
Tierce 2008 - Creating the Blend

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Second round of TIERCE. A couple of weeks ago we three Tierce brothers and our assistants sat down and made our first taste through of all of our 2008 Riesling lots to identify potential blend components for 2008 TIERCE. After a few hours of tasting and discussion and a few dozen wines we arrived at two lots from each winery that would be represented in our next set of trials. Our second tasting session last Tuesday was both exciting and productive. Each of us has skills, views and strategies that are both unique and complementary.

When assembling a blend from such diverse components, and one that truly is distinctive from our respective wineries, lengthy discussion always prevails. We set very few rules about in our blending exercises. The one preliminary guide, though, is that 1/3 of the blend should come from each winery. There is plenty of diversity among the blending components and a nearly infinite number of blending possibilities, so in the 5 years of the TIERCE project, this general approach has always worked.

We usually start our session by tasting each one of the components separately, making careful notes as to wines' characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, assets and deficiencies. The key at this point is not selecting the "best" standalone wines to include in the blend, but rather to select wines that have great attributes that are likely to work well together. The next step is to see how the wines play with each other. Here is where some of the real differences in strategy comes in. I tend towards a series of boring, methodical tasting trials.

I might start with a set of one third each of the A's, B's and C's with ratios of A1:A2/B1:B2/C1:C2 as follows:

1--7:3/10:0/10:0 2--10:0/7:3/10:0 3 --9:1/9:1/10:0 4 -- 10:0/10:0/7:3

My wine trial shorthand dictates that glass #1 is actually about 23.1%A1, 10.2%A2, 33.3%B1, 33.3%C1. Make sense? Don't worry, my fellow winemakers look at me pretty strangely sometimes, too! Each glass highlights how each individual secondary component "plays" with the other main components.

After several progressively more detailed permutations of this exercise, we might come to a preliminary conclusion about the ratio of secondary blend components. Then we take this ratio of components which we identified in trials at 10% of the total blend vary the percentage up or down. Once we find what overall percentage the blend works well at, we go back and evaluate the ration again. This iterative process has a potential of being very lengthy, so if we are to ever finish a good dose of Aha! generally comes into play. At any point, one of us may say, "This is a little out in left field, but let's try.....", or "I had a dream last night the the blend should be...". Usually, in this case we'll set of a few glasses that dance around that artistic inspiration and explore whether there is a new direction to go, or whether we're already on the right course.

The most satisfying point in the day is when, with a set of six potential blends in glasses in front of us, we all simultaneously say "This is it!". That's what happed on Tuesday, after about 2 1/2 hours of tasting iterative and inspired blends.

The next step is to assemble the actual blend in the cellars, according to our notes. Then there will be further sessions to fine tune the strategy of the final finessing of the blend through cellaring strategies prior to bottling later this year.

The most exciting thing right now, though, is that the 2008 TIERCE is...Great!

Cheers.

David.

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