

# *Colorado Cultivar Camp:* **MERLOT**

March, 20, 2017

With special expert hosts

Sally Mohr, MS

Max Ariza, CWE



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# Agenda

- All about Merlot
  - History
  - Geography
  - Biology
- Benchmark tasting – led by Sally Mohr
  - Bordeaux, California, Washington, Italy
- Blind comparison tasting
  - Colorado vs. The World



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# A Brief History of Merlot

By Gundlach Bundschu

<https://youtu.be/6efO9ReiKQM>

# All About Merlot

- History
  - Origin
  - Parentage
  - Related varieties
- Geography
  - France
  - Italy
  - USA
  - Chile
- Biology
  - Characteristics
  - Flavors



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# History of Merlot

- Relatively Recent Origin
  - First appearance in literature in late 18<sup>th</sup> Century – just before French Revolution
  - initial interest in Merlot appeared in the middle of the 19th century due to its low susceptibility to powdery mildew
  - importance of Merlot remained relatively limited until the last 40 years.
- Now most planted cultivar in Bordeaux
- Second most planted red winegrape worldwide with over 700,000 acres



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# History of Merlot

- Parentage:
  - Cabernet Franc
    - Native to the Pyrennes
    - Parent to Carmenère, Cabernet Sauvignon, related to Txakoli
  - Magdeleine Noire des Charentes
    - Previous unknown cultivar
    - The first cuttings of Magdeleine Noire de Charentes were found in Brittany (northwest France),
    - No vineyard exists today,
    - Vines are known to have existed there between 1460 and 1477.
    - Also a parent of Malbec (x Prunelard)



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# Geography of Merlot

- France
  - Bordeaux
    - Graves, Médoc, Pomerol, St.-Emilion, Fronsac, Blaye
- United States
  - CA, WA, NY
- Italy
  - Tuscany, Lazio, Friuli
- Chile
  - Colchagua Valley



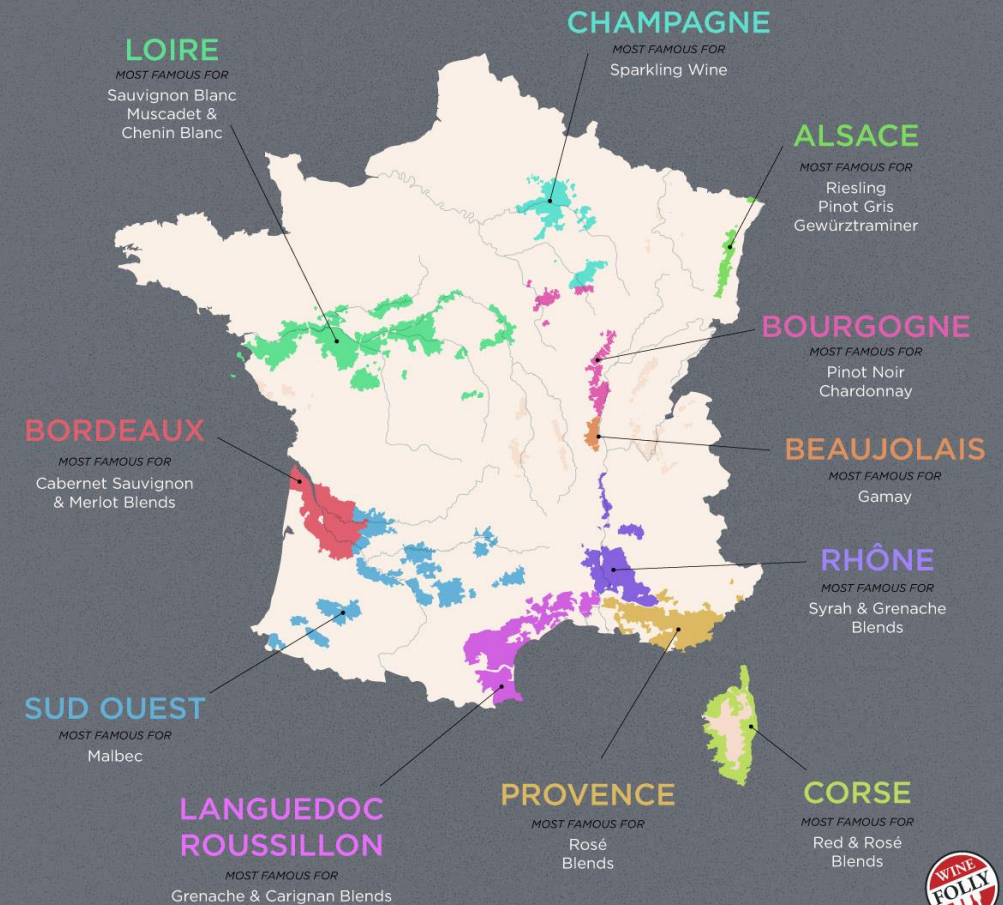
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# Geography of Merlot

- France
  - Bordeaux
    - Continuous wine production since 1<sup>st</sup> Century
    - Graves principle region until 17<sup>th</sup> Century
    - Médoc swamp drained by Dutch in 17<sup>th</sup> Century
    - 1855 Classification
  - Sud Ouest (South West) -Bergerac
  - Languedoc

## FRENCH WINE

• SIMPLIFIED •



<http://winefolly.com/review/french-wine-tips/>



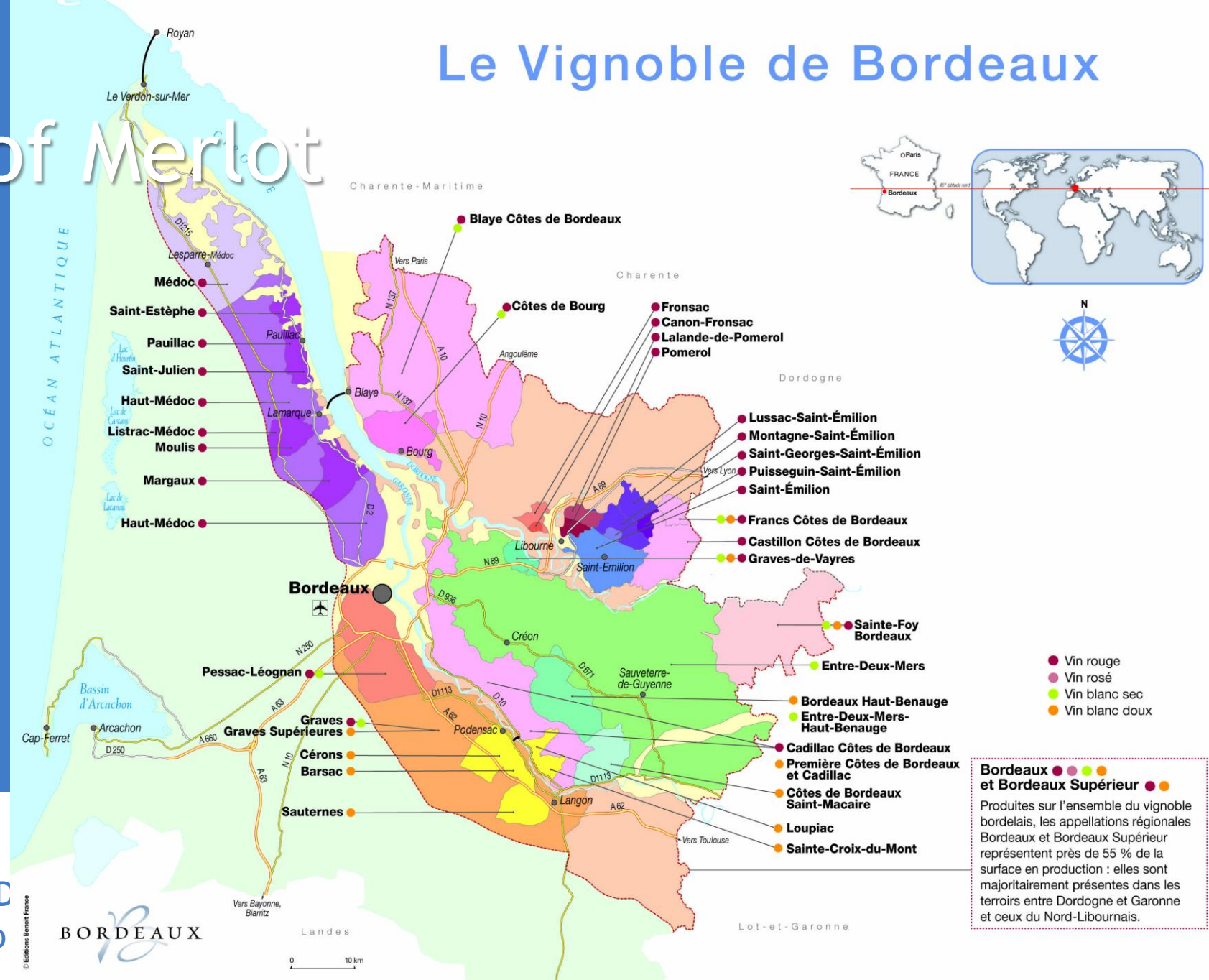
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# Geography of Merlot

- France
  - Bordeaux
    - 66% of red Bordeaux acreage
    - Predominant on the Right Bank
    - Bordeaux Supérieur
    - Pessac-Leognan
    - Harvested earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon
    - Still major component of Left Bank

## Le Vignoble de Bordeaux



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BORDEAUX

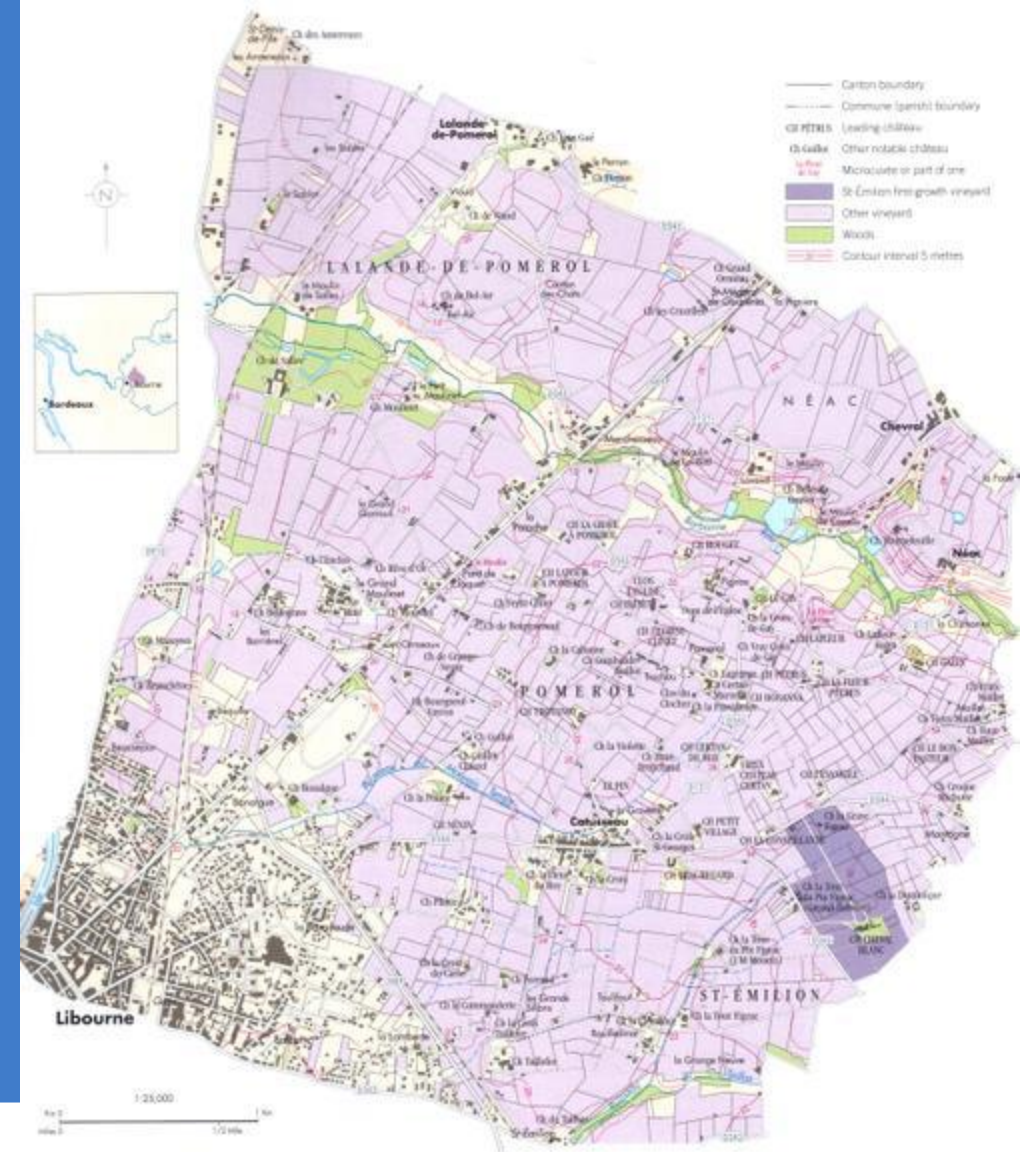
Landes

Lot-et-Garonne

0 10 km

# Geography of Merlot

- Pomerol
  - Smallest major appellation in Bordeaux
  - Clay rich soils
  - Absurdly expensive and rare: Petrus and Le Pin



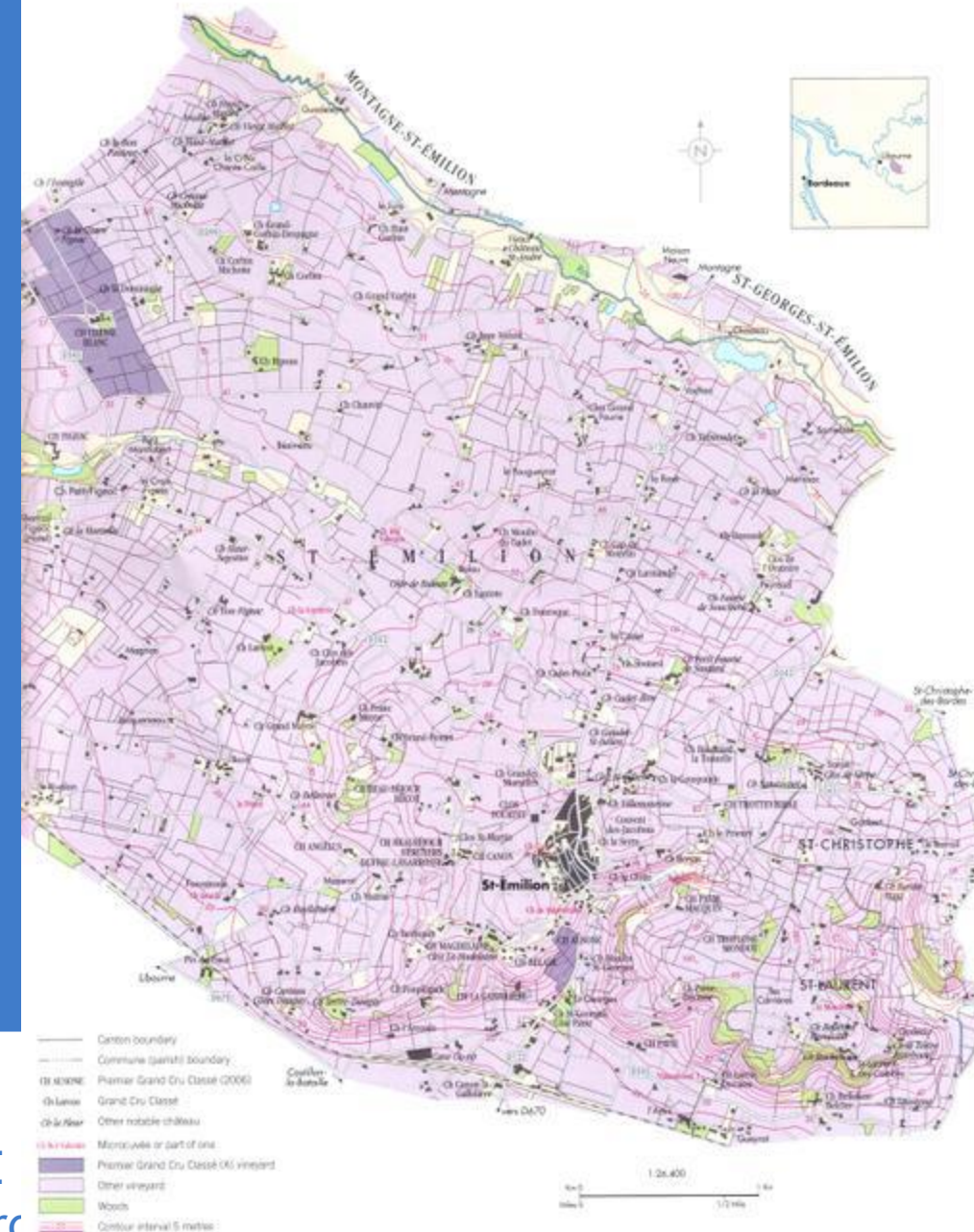
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• The average annual total production of each of these top Pomerol properties varies from 600 to 3,000 cases of wine – and prices tend to vary inversely. The trick should be to find a property whose size is as great as its ambition – but this is far from easy in a very small appellation which has already been subdivided many a time.

# Geography of Merlot

- St-Émilion
  - 2012 Classification (1958, 1969, 1986, 1996, 2006)
  - Can be adjusted every ten years
  - Four levels in the St. Émilion classification
    - Premier Cru Classé A (4)
    - Premier Grand Cru Classé B (15)
    - Grand Cru Classé (63)
    - Grand Cru (many)



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# Geography of Merlot

- Italy
  - Tuscany
  - Lazio
  - Friuli



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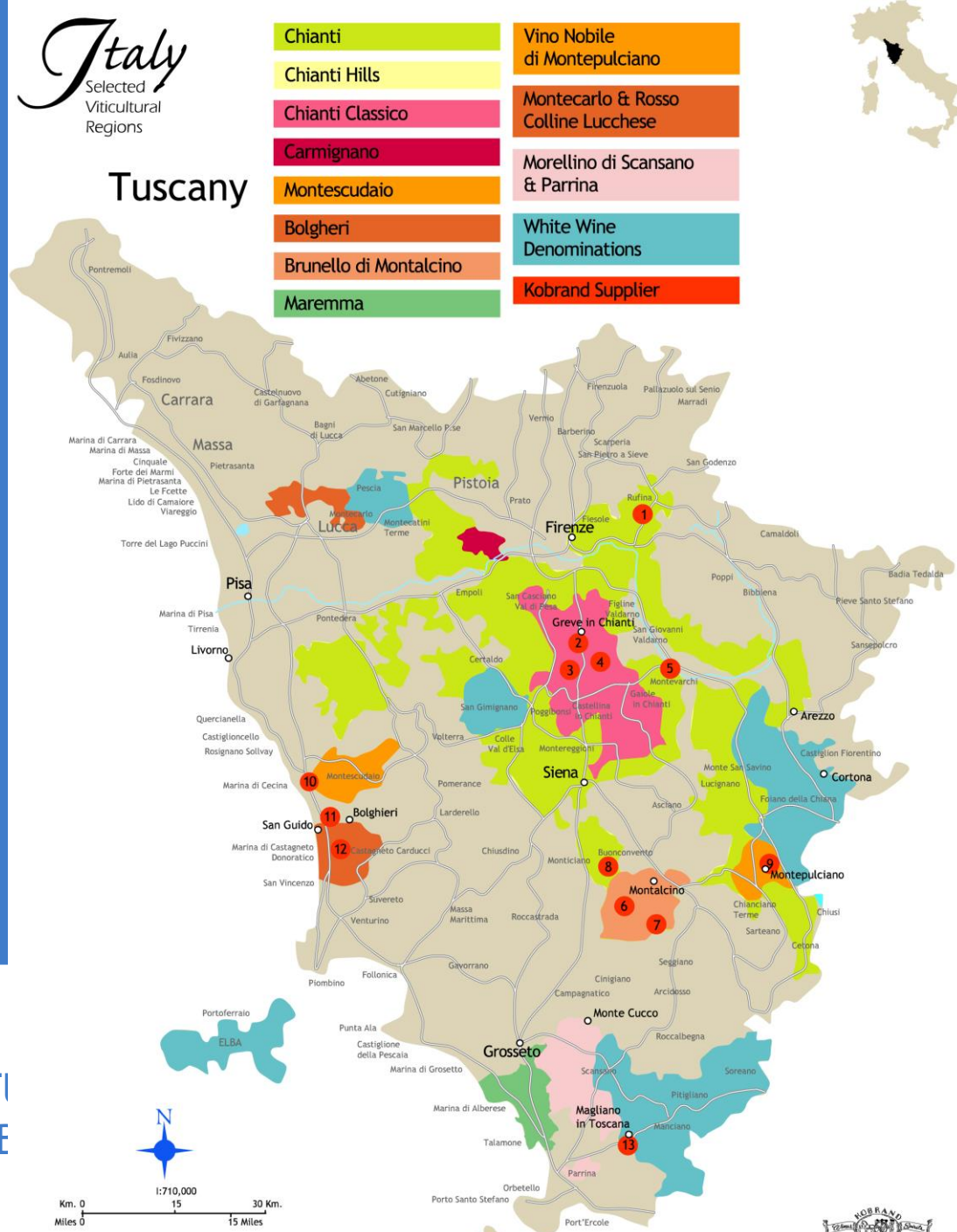
# Geography of Merlot

## Tuscany

- Super Tuscans – Vino da Tavola
- Originally outside of Italian law
- Maremma
  - Maremma, once an open, disease-infested marsh, has only been considered a world-class wine region for a few decades. Today, pretty seaside villages dot the coastline, but that, too is quite recent. Up until the 1970s or so, the nobles all lived in the hills, far away from the swamplands of the coast. That all changed when wines like Sassicaia, Grattamacco and later Ornellaia, Masseto and others exploded onto the global scene.
- Bolgheri
  - one of Italy's most prestigious vineyard areas
  - Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, though Sangiovese may comprise up to 50%
- Toscana IGT



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# Geograph

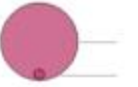
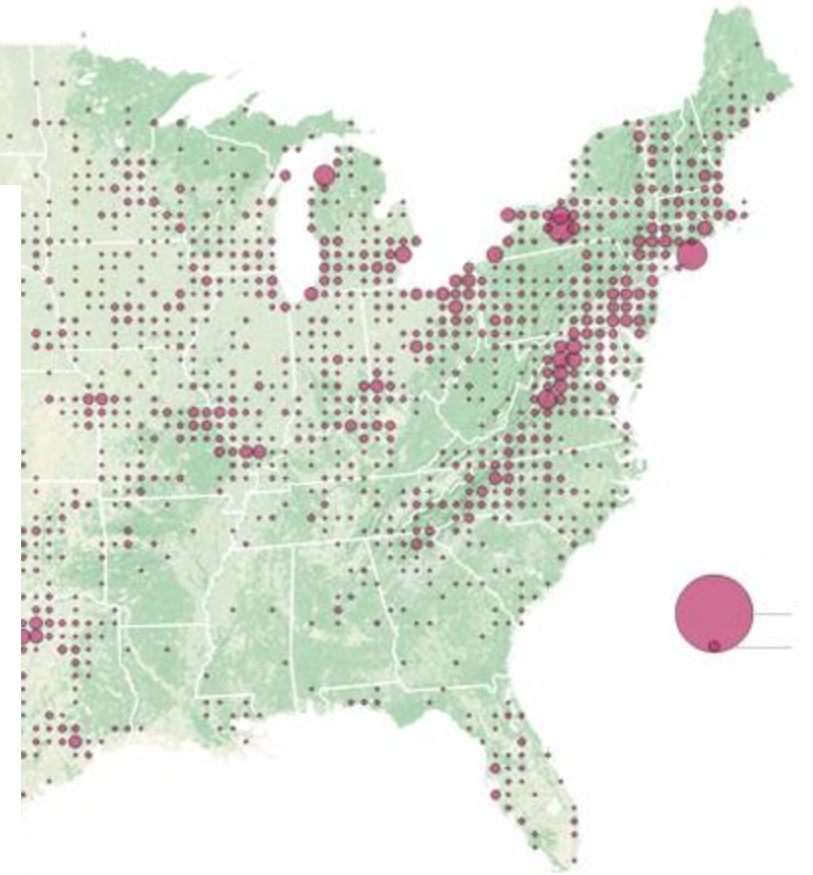
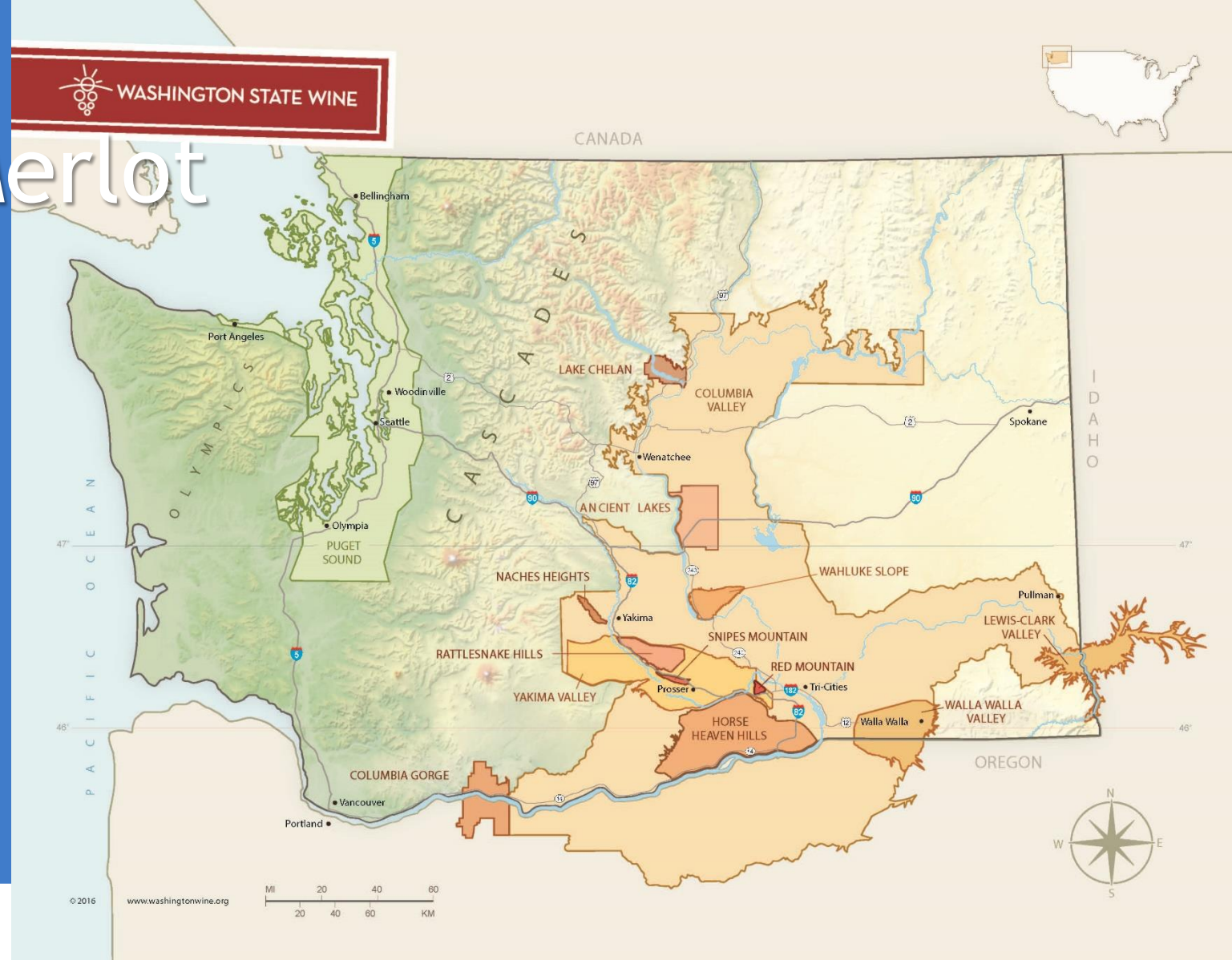


Fig. 16.1

# Geography of Merlot

- Washington
  - Walla Walla Valley
  - Red Mountain
  - Horse Heaven Hills
  - Wahluke Slope



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# Geography of Merlot

- California
  - Napa Valley
  - Sonoma
  - Santa Cruz Mts
  - Monterrey



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# Geography of Merlot

- Napa Valley
  - Coombsville
  - Oak Knoll
  - Atlas Peak
  - Stags Leap
  - Calistoga – Three Palms Vineyard



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## The Napa Valley Appellation and its Sub-Appellations



# Geography of Merlot

- Chile
  - Carmenère was widely thought to be Merlot
  - Colchagua Valley – Particularly Apalta region
  - Maule Valley



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# Biology of Merlot

- Earlier ripening – vineyard insurance
- More adapted to clay-based soils and cooler climates than Cabernet Sauvignon
- Moderately vigorous – up to 8 tons per acre in fertile soil
- Adds soft tannins and generous flavors to the more austere cabernet.
- Merlot tends to be noticeably lower in tannins and acidity than Cabernet
- Much more voluptuous to taste and, on the palate, provides lots of fruity impact in the middle to fill in the hole left by the tough, tannic framework of young Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Despite reputation as the user-friendly, early maturing wine, the best of these wines can continue to develop in bottle for decades.



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# Biology of Merlot

- Aromas/Flavors:
- FRUIT: currant, black cherry, plum, blueberries, blackberries
- FLORAL: violet, rose
- OAK: vanilla, coconut, sweet wood, smoke, toast, tar
- SPICE: caramel, chocolate, clove, bay leaf, green peppercorn, licorice
- BOTTLE AGE: truffle, mushroom, earth, coffee, leather, cedar, cigar box
- HERBAL: bell pepper, green olive



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# Quiz

<http://www.decanter.com/learn/winequiz/the-merlot-wine-quiz-test-your-knowledge-341719/>

# Tasting Benchmark Merlot

15 minute break...

# Benchmark Merlot

- 2014 Leonetti Cellars Merlot – Walla Walla Valley AVA, Washington
- 2013 Pahlmeyer Merlot – Napa Valley AVA, California
- 2012 Château Troplong Mondot – St. Émilion 1er Grand Cru Classé B, France
- 2011 Tua Rita Redigaffi – Rosso Toscana IGT, Italy



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2014 Leonetti Merlot – Walla Walla Washington
- \$100
- 14.3% abv
- 94% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc
- 1800 cases
- Founded in 1977 as Walla Walla's first commercial winery.
- "A soft, sexy and luxuriously textured red, the 2014 Walla Walla Merlot (there's 6% Cabernet Franc in the blend) is loaded with perfectly ripe notes of black currants, lead pencil shavings, charred earth and chocolate. Full-bodied and possessing a wealth of fruit, you have to hunt for the tannin, but they're there; still, fruit and texture are the name of the game here. The baby fat should slowly melt away and it should have 15 years or more of longevity." – 93 points Jeb Dunnuck Wine Advocate
- "Bright ruby-red. Deep, liqueur-like griotte cherry, wild herb and licorice aromas lifted by a slightly high-toned floral element. A lushly fruity, fine-grained fruit bomb on the palate, gaining creaminess with time in the glass. This wine has a pH of 3.52 following a bit of acidification. As sexy as it already is, the tannins currently impinge a bit on the finishing fruit, so I'd wait a year or two. Merlot for Pinot lovers." – 92 points Antonio Galloni Vinous
- "Dense, with cherry and herbal overtones in a package wrapped in firm, fine, peppery tannins, swerving into a long and expressive finish. Needs time to soften the edges. Best from 2018 through 2023." – 91 points Harvey Steiman Wine Spectator



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2014 Leonetti Merlot – Walla Walla Washington
- From two different vineyards
- Both Silt Loam
- 1,000-1,100 ft – Loess Vineyard
- 1,500-1,600 ft – Mill Creek Vineyard



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2013 Pahlmeyer Merlot – Napa Valley
- 95% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Petit Verdot
- 15.2% abv
- \$90
- "An absolute epic wine is the 2013 Merlot, a blend of 95% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Petit Verdot. It is no wimpy wine either, with the natural alcohol slightly north of 15%. A gorgeous nose including roasted espresso, melted black chocolate, blackberry, plum and cassis offers an exceptional set of aromatics. The wine has beautiful ripeness, headiness and a long finish of close to 45+ seconds. This is a beauty of terrific purity, texture and personality. Few California Merlots will ever be capable of equaling this. Drink it over the next 25-30+ years." – 96 points Robert Parker Wine Advocate
- "The 2013 Merlot is dark, powerful and also quite tannic, all signatures of the vintage. Black cherry, mocha, graphite, plum, smoke, licorice and menthol are bold and intense in the glass, but the 2013 is only showing a hint of its potential. Far from an easygoing Merlot, Pahlmeyer's 2013 is going to need time to be fully expressive. Most of the fruit in the 2013 is estate grown, with a dollop of grapes (15%) from Rancho Chimiles in Coombsville." – 93 points Antonio Galloni Vinous
- "Plump and silky, with a luxurious texture and a lingering finish framed by rich flavors of black cherry, mocha, dusty herb and spicy oak. Tannins ease in on the finish. Drink now through 2024. Tasted twice, with consistent notes. 2,844 cases made." - 92 points James Laube Wine Spectator



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2012 Château Troplong Mondot – St. Émilion
- Premier Grand Cru Classé B
- \$120
- 14.2 % abv
- 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc
- "One of the superstars of the vintage, it boasts an inky/purple color as well as abundant notes of blueberry liqueur, graphite, truffles, acacia flowers and subtle toast. Full-bodied, opulent and already easy to drink, this large-scaled wine possesses high levels of tannin, but they are relatively well-concealed by the extravagant fruit, glycerin, texture and density of this compelling Troplong Mondot. This impressive wine may shut down after bottling and require 4-5 years of cellaring. It has the potential to last at least 15-20 years. Bravo!" – 96 points Robert Parker Wine Advocate
- "This is concentrated and impressive for the vintage with beautiful ripe fruit, minerals, chocolate and light-coffee character. Full body, polished tannins and a long finish. Better in 2018." - 94 points James Suckling
- "One of the clear wines of the vintage, the 2012 Troplong-Mondot has been remarkable on several occasions. Sweet crushed flowers, red cherries, smoke, tobacco and plums open up in a heady, sensual Saint-Emilion that hits all the right notes. The 2012 blossoms nicely with time in the glass, gaining volume, but never losing its precision. This head-turning, flashy Saint-Emilion will delight readers for the next two decades, perhaps longer. What a gorgeous wine this is. Sadly, proprietor Christine Valette passed away in the spring of 2013, but her legacy will remain alive for quite some time with wines like this." – 94 points Antonio Galloni Vinous
- "Offers a solid, if slightly chunky, feel, with ganache and charcoal notes coating the core of dark currant preserves, fig paste and warmed plum fruit. Shows lots of smoldering tobacco accents on the finish. Pretty grippy for the vintage, but this is headed in a promising direction. Cellar for maximum effect. Best from 2018 through 2025." – 93 points James Molesworth Wine Spectator



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2012 Troplong Mondot – St. Émilion

- Vineyard size: 33 hectares (81 acres) on the clay-limestone plateau to the east of the village of Saint-Émilion
- Vine density: 5,600 – 6,600 vines / Ha
- Elevation: 206 meters
- Exposure: Southwest
- Soil Composition: Limestone clay with flint and chalk
- De-bud, De-leaf, Crop thin and a final de-leaf
- The vinification is carried out in small, temperature-controlled stainless steel vats.
- Cold soak prior to fermentation.
- Pumping over, delestage (rack and return) and pigeage (punching down the cap).
- A vatting period of 21 to 35 days with or without yeasting.
- 85% of the fine wine was run off the skins by gravity directly into new barrels and will stay there to age for between 12 and 24 months.
- Traditional racking through the small bunghole from barrel to barrel.
- The final blend will be decided at the end of the ageing process.



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2011 Tua Rita Redigaffi – Rosso Toscana IGT
- 14.8% abv
- \$275
- “Aromas of violets with liquorice and subtle brown sugar. This is a full-bodied merlot with fabulous tannins and a wonderful finish. It shows reserve and balance, with striking complex flavours of orange peel, light berries and chocolate. Pure magic. Goes on for minutes. One of the best Redigaffis ever.” – 99 points James Suckling
- “The 2011 Redigaffi (one of Italy’s iconic Merlots) is a little shy at first and needs a few extra minutes to warm in the glass. Once it does, it bursts open with sweet fruit, blackberry, dark leather and Oriental spice. The wine is beautifully balanced and enormously expressive. It hits the high notes and the low ones with tip-top precision. I loved the purity of the sweet tobacco and crushed white pepper you get on the seductively long finish. It’s a baby now, and needs more aging time. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2035.” – 96 points Monica Lerner The Wine Advocate
- “The estate's 2011 Redigaffi was just bottled, but it doesn't seem to be showing any reticence at all. Smoke, tar and incense all add a dimension of exoticism as this voluptuous, textured Merlot shows off its personality. Layers of fruit build to a creamy, resonant finish. There is a lot to look forward to here.” – 95 points Antonio Galloni Vinous
- “Initially marked by new oak, this intense, tannic red takes time to reveal the cherry, plum floral and spice flavors. Vibrant and long, finishing with mouth-coating fruit and tannins. This is saturated with fruit, and worth the wait. Merlot. 830 cases made.” - 94 points Bruce Sanderson Wine Spectator
- <https://www.jamessuckling.com/videos/tuscan-collectibles-tua-rita-redigaffi-the-vineyard/>



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# Benchmark Merlot

- 2011 Tua Rita Redigaffi – Rosso Toscana IGT

- Varietal composition: 100% Merlot
- Fermentation container: Casks
- Length of alcoholic fermentation: 10 days
- Fermentation temperature: 64-79 °F
- Length of maceration: 25-30 days
- Malolactic fermentation: Yes
- Type of aging container: 225 L New French Barriques
- Length of aging before bottling: 18-20 months
- Length of bottle aging: 6 months
- Alcohol: 14.8 %
- Residual sugar: <1.0 g/L
- Acidity: 5.9 g/L
- Dry extract: 41.0 g/L



- Vineyard size: 10 acres
- Soil composition: Pebbly Clay-Loam
- Training method: Spur-pruned Cordon
- Elevation: 330 feet
- Vines/acre: 3,400
- Yield/acre: 1.2 tons
- Exposure: Eastern / Southeastern / Southern
- Year vineyard planted: 1988-1996
- Harvest time: August
- First vintage of this wine: 1994
- Bottles produced of this wine: 10,000



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# Blind Comparative Tasting

15 minute break...

# Blind Comparative Tasting

Guesses on the wines...



*Colorado Cultivar Camp:*  
**MERLOT**

***Thank you very much!!***



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