

# Different grapes blend successfully

Of the countless steps taken in producing wine, one of the most dramatic and misunderstood is that of blending. While it is undoubtedly true that "80 percent of a wine's quality comes from the field," i.e., the quality of the grape used, one great contribution of the winemaker is in successfully blending different batches of wine together, whether he, or she, is assembling a humble red wine or crafting a superior Cabernet Sauvignon.

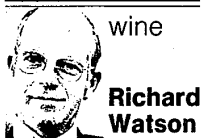
Wines are blended together for a variety of reasons, some of them pragmatic, some esthetic. Generic wines fall more into the former category. In these, it is not unusual for several different kinds of grapes to be blended together, even from different vineyards. Common combinations are Chenin Blanc added to Thompson Seedless to provide flavor, French Colombard added to Chenin Blanc to add acidity, Zinfandel coupled with spicy and rich Petite Sirah. The list goes on.

**BLENDED ACCOMPLISHES** a basic mission: to make the flavors of the wine more complex and palatable than is afforded by using a single variety. And simple Valley wines that are small producers, by adding a small amount of intense, costly and flavorful wine, can be turned from uninteresting to palatable and still can be offered at inexpensive prices for everyday consumption.

However, it is with the premium varieties that most of the confusion occurs. In spite of the occasional boast that is seen on some California Cabernet Sauvignons, for example, that the wine is "100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon," the simple fact is that this grape usually benefits greatly from being blended with others to develop a wine of great complexity.

The French have long known this and, increasingly, the word is spreading to Napa and its neighbors.

With red wines the one exception to this principle of cross-grape blending is Pinot Noir (Burgundy) which rarely can be blended. Complexity is obtained in other ways with this delicate grape. Cabernet is enhanced in depth, complexity and flavor when it has certain other wines blended with it. Most frequently used is Merlot, used to soften



**wine**  
**Richard Watson**

Cabernet and add a degree of class to it that Cabernet alone usually does not have.

**FIFTEEN PERCENT** is a rough amount that is used. Also used for a variety of purposes are Malbec, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc, in themselves rather uninteresting but marvelous complements to the major grape.

The reverse also occurs. Cabernet can be used to enhance Merlot, as is the case with most St. Emilion and Pomerol wines. With these, the Cabernet is used to add tannin and fruit depth to the otherwise rather gentle Merlot.

Many other examples of conventional blends could be cited, usually involving red wines. Rather, let's go to the next level of blending. When a label reads "100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon," that does not necessarily mean that the wine in that bottle is all from the same vineyard grape strain, growing conditions or micro-climate, or even same vintage.

Wines grown in slightly different geographical conditions, using grapes of similar or related parentage, contain subtle differences that, when combined with one another, are superior to the unidimensionality that may occur when all of the grapes are from the same strain.

IT IS AT THIS point in the winemaking process that the genius of a winemaker can step forth, for in these subtle nuances of taste, color, bouquet, acidity and other attributes are found the attributes of wine which, Cabernet is enhanced in depth, complexity and flavor when it has certain other wines blended with it. Most frequently used is Merlot, used to soften

## PLAYING THE UNDERDOG

In this rather unusual situation, white has been playing a back game and finally managed to hit black after black has borne off 12 checkers. Now white has double sixes to play.

White could use his double sixes to close his home table, then bring his remaining men home and hope to take enough men off before black enters from the bar to win the bearoff. Of course, this would be a serious mistake, as the chances of white's winning with only one of the opponent's men on the bar are remote indeed when that opponent already has 12 men off.

If white could manage to close out two of black's men, he would be a favorite to win. If by some stroke of good fortune, white could close out all three of black's remaining men, it would take a miracle for black to win.

Since black cannot be forced to move his men on his own 3 point until he has entered his checker on the bar, white must play accordingly. That means white must avoid making additional points in his inner board. (A checker on the bar is a 5-to-4 favorite to come in on a four-point board, but more than a 2-to-1 underdog to come in on a five-point board.)

With this in mind, white should play two of his sixes by moving the checker from the black 5 point to the white 8



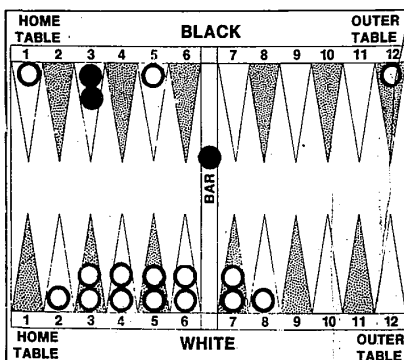
**backgammon**  
**Mike Giordano**  
of the Cavendish North backgammon club

point, thereby making a six-point prime and insuring against an accident. His remaining two sixes should be played by moving the checker from the black 12 point to the white 1 point. This play not only preserves the checker on the black 1 point — where it is perfectly placed in case black is forced to break his 3 point — but it also guarantees that white will be hit if black comes in on his roll.

Being hit is just what the doctor ordered for white, as it will enable him to play three or four more rolls with the checker that was just hit and maintain the same position with his last straggler still on black's 1 point.

Notice that if black comes in on the white 2 point, any 1 or 2 (except doubles) in the next few rolls will force him to break his 3 point, leaving three loose men. If black comes in with a one and subsequently rolls another one, he won't be forced to break his 3 point immediately; he will, however, be forced to hit the checker on white's 2 point, thereby giving white an additional three or four rolls to achieve the same end.

In any event, if black does re-enter on the next roll, he becomes a distinct underdog. If black is fortunate enough to stay on the bar, white will then begin moving his back men around the board, playing to go black for men later. If all this fails, white can always ad-



vance his prime and close out his board and still have a slim chance of victory. All this is possible for white because his back game was well timed. He was able to stay back and wait for his shots without ever making his 1 or 2 point — one mark of excellent back game timing. Of course, if white had missed his

shot, he would almost certainly have been gammoned and, possibly backgammoned. That is another mark of superb timing.

Questions about backgammon can be sent to Mike Giordano, c/o the Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

# New season of plays announced by theater

## theater

(Jan. 14 to Feb. 19), "1959 Pink Thunderbird," a comedy by James McLucas (Feb. 25 to April 2), "G.R. Point" by David Berry (April 8 to May 14), "Accidental Death of an Anarchist," a farce by Dario Fo (May 20 to June 25) and Christopher Durang's comedy, "Beyond Therapy" (July 1 to Aug. 6).

IN ADDITION to the regular season, a full season of repertory plays will also perform, beginning with "The

Woolgatherer" by William Mastrosimone (Sept. 9 to Oct. 9) and followed by "The Middle Ages" by A.R. Gurney Jr. (Oct. 21 to Nov. 20) and "Taken in Marriage" by Thomas Babe (Dec. 12 to Jan. 1, 1983).

More are "Auto Destruct" by Jeff Wanshel (Jan. 20 to Feb. 19), "Strangers" by Sherman Yellen (March 3 to April 2), "Calm Down Mother" and "Rites" by Megan Terry and Maureen

Duffy (April 14 to May 14), "A Voice of My Own" by Elinor Jones (May 25 to June 25) and "Rib Cage" by Larry Ketron (July 7 to Aug. 6).

In addition, a full season of Midnight Studio Productions is planned, as well as the continuation of the Children's Theatre Workshops.

For more information, call the Fourth Street Playhouse at 543-3666.

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