

SHIRAZMATAZZ



RESIDENT WINE EXPERT CLAIRE BLACKLER
APPLAUDS THE UNIVERSALLY POPULAR SHIRAZ...

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The universal popularity of Shiraz has to make it an undoubted star of the varietal show! Everyone loves Shiraz. There's just something about this variety that makes people go weak at the knees! Even the most hardened of critics can't resist a positive review for Shiraz. Character roles of "smooth and velvety", "rich and complex", "approachable yet sophisticated" secure its name up there with the best.

Shiraz and its alter ego Syrah are exactly the same black grape variety. Historically, the name adopted depended on where the grape was grown - "Shiraz" in the wine "New World" (e.g. Chile, Australia, New Zealand) and "Syrah" in the wine "Old-World" (e.g. France, Italy, Spain). More recently, however, there has been a trend towards using the names to represent the style of wine. Shiraz alluding to hot climate, full-bodied, fruit-driven blockbusters and Syrah, a warm climate, medium to full-

bodied herbaceous showing. Marketing departments and wine-makers will no doubt argue at length as to whether a wine will be called Shiraz or Syrah, as the name used will definitely influence who buys it!

A HOT ACT

Shiraz likes it hot. The fruit just doesn't ripen properly in a cool climate. The abundance of sunshine and warmth in Australia makes it a perfect climate to ripen the grapes and produce the full-bodied and rich wines that typify Australian Shiraz. Expect sumptuous blackberry, plum and cherry fruit combined with chocolate and sweet spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg. If that isn't enough, many Australian wines are matured in American oak which then finishes the wine with additional characteristics of smoke, sweet vanilla and coconut! The very hot areas of Hunter Valley, McLaren Vale and Barossa Valley are particularly famed for their Shiraz. Two Hands Gnarly Dudes (www.everywine.co.uk, £13.68) is just the most wonderful example. It's a big wine suited to big food. In the summer - spicy barbecued kebabs, ribs and char-grilled sausages. In the winter - casseroles and curries!

WARM RECEPTION

Shiraz's classic European home, where it generally prefers to be called Syrah, is the warm climate of the Northern Rhone in France. One can expect the same rich dark fruit, but with a generous seasoning of freshly ground black pepper and an infusion of seductive perfume. The French, naturally, use French oak which has a closer grain than American oak and the spice, pepper, smoke and dried herb characters tend to be more subtle and restrained! Caves de Tain Crozes Hermitage (Sainsbury's, £5.69).

ALL ROUND PERFORMANCE

Shiraz is a versatile grape, producing a wide range of wine styles depending on where it is grown and how it is handled during winemaking. Quite apart from the still red wines for which it is best known, it also appears in other guises.

Rosé - produced if the grape skins are left to macerate with the grape juice for a short while, for example, the charming Buenas Ondas Syrah Rosé from Argentina (Vintage Roots, £6.99).

Sparkling Red - a uniquely Australian style of wine, made in the same way as Champagne but with Shiraz grapes! It is a luxuriously deep cherry red and a favourite example is Majella Sparkling Shiraz (The Fine

Wine Company, Edinburgh, £13.99). Bottle fermented with a splash of vintage port for extra decadence!

Fortified - a very similar style to Ruby Port, which cannot legally be referred to as Port (at least not in the EU!), is another Australian speciality.

A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE

A style of wine that has recently become quite trendy (despite the French doing it for years) is the blending of Shiraz with the white grape variety Viognier. A few bunches of Viognier grapes are added to the fermentation vat with the Shiraz and they are co-fermented. Viognier makes the wine silkier, darker, more complex and aromatic. Try d'Arenberg Laughing Magpie Shiraz-Viognier (Co-op, £11.99).

AND NOW...

You've read the review, don't miss the live performance. It comes highly recommended!

The Classic Grape Varieties – Syrah/Shiraz tasting will be held on 16th April 2008 at Henderson's Wine Bar, Hanover Street, Edinburgh. Tickets are £30, to include a two course dinner designed to match the grape variety.



Claire Blackler is head tutor at Case Studies Wine School (www.casestudieswineschool.co.uk) which offers wine training courses and events in Edinburgh and Glasgow.