

SNOW ON WINE

Dr. Jeff Snow
Director of Education
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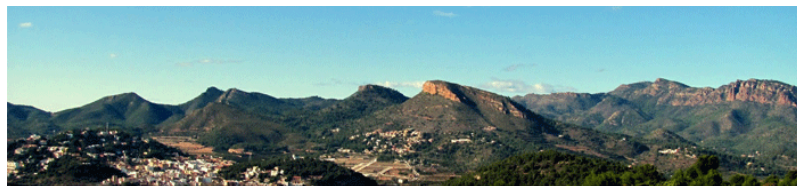
The 3M Grape



Although the Spanish and the French agree on very little, along their Mediterranean coast they share and relish the same grape. And yet they can't agree on a name! In Spain where the grape is thought to have originated it is Monastrell¹. In the Rhone Valley and Provence the French insist on calling it Mourvèdre. Although on both sides of the Pyrenees it may also be named Mataro¹. And although the Spanish and French may not blend well, the grape they share does!

In Washington, by any of those names, it is the "M" in the red blend wines we call "GSM". And here as well as California, Arizona, Texas, and around the world in South Africa and Australia 3M's plantings have been expanding since the 1990's. This trend followed the widespread fame wine writers like Robert Parker and others gave to Southern Rhone and Provencal wines such as Cote du Rhone, Chateauneuf du Pape and Bandol; red blends rich in Mourvèdre, which our "GSM" blends echo. And south of the Rhone Valley in France's Languedoc-Roussillon, and into Spain, the 3M grape is also blended but sometimes made as a mono-varietal wine. But Mourvèdre's great value is the structure, tannins and rich blackberry and dark stone fruit flavors it brings to red blends¹.

Monastrell comes from the Latin Monasteriella, or little monastery, suggesting it was first cultivated by monks. As it spread out over the world it has also retained and even gained popularity at home. Spain has the world's largest plantings, mostly along it's Mediterranean coast. This was some of the last of Spain to be replanted after Phylloxera finally arrived there and destroyed the vines in the early 20th century. But before the Phylloxera it was the main variety in the Camp de Morvedre



region around Valencia. And from here it apparently was taken to Provence where the French added a "U" creating the name Mourvèdre. Monastrell is the principal black grape in Denominacion de Origenes (DO's) such as Alicante, Almansa, Jumilla and Valencia along the Mediterranean coast. In our wine markets look for the DO Jumilla (pronounced hu-me-ya). Many wines there are nearly 100% Monastrell, and show off it's structure, texture and balance, and rich full blackberry flavor at a moderate price.

France has the world's second biggest 3M grape plantings. Over 23,000 acres today¹. An amazing increase from only 1,278 acres in 1960. This rise in popularity is despite Mourvèdre being a demanding and difficult variety. It is late budding, late ripening and needs high temperatures, yet is susceptible to "sunburn" if too hot. It is drought intolerant and has little resistance to many grape vine pests. But small, sweet, thick skinned berries can produce high alcohol and tannin levels and a wine with dark color and high flavor extraction. That apparently makes it worth the trouble.





Within France the biggest 3M plantings are in the Var, home of Bandol. Bandol wine must be 50 to 95% Mourvèdre. The blend is completed with any or all of Grenache, Cinsaut (also called Cinsault in the Rhone), Syrah and Carigan.

Boating the Canal du Midi last year near the Aude River in Languedoc we found Mourvèdre blends in the Minervois AOC⁴ and Corbieres AOC to be plentiful, wonderful and inexpensive. I later learned that Languedoc, with 700,000 acres, is the largest wine producing area of the world². It is responsible for over a third of France's wine production and in 2001 produced more than the entire USA².

"...Mourvèdre plantings along with all things Rhoneish have been increasing in Washington..."¹, so to get the inside word on how the 3M grape is handled locally I spoke with Winescape winemaker Phil Butterfield (a recent presenter at SES tastings). It all starts in the vineyard where he carefully monitors grape maturation, giving it ample "hang time". This gives our late maturing grape time to go from simple "sugar maturity" to full phenolic or skin maturity. The ideal terroir of Washington, at Kiona's Heart of the Hill Vineyard on Red Mountain, allows late harvesting and the full development of 3M's flavors and tannins. With late October picking, the grapes arrive cold (under 60 degrees). They are destemmed, lightly crushed, and the must warmed to 70 degrees so that primary fermentation in open bins will start immediately. Phil uses a non-native yeast specially selected for Mourvèdre, and adds yeast nutrients to keep the slow low temperature fermentation going for 18 or 19 days. Punching down the cap three times a day increases extraction and low temperature preserves more volatile flavor chemicals. Once fermentation completes to dryness, during an additional extraction of 4 to 5 days, care is taken to keep the new wine reduced by layering with CO2 gas. Finally the juice is pressed off the skins and the wine begins its 20 months in 2 year old barrels. Phil racks once during that 20 months as malolactic fermentation and maturation occur and keeps barrels topped up. Currently, all of Winescape's 3M is blended with other Rhone varietals, but Phil admits being tempted to make a Mourvèdre varietal someday³. "Difficult and demanding variety"¹ indeed, and a winemaker up to the task!



So what began on the sunny shores of the Western Mediterranean¹ has now traveled around the world. And although thriving as a new world wine in red blends both in the northern and southern hemispheres, 3M continues to shine and expand rapidly in popularity in its old world homes in France and Spain. Many of us have enjoyed it in Cote du Rhones and Southern Rhone village wines, and we all drink local GSM red blends. Now I challenge you to seek out other examples. Look for Bandol wine from Provence; Spanish wine DO's like Jumilla; Languedoc wines from Minervois; Roussillon reds; and Venture down under for Australian GSMs from Barossa Vale. Even California!



Today the wine market is world wide and we can all be world wine travelers with just a short drive to any local wine store or supermarket. But in the end don't you agree that we have some of the best 3M right here in good ole' Spokaloo!



References and notes:

- 1) Robinson, Jancis; Harding, Julia; Vouillamoz, Jose', Wine Grapes, Pp 3 – 1176, ECCO (Harper Collins Publishers) New York, 2012.
- 2) K. MacNeil The Wine Bible p. 293-4 Workman Publishing, 2001.
- 3) Phil Butterfield, wine maker and co-owner of Winescape Winery, personal communication.
- 4) AOC or Apellation Controlee is designation of French government control of origin and production of the best wines.