

The syrah-shiraz conundrum

One grape, two names, multiple personalities. Whichever style of syrah or shiraz you prefer, there's no denying that it's an attractive glass of red. **BY JEANNIE CHO LEE**



Syrach stands out from other popular red grape varieties with its chameleon-like ability to adapt to different climatic conditions; it thrives in the warm growing season in Australia's Barossa Valley as well as in the cooler, continental climate of Cote-Rotie in northern Rhone. Its two popular names, syrah and shiraz, reflect the wine's multifaceted personality. Syrah, as it is known in France and most other parts of the world, is associated with a spicy, peppery red wine with firm tannins while shiraz, as it is often called in Australia, suggests a sumptuous, sweet, fuller-bodied red with chocolate and sweet plum flavours. Both are completely different expressions of the same grape variety.

High on Pritchard Hill in Napa Valley, on prime cabernet land, is a small percentage of precious vineyard land that is dedicated to syrah: the IX Estate, which is a part of Colgin Cellars, one of Napa Valley's top wineries producing distinctive, mostly cabernet sauvignon-based reds. Planted by founder Ann Colgin, the winery is not alone in devoting prime land, which can cost up to US\$400,000

per acre in Napa Valley, to syrah rather than the more popular – and often more expensive – cabernet sauvignon. Araujo Estate and Kongsgaard also produce excellent syrah that rivals the best from the Rhone Valley and Australia.

For the most profound, intense expressions of syrah from Rhone, look out for those made by producers in Hermitage and Cote-Rotie. At Hermitage, syrah reveals itself as a powerful, complex, spicy red with savoury herbs and meaty flavours in the hands of top vignerons such as Jaboulet, Chaves and Chapoutier.

At Cote-Rotie, another enclave for top syrah-based reds, the syrah grapes grown on the steep, schist and granite hillside slopes are blended with a tiny percentage of Viognier, an aromatic white variety, during fermentation. The result is a unique red wine of elegance, intense perfume and depth. Here, Guigal, famed for its single-vineyard Cote-Roties, set very high modern standards for both quality and price with its new oak-influenced, powerful reds. Hermitage and Cote-Rotie wines pair beautifully with lamb and roast beef, especially if the latter is prepared with herbs such as rosemary and thyme or a black peppercorn sauce. ■



Read more of Jeannie Cho Lee's musings about the Airline's wine offerings on www.silverkris.com