



DIRECT PRESS

FEBRUARY 2022

FIELD BLENDS

What grows together goes together

There was a time, not too long ago,

when many people simply had one vineyard and made one wine. Grape vines were probably just one more thing growing on a small farm that sustained a small family, along with fruit trees, livestock, grains, and vegetables. In order to protect against the vagaries of each year's weather, a lot of different grapes were planted together. Some were known to ripen earlier, and some ripened later. Some had protection against certain types of fungus, others were resistant to pests. The idea was, even in bad vintages, you would still be able to get something out of the vineyard with a good mix of grape varieties.

In our modern, efficient times, the norm is one grape variety to a parcel. But there are still vineyards around, typically older, that are planted to this ancient field blend method that uses diversity to its advantage. In some cases, it's not entirely clear what grape varieties are even present, or in what

quantities. The important thing is the vineyard as a whole. What do the wines made from field blends taste like? Well, like anything else it depends on where they are coming from. But this method by nature makes for a blend that is hard to replicate, and the wines are typically unique. I find wines made from field blends to be interesting because of the inherent tension between the various ripeness levels of the grapes. Nature has made these wines in a way that a human couldn't, or wouldn't, by simply blending different wines together in the cellar to make a cuvée.

To me the more contemporary relevance of field blends is the emphasis on biodiversity. By now we have seen plenty of the risks wrought by monocultural farming. Relying on one variety can be disastrous — just look up the imminent extinction of the cavendish banana, a \$25 billion disaster on the horizon because of monocultural industrial farming.

Field blends are a compromise with nature, a hedged bet against an uncertain future and a gentle reminder that nature doesn't have to compromise with us.



Jutta Ambrositch and her dog in the vineyards inside the city limits of Vienna, where it was a tradition to plant a wide mix of grape varieties all together — some of these grape varieties are a mystery even today.

Not only is the ecological benefit more and more clear, but it also helps smaller winemaking projects, protecting them the same way it helped people survive in the days of small family farms.

At the end of the day, field blends manage to produce some really exciting and fun wines to drink, and we've got wines from Austria, Mexico, Spain, France,

Portugal, and Italy. They show us a broader and more nuanced picture of a specific place in the world in a specific year, a wider angle where you can't really control the overall composition as carefully. It's a compromise with nature, a hedged bet against an uncertain future and a gentle reminder that nature doesn't have to compromise with us. To me, that makes for

wines with a piquant vitality and bewitching poignancy. Hopefully you'll find the same alluring qualities in this month's mix of mixes.

Cheers!

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**Jutta Ambrositsch “Kosmopolit” Wiener
Gemischter Satz Trocken 2020**

Vienna • Austria

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

Some of the most famous examples of modern-day field blends are the *Gemischter Satz* (literally mixed set) that come from the vineyards planted inside the city of Vienna. Former graphic designer Jutta Ambrositsch is making some of the best and most adventurous wines in Vienna. The Kosmopolit comes from five different sites, all picked on the same day, and all crushed the same day. All the sites are interplanted with a mix of grapes. There’s definitely Grüner Veltliner — but also four or more other types of Veltliner like Roter, Brauner, and Frühroter Veltliner. A decent amount of Riesling, Zierfandler, Welchsriesling, Sauvignon Blanc are in the mix, but so are at least 10 other rare and still unidentified varieties.

Despite the dizzying collection of grapes, it’s a very focused, crisp white. Fresh and chalky with some underripe nectarine, stony texture, and a subtle smoky spice on the finish. I love the invigorating and refreshing tension in this wine from all the competing voices. It’s crackling and cackling with just the right dosage of citrus I crave in the dead of winter. JK

**Iria Otero Mazoy “A Seara” Castes Brancas
2020**

Ribeiro • Galicia • Spain

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

This comes from a polycultural field planted with a mixture of grapes as well as grains. It’s owned cooperatively by the small village nearby and farmed with organic and Biodynamic

practices. Winemaker Iria Otero Mazoy has a PhD in pharmacy and came to Ribeiro after visiting the area’s natural springs to help treat her eczema. She liked the area so much, she left behind her career in pharmacy to make wine.

The A Seara Brancas is a field blend of Treixadura, Godello, Loureira, and Torrentes. She uses concrete for fermentation, typical for the area, with just a small sulfur addition at bottling. Soft fruity notes mixed with apple, gingersnap, graham cracker, and salt. There’s just a little funk and some cooling eucalyptus on the finish. It’s complex and unique but still friendly and easy to drink. JK

**Martin & Anna Arndorfer “Vereinter Schatz”
Red 2020**

Kamptal • Austria

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Another Austrian field blend, this time a red version from the Kamptal, and it’s just Zweigelt and Pinot Noir. Gamey and juicy, with cranberry, rooibos, and herbal tea spice. There’s a little barnyard on the nose but not so much that it’s distracting. Lots of earthy, grippy texture, notes of iron, leather, and savory sumac. It shows the lively tension of grapes picked at different ripeness levels, but stays satisfyingly crunchy. Fermented and aged in neutral oak with just 10ppm of sulfur added at bottling.

When we did our Austrian theme in September, the two Arndorfer offerings were huge hits, so it was an easy call to include more from Martin and Anna. They have been pushing the boundaries in the more conservative Kamptal region, where their methods run counter to

economics by seeking harmony with nature. Their curious, playful, open-minded attitude has resulted some of the most innovative wines I've tasted in Austria, and the Vereinter Schatz is another highlight. JK

Viñateros Santos "Vila de Piedra" 2019

Castilla y Leon • Spain

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Mayu Miller of Viña Franca created the Viñateros Santos label to make wines that focus on out-of-the-way vineyards near Zamora and the Toro region. Much of the wines are sourced from fruit that had been previously sold off to negociants or cooperatives.

For the Vila de Piedra, Mayu enlisted Alvar de Dios, who got his start with the Commando G team, to make a field blend from a black slate soil vineyard near the Portuguese border at 2600 ft. These are old vines planted from the 1920s to the 1940s, and it's a blend of Mencia, Bastardo, Rufete, Cariñena, Trincadeira, Juan García, Mandón, Tinta Jerónimo, Gajo, and Arroba, farmed Biodynamically. The wine is fermented in cement and aged in steel, with 40ppm of sulfur added at bottling.

Alvar says he is "obsessed with freshness," and it really shows here. The wine is very floral, with orange blossom, pollen, and pomegranate. It's pretty and stays smooth and soft, but there is complex umami and subtle tannin that really adds dimension and brings it all home. Ethereal and layered, it's a singular wine that again shows off the spirited character that can only come from a wild mix of grapes planted and picked together. JK

Mont de Marie "Anathème" Rouge 2020

Nîmes • Languedoc • France

[Press 4 Red]

Thierry Forestier was making much more conventional wines before 2017. But then he sold some grapes to Eric Pfifferling of l'Anglore fame, and was totally blown away by the wine that Pfifferling made from his fruit. He was so inspired that he changed everything about his winemaking and his cellar practices. He was already doing excellent organic work in his beautiful hillside vineyards surrounded by oaks and boxwoods. Now he is completely natural in the cellar, too.

The "Anathème" is a field blend of Aramon, Grenache, Cinsault, and Carignan fermented whole cluster in concrete. Boysenberry, cherry, and grassy freshness. It's a lifted, lively wine that has elements fighting with each other in a good way. Nice spicy tannins and earth complement the fruit and help this cut through richer fare like roast chicken. JK

Bichi "Mistico" 2019

Tecate and Valle de Guadalupe • Mexico

[Press 4 Red]

We love Bichi, and we're so happy to have enough of one of their wines to put in the club this month. Founded in 2014, Bichi has become the leader of the Mexican natural wine movement, producing vibrant, living wines that are always fun and playful. Noel Téllez left his job as a lawyer to move to Baja to focus on farming and crafting these naked wines, and hasn't looked back since, building a ravenous following in the states and internationally.

Mistico is a field blend of all sorts of different red and white grapes from Tecate and Valle de Guadalupe. Mostly Nebbiolo and Tempranillo, but who the hell knows the breakdown of all the

stuff that goes into this. All of the grapes are destemmed and fermented in 450L concrete tinajas with 2-3 weeks of maceration. Once pressed, the wine ages in old oak barrels and stainless steel, bottled unfiltered with just a teeny tiny bit of sulfur.

This is perhaps the most approachable wine in the Bichi line up. Aromatically, it's a bit gamey, but has a joyful red and black fruits and herbal sagey elements that invite the drinker in. Spicy, smoky and fresh, the ripe fruit and rustic tannins create the perfect structure to build a meal around this pure Mexican wine. KS

Eric Texier Vignenvie "Calico" Blanc 2018
Beaujolais • France

[Press 4 White]

Vignenvie is a group of vineyard workers in the village of Charnay in the Beaujolais. The vineyard work is inspired by the "Do Nothing" farming philosophy of Masanobu Fukuoka, where the growers strive to let the vines flourish like they would in their most natural, untouched state. Calico is a special project from the infamous Rhone Valley winemaker Eric Texier, who makes the wine for Vignenvie and redistributes the wine to workers, barely any of the wine makes it to the states.

The vineyard is planted to many white and pink grapes, mostly different types of Muscats and Chasselas, as well as Pinot Gris and Grenache Blanc. All of which is picked and vinified together at Texier's winery. Nothing is added to the finished wine.

Floral and chalky on the nose, with subtle notes of peach blossom. Racy and bright, with apple, crunchy pear and juicy stone fruit. Great tension and texture, with just enough body and perfectly balanced acidity. KS

Textura Pretexto Branco Dão 2020

Dão • Portugal

[Press 4 White]

Named for the Portuguese word for 'texture,' Textura may be a young estate from one of Portugal's oldest winemaking regions, but they have quickly established themselves as the domaine to watch in the Dão. Founded in 2018, Textura organically farms 22 hectares of native Portuguese varieties planted on granitic soils at high elevations. Did I mention that the revolutionary Luis Seabra is making the wines? With all of these factors working together, how could these wines not be head-turners?

Pretexto Branco consists mostly of Encruzado and Bical, with a small percentage of Gouveio, Malvasia Fina and Cerceal Branco throw in the mix. All of the grapes were picked and pressed together, then fermented naturally in a combination of stainless steel tanks and cement vats, and was aged in oak, steel and cement for around 10 months.

This a beautiful offering that tastes too good to be called an 'entry level wine.' The nose is quite pretty and stoney, with delicate white floral and melon tones. On the palate, it's medium-bodied with well integrated acidity. Orchard fruits take centerstage to a backdrop of Atlantic minerals and pleasant creaminess. KS

Martissima Collio Bianco 2019

Friuli • Italy

[Press 2]

Marta Venica comes from Friulian royalty. The daughter of Giorgio Venica, Marta grew up immersed in the vibrant vines of her family's Venica & Venica estate, a benchmark producer in the Northeastern most region of Italy. At the age of 18, she began working harvest with father and brother, and later went on to work under

legendary producers like Dönnhoff in Germany and Pierre Peters in Champagne. She even studied biodynamics under the queen herself, Elisabetta Foradori.

Today, she owns a small vineyard in Collio, arguably the most prestigious land in all of Friuli. She works the vines organically, employing the biodynamic principals she learned at Foradori, and producing just two wines, a Collio Bianco and Rosso. The Bianco is a co-fermentation of the three white grapes she grows - Malvasia, Ribolla Gialla, and Friulano, all of which are picked and pressed together, then fermented two-thirds in stainless steel and one-third in barrique.

I've long been a loud and proud lover of Friuli - Collio produces what I believe to be some of the finest white wine wines in the world. They are rich, but balanced, refined, but approachable. What I love about these wines is their ability to please all sorts of people and Marta's Bianco does just that. A beautiful nose of honeysuckle, basil and ripe pear, fuses naturally with the full-bodied palate. This is "winter white" perfection, with bitter orange, fleshy yellow apple and a touch of honey and almond. The wines gorgeous textures builds seamlessly into a very, very long finish, making it a perfect contender for main courses, especially anything herbed. KS

DaTerra Viticultores (Laura Lorenzo) "Azos Da Vila" Tinto 2019

Galicia • Spain

[Press 2]

I think at this point I can say that I'm pretty much obsessed with Laura Lorenzo; her passion is expertly translated into the her wines, and I've never been disappointed by one of her bottles. Her wines do what a lot of

winemakers reach for, but never quite obtain: they tell the story of where and when they came from. And they do so unapologetically.

Azos Da Vila is field blend consisting mostly of Mouraton, Garnacha Tintorera, and Mencia, with a smattering of other indigenous varieties (some of which haven't been identified). As is traditional with the wines of yesteryear that came from this region, all the grapes are co-planted, picked together and go in to a mix of used chestnut and French oak barrels together for 15 days maceration. The wine then rests for 1 year before being bottled unfiltered and with just a tiny dose of sulfur.

Laura's reds are always delightfully rustic and alive and Azos da Vila delivers on that promise - it is buoyant, bright and delicious. The nose has just enough funk dancing playfully around the dark berry tones to feel unique without being polarizing. Medium-bodied with pleasurable tannic structure. The high-toned blood orange acidity works incredibly well with the black cherry and blackberry flavors that dominate the palate. A wonderful wine to pair with red sauce pizza, cured meats or (in my case) an Impossible Burger. KS