

The Vine Journey
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By Martin Tozer

"Other" Red Wines

In stores that have their wine department organized by wine variety you usually will find sections labeled cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, merlot, and so on. I want to talk about a couple of wines you will find in the "other" or "miscellaneous" section.

Cabernet franc is a red wine that we see quite a bit from Washington producers. While it is thought to be a relative of the cabernet sauvignon grape, cab franc is its own, distinct variety. In Europe it is used primarily for blending in the massive wines of Bordeaux but some other regions are making it into lighter, single variety wines. Washington grape growers planted this unique variety almost as early in their history as cabernet sauvignon and merlot. It seems that most wineries in Washington that produce cab franc use it for both blending and as a stand-alone wine. Depending on the growing conditions and the composition of the soil, cab franc grapes usually produce a light to medium bodied wine with more upfront fruit flavors than most cabernet sauvignons. Cabernet franc is usually a less expensive than its red cousins and you should be able to find several good examples at most stores in town for under \$10.

Lemberger grapes have been planted here in Washington since 1965 when Walter Clore and George Carter started the Prosser Experiment Station. This research vineyard was created to research what kinds of grapes would grow well in Washington. Lemberger turned out to be one of them. If you have heard of leemberger wine you may think of it as a simple little red that needs to be consumed young. On the contrary, the relatively low tannins and fruitiness of this grape make the wine very easy to drink young but it can age gracefully. I read a piece by another columnist who attended a vertical tasting of leembergers from one winery that included bottles from 13 different years. He was suitably impressed by even the earliest vintage. A good leemberger should not be too hard to find and you should not have to pay much more than \$10 a bottle.

I highly recommend that if you are a red wine drinker go out and find a bottle of each of these wonderful varieties. Lemberger and cabernet franc are both great grapes that grow well here in Washington and our local winemakers are very adept at producing nice finished wines from them.

A quick note on vertical tasting of wine; usually these events are sponsored by the winery and it is a great chance to sample wines of the same variety but from numerous vintages. Most wineries reserve a small amount of each wine they produce and designate them as library wines. This allows them to compare their current cabernet sauvignon to one they made ten years ago. Occasionally they will pull out all the stops and offer samples of a variety from nearly all the vintages they produced. This is a great chance to see the effects of aging wine and taste the differences that growing conditions have on grapes from year to year.