



Wine Blending With Zonnebloem

Posted on [August 19, 2015](#) by [Tandy](#)

I have been extremely privileged to have learnt so much about how wine is made, from viticulture, all the way through to bottling. But, other than knowing that blends exist, I've never been a part of the process. So, when Jani-Mari of De Kock Communications invited me on behalf of Zonnebloem to [come and blend wine](#), I could not say no. And I am so glad I went, not just because my team won, but because I learnt so much!



The Craft Of Blending With Zonnebloem

20 of us attended this media event and we were split into teams to try and copy the Lauréat blend. Each team was given a sample of the 2013 Lauréat and we were told that the blend was made up of 45% cabernet sauvignon, 40% merlot, 10% shiraz and 5% petit verdot. Each year the recipe itself will change and the 5% component might come from cabernet franc grapes instead of the petit verdot used for the 2013 blend. We were told that petit verdot can rescue any blend and adds backbone to the wine.



Our Blending Station

The sample wine we tasted was a deep red colour with ripe plums and berries on the nose and a hint of spice and black pepper. The wine is fruit driven, meaning it pairs well with food and is full bodied and dry. The flavours of dark fruit stood out for me, with a hint of dark chocolate in the background. The tannins were not overpowering and the cigar finish was long with the wine lingering delightfully on the palate.



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Some Of The Wines

The winemakers create the Lauréat blend by starting off with a tasting of 30 different single varietal wines. They will choose the ones that will best give the characteristics that they want and discard the rest. The chosen wines will then be blended until the perfect blend is achieved.



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Blending Equipment

We were only given 8 wines to sample for our blend and the first cabernet sauvignon tasted like dark berries with oak spice. The second sample was more dark fruit and cigar and the third was the cedar component we needed, with a hint of mint. Our first merlot was plum and “yum” and for this reason it went to the top of our list. The second merlot was more ripe berries with a taste of Christmas and very dry. We then tasted the first shiraz which was dry and full of spice and tannins and the second shiraz was plum and black pepper with dry tannins. We only had one bottle of petit verdot which was dry and fruity and this made our blending slightly easier.



Wine Tasting In Progress

As a team we immediately discarded the first cabernet sauvignon bottle. I wanted to highlight the second sample but my team felt that the third one was more dominant. We set about making our blends and this was our first attempt:

- 5mls petit verdot - the given
- 20mls cabernet sauvignon sample 2
- 25mls cabernet sauvignon sample 3
- 40mls merlot sample 1
- 10mls shiraz sample 2



My Tasting Notes

Not 100% happy with this effort, we decided to only change one thing for the second blend. This is a habit I have picked up from Dave who as a race engineer always tells people to only change one thing on their race car to see if it works or not. Our second glass was as follows:

- 5mls petit verdot - the given
- 25mls cabernet sauvignon sample 2
- 20mls cabernet sauvignon sample 3
- 40mls merlot sample 1
- 10mls shiraz sample 2

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Our Yet To Be Filled Bottles

We were much happier with this blend and Tessa de Kock said it was good, but not perfect. James (one of the winemakers) was quite impressed with this sample. We then made our third glass from:

- 5mls petit verdot - the given
- 25mls cabernet sauvignon sample 2
- 20mls cabernet sauvignon sample 3
- 30mls merlot sample 1
- 10mls merlot sample 2
- 10mls shiraz sample 2



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Calculating Our Blend

and straight away we could tell that the merlot was not right. We decided on one more blend:

- 5mls petit verdot - the given
- 25mls cabernet sauvignon sample 2
- 20mls cabernet sauvignon sample 3
- 40mls merlot sample 1
- 10mls shiraz sample 1

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The Blending Process Is Complete

I thought that this wine was the winner, and as a team we nearly went with it but James was not as convinced as we were. We then made up our 2 litre sample of glass 2 and called our wine **James Says** because James said it was better. And, it won! Bonnie (the head winemaker) was not convinced we had only used 5% of the petit verdot, but I can assure you (and her) that we had. My friend who owns a wine farm got to sample the wine that I took home, both the original and our team blend, and he was most impressed with our efforts.



James Says

I could not have done any of this without my team members, Marlise Potgieter from De Kock Communications, Danielle Le Chat from House & Leisure and Danie Keet, who writes for Die Burger and Eikestadnuus. I would also like to thank everyone involved for including me in an amazing experience that I will never forget.

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The Winning Team - photograph supplied by De Kock Communications

Disclosure: I was invited to attend this function without being required to blog about my experience. This post is in line with my *blogging policy*.