

Wine by Design

Creating a great blend

BY GINA BIRCH

It's one thing for winemakers to perfect Chardonnay or Cabernet, a bottle typically containing a single grape. It's a different animal to create a blend that can consist of two to five or more grapes. It's a great experiment for many vintners hoping to create the perfect representation and expression of what they grow.

Blends are almost always great food wines and usually a good way to satisfy the varying tastes at your table. These blends span the globe. A couple of them are long-time favorites from established producers; however, most of these are new to store shelves and restaurants.

The 2009 *Magnificat* (\$50) from Franciscan Estate in Napa Valley, California, is one of those classics. It's also a classic Bordeaux blend of 64 percent Cabernet Sauvignon

with some Merlot, Petite Verdot, Cabernet Franc, and Malbec to give it depth. The wine has a rich garnet color and smells like vanilla. It's not as fruity as you might expect, rather dry, a bit herbal, and smoky with plums, cherries, and lots of tannins. Be sure to let it open a bit in the glass after opening the bottle.

The rest of these blends are all great values in the \$15 and under range.

Bodega Santa Cruz Winery in Spain is a name that is well known in the wine world, as is B.B. King in the music world. These two worlds merge with the *B.B. King Signature Collection Red 2010*. Only recently introduced to the United States, this is a Crianza blend made from Garnacha, Syrah, and Cabernet Sauvignon. One never knows if wines like this are more gimmick than

substance, but this bottle opened nicely with tobacco, blackberry, plum, and spice on the finish. It has a hint of vanilla and nice tannins. It's a big blend for the \$15 price range.

A beautifully rounded blend from Argentina is *Casarena 505 Esencia*. It was made to represent the true essence of Argentinian wines, according to Martin Perez Cambet, commercial manager for Casarena. He says, "For me, no matter where I am, I feel the sun of Mendoza is in this glass." The blend is 50 percent Malbec followed up with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Its nose is earthy, and it has a big mouthfeel: mint, herbs, coffee, tobacco, and currant, with a cherry finish.

From neighboring Chile, try the *Casillero del Diablo Reserva Winemaker's Red*





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—MARTIN PEREZ CAMSET, COMMERCIAL MANAGER
FOR CASARENA WINERY & VINEYARDS

Good for the beach, meanwhile, is *Casillero del Diablo Reserva Coastal White*. The Chardonnay-based blend is toasty, but the addition of Moscato means just the right punch of peach and pear. Both wines are new additions to the winery, which when translated means "the devil's cellar." Legend has it that a devil lives in the cellar of the winery—a story told by a former owner to keep people from venturing in to steal his precious juice. Still, many locals believe the folklore.

Another affordable new white blend from Chile is *Frontera Vintage White*. It contains floral Viognier, fruity Riesling, crisp Chenin Blanc, and a melon-y Pedro Ximénez. I was expecting this to be sweet and uninspiring, but it had a surprising depth with a good balance of fruit and acidity for the price tag.

You might not expect to find a good French wine in this price range, but the *Domaine du Tariquet Classic* delivers. Winery spokesman Ithier Bouchard says, "This is our flagship wine, the first wine we started to produce in the early '80s." The crisp

blend is made from unique grapes like Ugni Blanc and Colombar. The wine also has small percentages of Gros Manseng and Sauvignon Blanc. It smells a little grassy and it tastes fresh, with tropical fruits; however, it is still dry. The grapes come from Gascogne, a region of France that Bouchard says is known more for its duck and foie gras than wine. Serve it with charcuterie, pasta, or oysters.

You can find most of these wines at outlets like Total Wine & More and local restaurants including *Bistro 41*, *Bayfront Bistro*, *The Twisted Vine Bistro*, and *Decanted*. Stock up. Your friends will be impressed with your collection of unique, worldly, and what appear to be expensive blends. We'll keep the price points our little secret. Cheers! ☺

Gina Birch is a TV/radio broadcaster and freelance writer from Southwest Florida. You can read more of her musings at thebirchbeat.blogspot.com.

Blend 2011. It is mostly Syrah with 20 percent Carmenere and 20 percent Cabernet Sauvignon. It's a smooth wine, hosting flavors of plum, cherry, and chocolate with that signature Syrah spice on the finish. Good for grilling.