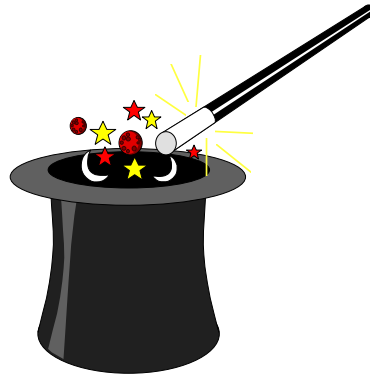


# THE MAGIC OF MERITAGE



*As originally conceived in 1988, Meritage is defined as a blend of merit (among the best wines a winery produces, likely in small volumes) and heritage (the Bordeaux tradition of blending varieties). Today there are many imaginative blends on the market.*

## **WHAT IS MERITAGE?**

In 1988, a group of American vintners formed The Meritage Association to identify and-crafted wines blended from the traditional "noble" Bordeaux varieties.

Canadian VQA wines are labeled after the grape variety that comprises at least 85% of that wine. A label with "Cabernet Sauvignon" indicates that the wine is comprised of 85% or more of the grape variety Cabernet Sauvignon.

Many winemakers, however, believed the varietal requirement did not necessarily result in the highest quality wine from their vineyards. "Meritage" was coined to identify wines that represent the highest form of the winemaker's art, blending, and distinguish these wines from the more generic moniker "red table wine."

"Meritage," pronounced like "heritage," was selected from more than 6,000 entries in an international contest to name the new wine category. Meritage is an invented word that combines "merit" and "heritage" --reflecting the spirit of members of The Meritage Association.

While many wineries prefer to use proprietary names in addition to, or rather than, Meritage, to obtain a license and use the term Meritage a wine must meet the following criteria:

- A red Meritage is made from a blend of two or more of the following varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, St. Macaire, Gros Verdot, and Carmenere. No single variety may make up more than 90 percent of the blend.
- A white Meritage is made from a blend of two or more of the following varieties: Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, and Sauvignon Vert (Muscadelle). No single variety may make up more than 90 percent of the blend.

Many retailers and restaurateurs are now responding to demand for Meritage wines by stocking or listing them separately in their stores and wine lists.

## **ABOUT THE MERITAGE ASSOCIATION**

A group of American vintners, frustrated with limitations on varietal labeling requirements, set out to create a special name for high-quality blends of Bordeaux varietals. The term Meritage was coined and the association was formed in 1988. Meritage represents the highest form of the winemaker's art, blending. It is an invented word, neither French nor English, a blend of merit (for quality) and heritage (for the Bordeaux tradition of blending varieties). Meritage® is a registered trademark of the Meritage Association, located at <http://www.meritagewine.org>, with 82 winery members in 12 states.

## **MERITAGE NEWS**

### MERITAGE ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP GROWING, BROADENING: CHANGE IN DIRECTION YIELDS GREATER CONSUMER AWARENESS

September 16, 2002, Rutherford, Calif. – Winery membership in The Meritage Association increased over 40 percent in the past year and a half, from 56 to 82 members, according to the association's chairman, Michaela Rodeno, CEO of St. Supery Vineyards & Winery.

Additionally, membership is broadening. Although California is home to one-half of the member wineries, members also hail from New York, Washington, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Colorado, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Indiana and West Virginia.

Formed in 1988, The Meritage Association made a dramatic shift in late 1999, changing its focus from policing the registered trademark to promoting the new category. Three years ago, only 22 wineries were members. Now, national press coverage in the Wall Street Journal and CNN, as well as a steady stream of local coverage, has helped raise membership, while also raising consumer awareness of these quality American wines blended in the tradition of Bordeaux.

“Now that many consumers have caught on to the concept, we want to help retailers and restaurateurs sell more Meritage wines,” said Michaela Rodeno. “For example, separating Meritage reds from the ‘Cabernet Sauvignon’ or ‘Other Red’ categories in wine reviews, store shelves, and wine lists helps consumers find these wines. That can only help retailers and restaurateurs sell more wine, stand out from the pack, and convey to their consumers that they ‘get it’,” she added.

The term is gaining more widespread use by both wineries and the trade. Although the Association's membership is currently limited to wineries in the U.S., the group's tenets have been adopted by Canada's VQA, and wineries from Israel to Australia have adopted the term. A New Jersey distributor has even named one of its fine wine sales teams, ‘Meritage,’ and numerous restaurants are now called Meritage.

## MERITAGE EVENTS

### MERITAGE VS. BORDEAUX TASTING

Professional Friends of Wine

<http://www.winepros.org>

Please read the Meritage vs. Bordeaux tasting notes by clicking on the above link for the Professional Friends of Wine page.

Professional Friends of Wine has an article that explains the genesis and meaning of the word Meritage. One paragraph says:

*"Meritage is a thoroughly American word which rhymes with 'heritage'. Turning it into some lame French word that rhymes with 'mirage' displays ignorance of the word's origin and disrespect for the association and its member-producers."*

One of the PFW readers sent an email commenting:

*"How can you admonishingly talk about 'displays of ignorance' and 'disrespect' in speaking about a word that (too coincidentally) is spelled like a French word, looks like a French word, and just so happens to refer to French wines of the Bordeaux appellation? Is the word lame because it's French? It's marketing B.S. since it can be 90% one variety and a varietal need only be 75%, meaning there may not be any difference between a good 'Cabernet' and 'Meritage' --that is, the mis-pronounced 'Meritage' stolen from the French. No wonder we (irritate) the French."*

Here is Professional Friends of Wine Editor Jim LaMar's reply:

*The invented word "Meritage" refers ONLY to American wines. Any use of the word that intentionally includes "French wines of the Bordeaux appellation" is guaranteed to insult the French. Uninventive retailers and restaurants may lump all blended wines into one section or category of their shop or wine list, which confuses the public by mingling distinctly different wine groups.*

*It is only the **pronunciation** of the word (as if it were French -- it is NOT) that is lame, not the word itself.*

*Are Chateaux Mouton and Petrus guilty of "marketing B.S." since they are each nearly 100% varietal? Do you not understand that wines can be 20% each of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petite Verdot and Malbec and still qualify as "Meritage"? The term brings blending freedom to the small, independent winery that lacks the resources to promote an invented proprietary name for wines that otherwise could not be legally sold as varietal. (Personally, I think of "marketing B.S." as the practice of pricing wine based on scarcity, rather than quality, but that's an entirely different subject.)*

*"Meritage" also brings clarity to the consumer ... but only if he understands the term.*

*Cheers, Jim LaMar*

## **WINE SOCIETY NEWS - Cellar Notes**



*Meritage Association President Michaela Rodeno answers questions about Meritage wine and the Meritage Association in the October/November 2001 publication of the International Wine Society. In the article, Michaela states that she encourages restaurants and stores to separate Meritage from the Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc sections on wine lists and shelves. Michaela adds: "We want consumers to look to Meritage as a signpost for a winery's best wine."*

To obtain a copy of this information,  
visit our website at:  
[www.sumacridge.com](http://www.sumacridge.com)

*Source: The American Meritage Association*