



REWARDS

Blending: The Rules

Blending your own wine is harder than it sounds.

MARK HEDLEY reports from beyond the hangover...

“I WANT MORE fruit!” says I.

“I want more finish!” says my editor.

“But what about the minerals on the mid palate?” butts in our industry editor.

It was our first blending session for Chateau Hedge – our very own bespoke claret created with innovative company CrushPad – yet it was descending into a scene from *Are You Being Served?*

Stephen Bolger, the company’s CEO, had travelled over from Bordeaux to bring us samples of our new wines fresh from the barrel, as we had not been able to make the ‘mash-up’ that had been hosted at the winery early this year. He arrived straight from a blending session at the London HQ of a well-known German bank. Apparently his clients had been holed up in the boardroom for hours debating exactly what ratios would make up their final blend.

“You won’t have that problem here,” we assured him at this, our first ever blending session. “We’re professionals.”

That was until we were presented with nine different but equally delicious wines: three merlots, three cabernet francs, and three cabernet sauvignons, including our own initial blend components straight from barrel. As we had decided to produce a

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PHOTOGRAPH by Mark Hedley



WINE
CRUSHPAD

right-bank style claret, we began with 80% merlot and 20% cab franc – and set forth to adjust our ideal claret from this point.

Crushpad offers something truly unique in French wine making: it allows you to produce your own premium bordeaux, participating as much or as little as you want in the process – from harvest to bottling. And for the first time in history, it allows you to blend wines from different AOCs (regions regulated by an anally-rigid French certification system). So you can assemble wine produced from, say, a Saint Emilion merlot with a Margaux cabernet sauvignon, or a Pauillac cabernet with merlot from Canon Fronsac – all in one wine. This is because the company rents selected vineyard plots from growers, rather than owning the vines – and because clients are making the wines for themselves according to the style and taste they fancy, rather than pure AOC considerations.

The 80:20 ratio was a promising start, but left us wanting. We decided to up the content of the Saint Emilion cab franc (from a parcel called Ikory Ouest belonging to Chateau Tertre Daugay) in an attempt to add lift to the finish. With three of

us judging, it quickly became clear we looked for different things from our wine. Although our editor was happy with the finish now, I wanted something fruitier (oo-er, missus) and our colleague was after something a bit earthier. So next up we went for an ambitious blend of 50% Cotes de Castillon merlot (Le Ruisseau); 15% Canon Fronsac merlot (the Pey Labrie, for the extra minerality); 20% Ikory Ouest Cab franc and a 15% fruit-filled Margaux cabernet wild card. Sadly, it was a bit like a coalition government: feasible in theory, but a bit crap in reality.

So we scrapped the Margaux and went back to simpler ratios. Just as well, as for some reason it had become harder to do the math. Eight bottles later, and every blend seemed to taste excellent to all of us. But I’m not sure that’s the sort of compromise that would lead to the best results.

Fortunately, I had circled one blend in bright red biro about half an hour into the process: 60% Le Ruisseau; 15% Pey Labrie; 25% Ikory Ouest. This will be our wine. Maybe. You see, we have a second tasting in spring before it’s bottled, so it could all change... [H crushpad.com](http://crushpad.com)