



# Merry Monks

## Wine Club of Cantiga Wineworks



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## Rhônes and Clones

The vast majority of the wine-producing world considers Syrah and Shiraz to be the same grape sporting two different names. Having worked extensively with the Australian clone in the Rorden home winery, we weren't so sure. In our experience, the grapes presented distinct differences in fruit and spice profiles, although they were very similar in structure. So, in 2003 we decided to see for ourselves, planting both French (Rhône Valley) and Australian clones in our estate vineyard.

In 2007, we produced our first side-by-side comparison of these two estate-grown wines. This was released to our wine club five years later, in 2012—a few of you may still remember this. At that time, we challenged our club members to taste for themselves whether there were discernable differences between the two grapes, and formulate an opinion on whether these differences are pronounced enough to consider Syrah and Shiraz two different wine varieties.

Since then, we have released multiple vintages of this comparison. Our vineyard is considerably more mature, and this is reflected in the character of the fruit we are harvesting. Perhaps our long-time members could humor us and revisit this comparison; and our newer members might enjoy exploring the topic for the first time.

### A little history...

The Shiraz (Syrah, Fr.) grape is thought to be named after the city of Shiraz in Iran, near where the process of wine making possibly originated 7000 years ago. Legend tells us that the grape was brought into southern France by a returning crusader, Guy De'Sterimberg. He became a hermit and developed a vineyard on a steep hill where he lived in the Rhône River Valley. It became known as the *Hermitage*. A recent article by Anahita Shams for BBC News discusses the thriving wine industry in Shiraz from around 2,500 BC up until 1979, when Iran's Islamic rulers banned alcohol. However, she references DNA testing conducted in 1998 on French Syrah—the later name for Hermitage—that seems to instead link the Syrah grape to local French varieties, thus throwing into question the genetic link between Syrah grapes and the wines of ancient Shiraz.

Nevertheless, in 1832, a Scottish immigrant named James Busby, who is considered to be the founder of the Australian wine industry, brought with him vine clippings from France which he called “Shiraz.” The Australians have been developing Shiraz as their foremost wine grape for two centuries.

French-clone Syrah first appeared as a wine grape in California in the 1970s, and several clones of the grape have spread widely through the state. Around the same time, an Australian Shiraz clone was also introduced. It is available in several “heat treatments” (resulting from tests for resistance to pests and disease at UC Davis), but these are generally believed to be strains of the same clone.

In 2003, Cantiga Wineworks planted in our Estate vineyard two French Syrah clones and two plantings of Australian Shiraz—one a current heat treatment selection and the other in the form of cuttings taken from the original planting of Shiraz in California. The purpose was to make a study of clonal differences of these grapes when cultivated in the same soil, with the same farming techniques and winemaking style. In conclusion, yes there are distinct differences, but we love them both! Our Syrah, unfortunately, suffered from “syrah decline” that is decimating vineyards in our region; we have replanted this part of our vineyard with the heartier Shiraz clone.

## So...what's the deal with Syrah and Shiraz?

Most California winemakers will tell you that the only difference is the name (Syrah in France, Argentina, Chile, and most of the United States; Shiraz in South Africa, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand). Some may make a stylistic differentiation based solely on winemaking (Syrah for Old World style wines; Shiraz for New World style wines). The question we have posed in the past, and pose to you once again, is this:

*Have almost 200 years of propagating this originally French grape in Australian soils imparted on Shiraz enough unique characteristics to differentiate it from its French counterpart?*

We have polled many of you after Syrah-Shiraz taste tests in years past, and many of you identified noticeable differences between the Syrah and Shiraz grown in our Estate Vineyard and made in our classic non-ML style. Whereas the Syrah is characterized by blackberry fruit and chocolatey tannins, the Shiraz shows blueberry fruit and peppery spice, with somewhat smoother tannins.

For those who would like to do a fresh comparison of the 2013 vintage, we invite you to download the tasting guide we have attached to your club notification email. We encourage you to share your findings on our Facebook page, or else email us your results!

### 2016 Zinfandel, Herbert Vineyard (Exclusive pre-release)

Harvest Brix: 25.7      pH: 3.52      TA: 6.50      Alc: 15.5%      RS: 0%      ML: 0%  
Cases produced: 194      Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

At last...it's here! Thanks for your patience in waiting for the much-anticipated new vintage of our beloved Herbert Vineyard Zinfandel. It is now worthy of opening, but still quite young, so if you are able to put it down for a few months (in cool, stable storage), your further patience will be rewarded. This wine exhibits bright raspberry and pomegranate fruit, anise spice, excellent structure and acidity. This is our 14th vintage from the historic Herbert Vineyard. Like other vintages, the 2016 is outstanding with BBQ (particularly pork), as well as Italian or Indian cuisine. It is particularly enjoyable with tomato-based pasta dishes and gourmet pizza.

### 2013 Shiraz, Estate (Club-only release)

Harvest Brix: 25.3      pH: 3.77      TA: 5.77      Alc: 15.2%      RS: 0%      ML: 0%  
Cases produced: 98      Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Our planting of Australian Shiraz gives a very low yield per acre and gives us exceptionally high-quality, rich, concentrated fruit. This is a limited, "club only" wine. The fruit characteristic is different from the Syrah; it is more blueberry, enhanced with spice characteristics such as pepper and tobacco. It has exotic notes, and one can imagine it being drunk by Persian poet Hafez when he wrote, "Bring me a cup of wine that is dark red and smells like musk. Don't bring me that expensive brand that tastes like money and smells like lust." Our Shiraz is not only outstanding with Australian lamb; it also complements spicy Middle Eastern and Indian cuisines.

### 2013 Syrah, Estate (Club-only release)\*

Harvest Brix: 26.0      pH: 3.77      TA: 6.05      Alc: 15.1%      RS: 0%      ML: 0%  
Cases produced: 60      Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

The Sierra Foothills, particularly in higher elevations such as Fair Play, have proven to be exceptional for growing bold, fruit-forward yet balanced Syrah. Until our recent replant, our own vineyard yielded a tiny Syrah harvest with very low pounds per acre—and some of the best quality we have found. Like our Shiraz, this is an extremely limited, "club only" wine. The rich, concentrated blackberry fruit and bold tannins are balanced with cleansing acidity, resulting in a classically structured food wine. Enjoy this one with wild game, flavorful red meats and grilled veggies, particularly eggplant. It shines with Mediterranean dishes. Though we deemed the 2013 vintage ready for release, it will continue to improve for many years.

*\*LIBRARY WINES FOR UPPER TIERS: Professional Winos will receive a bottle each of the 2013 and 2011 vintages. Ambassadors of Oenos will receive two each of the 2013 and 2009 vintages!*