

# Pull That Cork

WINE MAKES OUR LIFE MORE FUN.

## Part 3 of The Masthead Project: Blending Wine from a Wine Blogger's Point of View

Written by [Nancy \(CSW\)](#) on July 29, 2016

In [Part 1](#) of the Masthead Project we shared with our readers the invitation we received to participate in a unique wine blending project, expanded on the idea and took them along as our group of wine bloggers got to know each other while touring downtown Lodi. [Part 2](#) of our post provided background on Scottto Cellars, the winery sponsoring the blending project, took our readers along on a cider-making tour and a visit to Mohr-Fry Ranch in the Mokelumne River sub-AVA of the Lodi appellation. In this, our final post, we take you along as we sit down with winemaker Mitch Cosentino to create a blended wine.

### ***Sitting Down to Blend a Wine***

We all gathered at *Suite C*, located above the Scottto Cellars' tasting room in downtown Lodi after a satisfying lunch at the [School Street Bistro](#). Mitch Cosentino sat at the head of the table. The four of us (wine bloggers Cindy Rynning, Melanie Ofenloch, Pete and I) gathered around the table. Set before us was an array of wine glasses, graduated cylinders and pipettes. Mitch bought his own crackers, as he always does when he's judging wine, and encouraged us to use them throughout the blending process to clear our palates.



Along with all of the glassware and laboratory equipment was an overwhelming 11 potential blending samples. We would need to taste every wine while still reserving enough for multiple blends and tastings. And we would need to keep track of it all. It was a bit hectic at times, but we powered through.



The four most important bottles were labeled 2014 Sangiovese F, H, A and V respectively. The blend would be based on Sangiovese, probably, unless we liked one of the other potential blending partners better (we didn't). The first task Mitch gave us was to taste each Sangiovese and determine our favorites. We tasted, took notes and discussed. There was no early consensus. We continued to sniff, taste, talk. A blend of our two favorite samples was a possibility. Ultimately we decided to use F as a base, but H and A had possibilities too. We decided not to include V in the blend.

The four bottles of Sangiovese represent samples from four barrels of 2014 Sangiovese from Mohr-Fry Ranch, the vineyard we visited earlier in the day. All were aged in mostly neutral oak: F = French oak, H= Hungarian oak, A = American oak.

The sample labeled V was included because it contained significant volatile acidity. We tasted and made our decisions without knowing what each letter meant on the samples so we could be as objective as possible.



Next, Mitch moved our attention to the other varieties that were potential blending partners; there were seven in all. We tasted them one-by-one, made notes, discussed each wine's potential as a blending partner to the Sangiovese. Among our choices: Syrah, Barbera, Zinfandel, Petit Verdot and Petite Sirah from three locations. We decided the Zinfandel, Barbera, Petit Verdot and one Petite Sirah had the most potential.

Mitch was delighted (and I think entertained) that Zinfandel was among the varieties we considered as a potential blending partner. It was the first variety we tasted with the Sangiovese to determine if it passed the compatibility test. It was unanimous. No! The Zinfandel trampled all over the Sangiovese and the flavors just didn't taste good together. Mitch, of course, knew this would be the case. I felt very relieved we came to the *correct* conclusion. Mitch probably did as well!



We moved on to Barbera blended with Sangiovese and decided unanimously that the blend was too sweet. With two potential blending varieties excluded, we circled back to confirm our choice of the base blend before tasting the two final potential blending partners. After re-tasting, we confirmed our favorite base combination was a blend of equal parts Sangiovese aged in French oak and Hungarian oak.

Next, we moved on to tasting two blends of the French/Hungarian Sangiovese base wine — one with 5% Petite Sirah and the other 5% Petit Verdot. The consensus: neither added significantly to the base blend which we all liked very much.

Because we all liked the 50/50 blend of French and Hungarian oak-aged Sangiovese so much we went back to re-taste it. We all loved it for its perfumed aromas and depth of flavor. Did we really need to add anything to this blend? Ultimately we decided no. Our Masthead Sangiovese would be a blend of equal parts Sangiovese aged in French oak and Hungarian oak. The Sangiovese would stand alone! Once we came to this conclusion, Mitch confirmed that this was his choice as well.

I took us nearly three hours to arrive at our decision, but in the end we were all pleased and certain of our choice. Early in the blending process Paul Scotto joined us. He listened to our comments and opinions, tasted the blends, but did not try to influence our decisions.



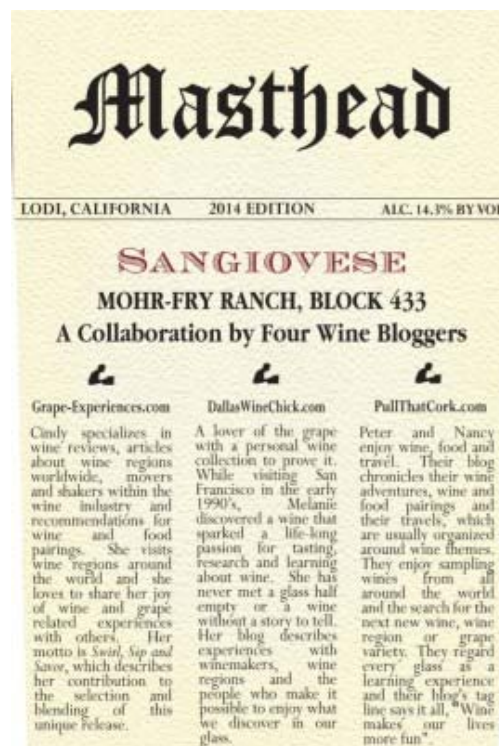
It was interesting to taste the Sangiovese over an extended period of time as it gained complexity in the glass and the flavors changed. Also of interest to me was that between the Petit Verdot and Petite Sirah I preferred the Petite Sirah when I tasted on its own. But, when blended with our favorite base Sangiovese blend I preferred the Petit Verdot. At first I was certain I had the two blends reversed, but that was not the case. It was a good reminder for me to always taste the wine in front of you without trying to second-guess what is in the glass.

### ***Our Work Continued After Blending***

Throughout the rest of June and through mid-July there was much to accomplish. We were all asked to contribute to the design and content of the Masthead wine bottle label. We assisted in writing the brochure that will accompany our Masthead Sangiovese.

We chewed our fingernails along with Brad and Robert at Scotto Cellars as we waited for the wine bottle label approval from the TTB. We felt nervous and dejected when the first submission was rejected over details regarding the Lodi Rules™ certificate. Everyone was concerned we might not be able to complete the project before the Wine Bloggers Conference in August. We were elated when the label was approved just a few days later.

The wine bottle label went to the printer. The brochure to accompany our Masthead Sangiovese underwent the final edit and was sent to the printer. *This was really happening! And just in time!*



The Masthead Label

## ***Final Thoughts and Thanks***

This blending experience was amazing for both of us. We learned so much about the compatibility of grape varieties in blending wine and just how much work blending wine really is (at least it is from a novice's point of view). And there is all of the work involved with label design and approval for which we had no prior appreciation.

To Bradley and Robert we say thanks for coming up with the Masthead idea and thanks to Anthony Scotto III for approving the project. I know this project has been a lot of work on your end and we are both happy to have been included. I'm pretty sure this is the first wine bottled by Scotto Cellars that bears the Lodi Rules™ designation and that's great. It is a reflection of the ideas of trying new things and keeping an open mind about wine that Anthony expressed to us.

We thank Mitch Cosentino and Paul Scotto for sharing their wine blending knowledge with us. And for your patience.



Mitch, Melanie, Nancy, Pete, Cindy and Paul

Cindy and Melanie, you were wonderful to work with. I started this blending experience feeling somewhat tentative, but our group worked so well together that I quickly felt at ease. We managed to have a good time while still focusing on the task at hand. Then there was the constant dry wit of my amusing husband. What a group.

Below are links to the posts written by Melanie and Cindy about the Masthead project. We hope you will take time to read them.

[Operation Masthead: Four Bloggers Quest to Secretly Make A Wine \(and Wait to Tell the Tale\)](#) by Melanie on **DallasWineChick.com**

[Scotto Cellars Masthead: A Lodi Wine Blended by Wine Bloggers](#) by Cindy on **Grape Experiences**

Now, on to the Wine Bloggers Conference!

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Cheers!

<http://pullthatcork.com/2016/the-masthead-project-part-3/>