lot of swirling and sniffing and tasting until – aha, light bulb!

Q: Once you've created the perfect blends in the lab, how do you translate those very small lots into production-sized lots?

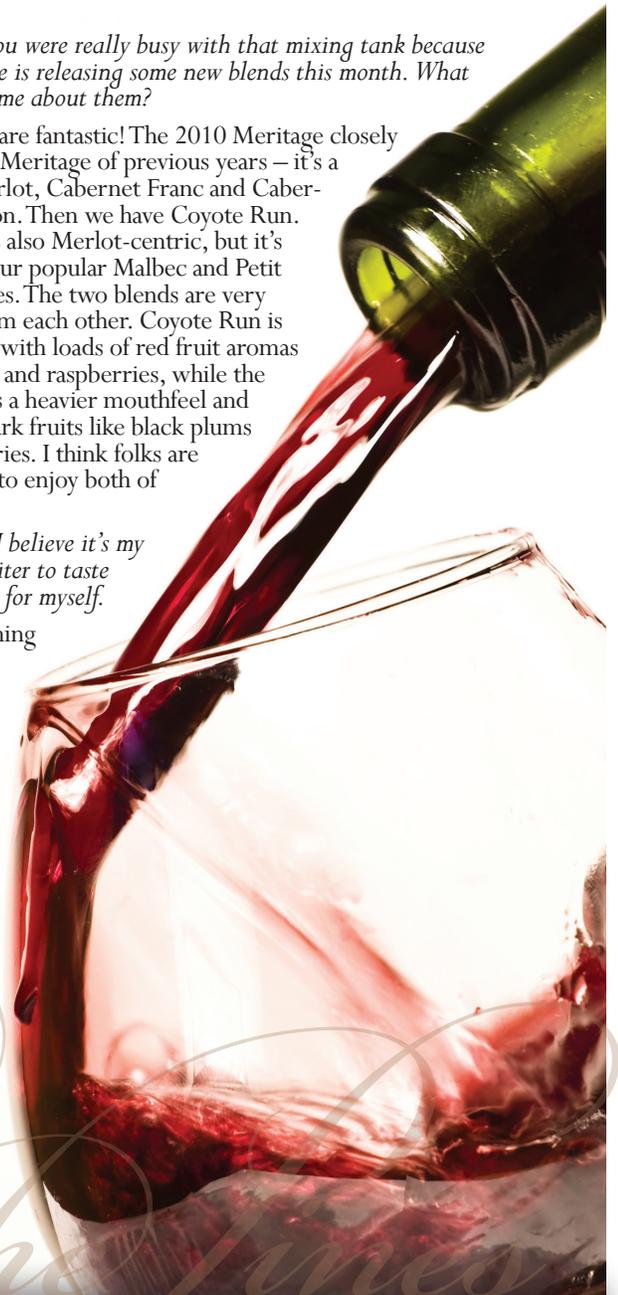
Chris: I use the same percentages of all the different components I used in the lab but with larger amounts. I slowly pump out my barrels into a mixing tank, and then I use a measuring device that looks just like a dip stick to keep track of the quantities. I continually take samples from the mixing tank and taste it, just like when I'm making a sauce – a really big batch of sauce! If it's not quite what I want, I adjust as needed.

Q: I know you were really busy with that mixing tank because Middle Ridge is releasing some new blends this month. What can you tell me about them?

Chris: They are fantastic! The 2010 Meritage closely mirrors our Meritage of previous years – it's a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. Then we have Coyote Run. This blend is also Merlot-centric, but it's made with our popular Malbec and Petit Verdot grapes. The two blends are very different from each other. Coyote Run is light bodied with loads of red fruit aromas like cherries and raspberries, while the Meritage has a heavier mouthfeel and aromas of dark fruits like black plums and blueberries. I think folks are really going to enjoy both of them!

Q: Hmm – I believe it's my duty as a writer to taste both of them for myself.

Chris: Opening right now!



Wine in the times

Inaugural Artist Series

...CELEBRATING THE ART AND HISTORY OF IDYLLWILD

Winemaker Chris and his wife Melody love Idyllwild – a town they are very proud to call home. They enjoy it all, from the tall pine trees that reach up to beautiful blue skies, to holiday parades, and the absolute best in music and art.

As winery owners with an appreciation of the arts, they always wanted to start an Artist Series label and were waiting for just the right time and subject matter. Along came Idyllwild Deer Sightings, the first permanent public art exhibit to grace the beautiful mountain community. The 22 life-size deer, painted by local artists, commemorate the art, history, and culture of Idyllwild – which was exactly the type of project Chris and Melody wanted to honor. They approached the Art Alliance of Idyllwild, the sponsor of the exhibit, about incorporating images of the painted deer on the labels of their 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon, and they also offered a donation to the organization for each bottle sold. The Board approved the idea and the creative process leapt forward.

With 22 deer painted by an extremely talented group of artists, determining which deer to feature was very difficult. The selection committee considered several criteria – composition and design, creativity and originality, historical and cultural significance, visual impact for label design, and appropriate fit for inclusion in a collector's series. After much deliberation, six deer were selected, with each deer showcased on its own label.

The Artist Series is comprised of two collections: *Midnight Blues* and *Origins*.

Midnight Blues



Dottie

By Kathy Harmon-Luber

Dottie's impressionist images feature Mother Luna in the night sky over Lake Fulmor. Formed in 1949 through the construction of a new Banning-to-Idyllwild highway, Lake Fulmor is considered by some to be Riverside County's most scenic man-made lake. With statuesque pines encircling the lake and a fully accessible pier, it's a popular spot for fishing and picnicking.



Winter Midnight

By Karlis Dabols

A warm cabin nestled in the snowy woods pays tribute to the ranchers who settled the area in the 1860s. With the advent of moving pictures many years later, the scenic Garner Ranch became a popular place for filming westerns featuring stars such as Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, and Audie Murphy. The iconic opening scene of *Bonanza* where four Cartwrights ride across the valley was also filmed there.



Jazzy

By Rachel Welch

Idyllwild is home to many talented musicians and offers a number of performance venues for local and visiting artists. One of the most popular events is the annual "Jazz in the Pines" held at the Idyllwild Arts Academy to raise scholarship funds for the nationally recognized boarding high school. Other musical events include concerts by the talented Idyllwild Master Chorale and the always fun, always free Idyllwild Summer Concerts series.

Origins



Spirit of Tauquitch

By Darcy Gerdes

Perhaps the most prominent and well-known landmark in Idyllwild is Tahquitz Rock. It was made legend by native tribes who told tales of disappearing maidens. Chief Tauquitch was suspected of the terrible deeds. Darcy's deer chronicles a boulder battle between the braves and their evil chief that tore deep holes in the earth and formed local lakes that we enjoy today.

Bella

By Jerry Baccaire

Bella's paisley design of 26 native plants honors the diverse flora and fauna of Idyllwild including the spectacular Lemon Lily, a rare local wildflower. So many of these flowers were removed from the mountain by tourists that the yearly Lemon Lily Festival was started to foster an appreciation for the threatened flower and educate the public of its plight.



Rocky

By Neil Jenkins & Donna Elliot

Rocky celebrates the history of rock climbing in Idyllwild. Starting as early as 1938, Tahquitz Rock drew climbers who would become some of the biggest names in the sport – people like Ruth Dyer Mendenhall, a pioneering Sierra Club climber, and Yvon Chouinard, who owns the outdoor clothing company Patagonia. In the 1950s, a climbing rating system (5.7, 5.9, etc.) was developed at Tahquitz and grew into international use.

All 22 deer sculptures were honored at a wine release party hosted by the Art Alliance. The festivities were held, fittingly, at the Idyllwild Area Historical Society, home to five of the deer. The Historical Society also carries a map showing the locations of the painted deer, and visitors are encouraged to pick one up for self-guided tours. Indeed, it is Chris and Melody's hope that this Artist Series encourages everyone to take a closer look at what Idyllwild has to offer and experience all that makes Idyllwild a special place.

Art Meets Wine

...2011 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Middle Ridge's inaugural Artist Series features more than a beautiful label. Beneath the brightly colored designs, you will discover the newest member of our wine family – our 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon. It's a very special wine. Not only does it taste amazing, but it's the first time that Winemaker Chris has used grapes from Santa Barbara County's Santa Ynez Valley.

"I cruise through Santa Ynez at least once a year because the cooperage I use throws an annual event for winemakers," says Chris. "I checked out the grapes and found that they're a good match for my winemaking style – I like nice fruit aroma, bright acidity, and good tannin feel on the tongue. These grapes deliver that."

The region has always been a favorite destination for California wine enthusiasts, and it gained even more popularity when the movie *Sideways*, which was filmed in the area, was released in 2004. The soil, formed from an ancient seabed, is limestone-based, which stresses the grape vines. In this case, it's a good stress – although the vines have a low yield, the grapes they produce have an excellent concentration of flavor. Additionally, the warm temperatures in the eastern part of valley create a great climate for heat-loving Cabernet grapes.

The winemaking tradition of the region dates back to the early 1800s. Spanish missionaries were well aware of the area's ideal growing conditions and planted the first vineyards. The wine industry grew and continued to flourish until Prohibition brought it to an abrupt halt. However, a renewed American interest in wine during the 1960s and 1970s spearheaded a growth in viticulture throughout California, including the Santa Ynez Valley.

When you sip our Idyllwild Deer Sightings 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon, you'll taste mostly Santa Ynez Cabernet with just a smidgeon of what Chris calls his "secret sauce" – a proprietary blend of other grapes that perk up the delicious aromas even more. "It's a damn good Cab Sauv to start with," says Chris. "And a little punch makes it Middle Ridge worthy."

Can't wait to try it? You can purchase the Idyllwild Deer Sightings Cabernet online at middleridge.com.

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Come taste Middle Ridge wines at Crush & Brew in Old Town Temecula, which serves as our tasting room, and at special events in Idyllwild.



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