

From James the Sommelier – All About Grapes

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours'

Here's a scenario for you:

Sommelier: 'What type of wine would you like to drink tonight, sir?'

Guest: 'I want a full-bodied wine. Which grape is more full-bodied, Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir?'

Sommelier: 'The Cabernet Sauvignon tends to be considered the more full-bodied, sir.'

Guest: 'Ok. I'll take the Shiraz then.'

Sommelier: 'May I ask what your eating tonight, sir?'

Guest: 'Oh, it's ok, just get me the Shiraz, thanks.'

Now ensues a Fawlty Towers-esque rant inside the sommelier's head whereby, while on auto drive and retrieving your glasses, bottle of wine, opening said bottle, serving the contents and perhaps making light conversation, he raves over the futility of the customer asking such an important question and then, seemingly, taking no notice of the answer and going with his own, apparently, inferior judgment. Because, boys and girls, any question over the *grape* of a wine is a question about the wine's character, its race, its ethnicity, its being. It is rather important.

Over the following month I will shed light on some of the most well known grapes around the world and what makes each type of grape so different to the point where different varieties make completely different wines.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet Sauvignon, the noble grape of the world, is the offspring of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc, the Angelina Jolie of varieties. Notoriously easy to cultivate due to its thick skin, loose clusters and subsequent resistance to rot and frost, it was the most widely planted grape in the world during the majority of the 20th century. Its worldly stance helped it to become a hero, of sorts, as budding wine markets (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Lebanon to name a few) were propelled onto the international scene due to producing quality Cabernet Sauvignon.

However, like Dr. Jekyll, this noble grape does have its evil side as its promiscuity can sometimes be construed as colonization, countries favoring the famous grape instead of the local means traditional varieties are sometimes uprooted to the point of near extinction as replaced by Cabernet Sauvignon. So, a sophisticated pirate, a Lord Byron among wines that, while controversial, would never be left off a guest list.

Cab-Sav's origin is undeniably French. How could it be questioned when its parents are bastions of French wine growing? More specifically it does tend to be attributed strongly to Bordeaux, and for good reason. The most historic use of this varietal is undoubtedly the 'Bordeaux blend,' a mix of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. A marriage of convenience, the blend was invented during Europe's Little Ice Age when vignerons decided to reduce the risk of crop loss by planting three types of grape instead of one. Of course, it does span the world over with noticeable contributions coming from Australia, America, Chile and Argentina.

So, what can we expect this cultured, wise, traveled grape to smell and taste like? Of note would be the aromatic genes inherited from its parents, the blackberry and pencil box from Cabernet Franc and earthy, grassiness from Sauvignon Blanc. On the mouth the character varies depending on where in the world it is grown. Old World Cabernet Sauvignon, picked at optimum ripeness, tends to taste earthy and vegetal, whereas if it hails from the New World it tends to exude fruity flavors, as the grapes are usually picked when overripe.

TIPS: When paired with food it complements any dish with fatty red meats.

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road,
George Town, Penang

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