

winemaking

Varietal Focus:

Syrah

Washington state, Paso Robles and Sonoma County winemakers and their wines

Lance Cutler

Editor's Note: *Wine Business Monthly* is embarking on a series of articles, each focusing on a single grape variety. We will select three distinguished winemakers from each distinctive region producing the selected varietal wine. We want to learn what clones and rootstocks are being used and what soil types they are planted on. We want to know how microclimates influence the variety. We will take detailed production notes, including whether native or commercial yeast is used, fermentation temperatures and regimens, oak programs, etc.

Our writer, Lance Cutler, who has been a winemaker for more than 30 years, will visit each region, meet the winemakers, visit some of the vineyards and conduct a tasting featuring wines from the selected wineries. We want winemakers to taste the wines from their own regions as well as the wines being produced in other regions. We hope that discussions raised during these tastings will allow us to identify regional characteristics within each variety.

We think that these varietal stories will be of great interest to winemakers all over the country. Our intent is to lay out exactly what winemakers are doing to best express their terroir, to determine which fermentation techniques lend themselves to which styles and to delineate the unique characteristics of each variety.

Our author has selected Syrah as the variety to begin this series.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN FARMING GRAPES any time over the last 25 years, then there is a good chance that you have experience with Syrah grapes. According to DNA typing conducted as recently as 1998, Syrah originated in France as the offspring of two relatively obscure varieties: *Dureza* and *Mondeuse Blanche*. In France the wines of Hermitage brought fame to Syrah and have been known to wine collectors for their power and complex flavors for centuries. While in the 18th and 19th centuries much of the Syrah grown in France was blended into “clarets,” that is no longer the case. French Syrah now comprises the classics, like Hermitage, Côte-Rôtie and Cornas, and is used as a blending grape in Gigondas, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Côtes du Rhône and other appellations in France.

A world traveler, Syrah is the most planted red grape in Australia (where it is known as Shiraz) and accounts for 40 percent of all red wine production in that country. Syrah is the most widely planted Rhône varietal in California. Just 100 acres of Syrah were in California in 1985, according to estimates. Currently, the state has more than 13,000 acres, and there is significant continued expansion. Syrah is doing well in the state of Washington, and there have been recent plantings in Oregon. Syrah plantings are increasing in South Africa, Argentina, Spain, Italy and Chile. Even France, which already boasts the world's largest Syrah acreage, is expanding varietal plantings, especially in the Languedoc-Roussillon region.

Syrah vines are adaptable and are able to grow most anywhere. They produce wines that vary widely according to the climate and terroir of the particular vineyard. Syrah tends to do best in warm climates on rocky, well-drained soils. It buds relatively late and ripens somewhat early so it provides a bit of its own frost protection system. It is not overtly susceptible to mold and rot, but it is vigorous, and over-cropping or too much water can intensify green, unripe flavors. Syrah also does well in cooler growing sites although those sites tend to change the aroma and flavor profiles quite dramatically from the warm weather sites.

Syrah produces a wide range of flavors depending on climate, soil and viticultural practices. In warm climate regions, characteristic Syrah flavors tend toward dark fruits, cherry, white pepper and earthy notes. Cooler regions bring out black pepper, meaty (bacon) flavors, green olive, leather and spice. Syrah can be attractive either as a stand-alone, powerhouse varietal or as an accommodating blending agent for varieties as diverse as Grenache, Mouvedre, Cinsault, Viognier, Cabernet Sauvignon and even Zinfandel.

How this works

We sought out three distinctive Syrah-producing regions: Washington state and, in California, Sonoma County and Paso Robles. From there we selected three distinguished winemakers from each region. We held tastings with each of the three winemakers and what follows are details regarding the nine wines in the tasting. They cover the essentials, both in the vineyard and in the winemaking regimens.

Tasting notes begin with the comments of the winemaker, then other winemakers from the same region. Comments from winemakers (including **Doug McCrea, Bob Betz, Caleb Foster, Andy Peay, Lise Ciolino, Duncan Arnot Meyers, Terry Hoage, Anthony Yount and Neil Collins**) of the other two regions follow.

Washington

Washington has come onto the Syrah bandwagon relatively recently. Just 20 years ago Washington had virtually no Syrah; now plantings comprise 15 percent of total grape plantings, almost 3,000 acres. Washington winemakers are talented, dedicated and have a chip on their shoulders. They believe that their rocky volcanic soils, their selected vineyard sites and their extended growing season featuring long days and cool nights could comprise the greatest Syrah-growing region in the world. They see their Syrah wines as less overtly fruity than others with more structure. The wines represent a mid-point between cool climate and warm climate Syrah with lots of juicy dark fruits and blueberry, some pepper and spice, and firm but not harsh tannins.



Buty's Rockgarden Vineyard couldn't have a more appropriate name; vines literally grow out of the river rock.

McCrea Cellars

McCrea Boushey Vineyards Grand Côte 2007 Syrah
(100% Syrah) 14.8 alc.

Doug McCrea of **McCrea Cellars** is one of the true pioneers of Rhône varietals in the state of Washington. He was the first Washington winemaker to dedicate himself exclusively to Syrah and Rhône varietals. He has spent two decades working with vineyardists to select the right clones and rootstocks and place them in perfect growing sites. He believes that great wine is made in the vineyard, and winemakers should be minimalistic in their winemaking approach.

“This portion of Boushey Vineyard was planted in 1994 at 900- to 1,000-foot elevation. It is in central Yakima in a moderate temperature zone. Plants were sourced from **(Joseph) Phelps**. There is some fine top soil on fractured vesicular rock. Rows are planted north to south in straight sun so we use a bi-lateral system to protect from sunburn. The vineyard is irrigated with drip, judiciously applied and produces 3-½ tons per acre of small berries with a gamey, meaty character due to the rock.

“Northern Rhône is my model. I prefer a rich mouthfeel with refined tannins, and a sense of elegance is important to me. I harvest grapes around 25° Brix and 3.75 pH. The focus is on gentle handling, so no machines are used except a stemmer-crusher to split berries. Wine is fermented in 1 to 1½-ton fermenters. I cold-soak until I notice a slight VA. Then I use four different selected yeasts on individual batches—but ferment a portion with indigenous yeast as well—and then I blend the various batches. I ferment in the low 80s for about 10 to 12 days, then rack to barrels. The wine sits on lees and is stirred every four to six weeks. We use four to five different barrel producers (mostly **François Frères**, **Saury**, **DJ** and **Sirugue**) with 15 to 20 percent new oak and keep barrels no longer than four years. We rack once in the spring and again at bottling.”

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

McCrea: My goal is to bring the vineyard to the wine glass with minimal intervention. I think there is a rich mouthfeel with refined tannins. There are some gamey, smoky aromas with mulberry, blueberry flavors. Very Northern Rhône.

Betz: It's open and broad with a nice fruit/acid balance. It's an elegant wine showing the evenness of the vintage.

Foster: Lovely, complex and round. It shows a deft hand.

Peay: Plump plum fruit with some exotic floral character. Round, juicy with blueberry flavors.

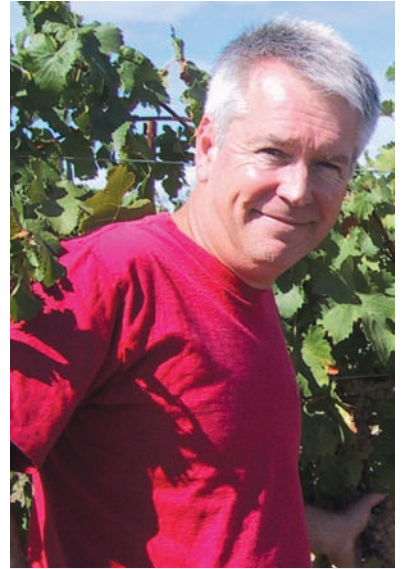
Ciolino: Meaty underpinning with some oak sweetness. Soft with smooth finish.

Meyers: There's an herbal quality I associate with high pH.

Hoage: Beautiful. Silky all the way through. Dark fruits and perfumed face powder aromas. Beautiful viscosity. Seamless from beginning to end.

Yount: Something almost synthetic in the nose with a voluptuous palate.

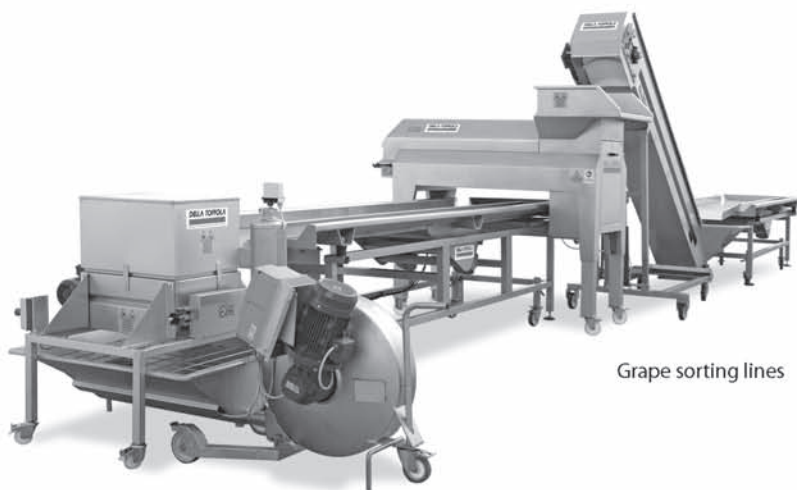
Collins: Has great balance and length. It's delicate and pretty and well integrated.



Doug McCrea

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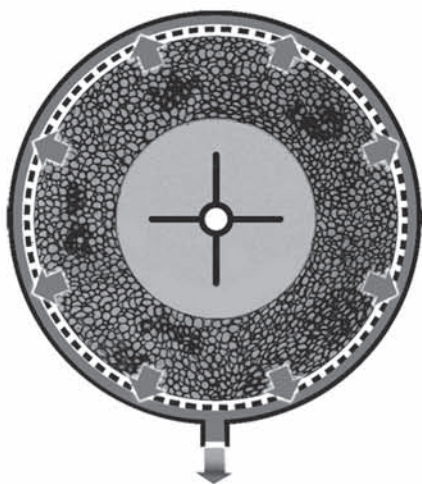
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Syrah

Betz Family Winery

Betz Family Winery 2008 Syrah La Serenne, Boushey Vineyard (100% Syrah) 14.8 alc.

Bob Betz is a Master of Wine and spent 26 years at **Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery** before starting **Betz Family Winery** with the 1997 vintage. His operation is a family affair that includes his wife and daughter. He sources grapes from a variety of well-known growers and famous vineyards.

“The grapes for La Serenne come from a single site and single clone from Boushey Vineyard at 1,250- to 1,350-foot elevation in the Yakima Valley. There is a wind-deposited topsoil (like talc) 20 to 30 inches deep. The vines are planted in north to south rows on bilateral cordon, and we keep sprawl on the west side to protect from sunburn. We use lots of cluster thinning to remove any bird damage, rot, sunburn, etc., and harvest runs 2½ tons per acre.

“We hand-sort the grapes and move them gently by gravity until after fermentation. Wine is fermented in 1½-ton bins, using daily punchdowns and two aerations during the fermentation. We inoculate with yeast and ferment at 80 to 85° F. I check for extraction to determine when to press and often press before dryness to barrels. We use French barrels exclusively, 50 percent new. Malolactic occurs in barrel where wine is aged sur lie and using batonnage. Post-malolactic, our focus shifts to fervently reductive winemaking techniques. The wine is finished with a polish filtration at 1.2 micron.”



Bob Betz

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Betz: I use the Northern Rhône model as well. This wine is concentrated but gentle. It's supple without being a fruit bomb.

Foster: It's youth-driven with bigger acids. It has wonderful grip and is made for the long haul, showing the best Yakima has to offer.

McCrea: This is more youthful and acidic with similar aromatics of the McCrea version.

Yount: Explodes from the glass with red fruits. Fleshy and ripe. Will evolve.

Hoage: Young and aggressive. It's big and young. Perhaps a bit too extracted.

Collins: Bright red fruit and nice acidity but a bit unapproachable. Great structure. Needs time.

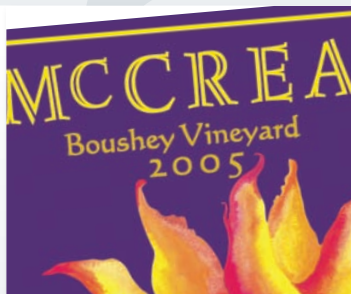
Ciolino: I like the mouthfeel. There's more grip with some forest in the palate.

Peay: Youthful with bright mid-palate. Large frame with black licorice and a bit of high alcohol. Will mellow with age.

Meyers: Dense mid-palate with a vibrant finish. Dark olive, tapenade flavor. Gamey Syrah character. Nice tension in the wine.

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Wines



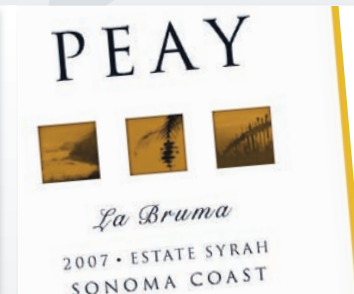
2007 Grand Côte Syrah



2008 Syrah La Serenne



2007 Rediviva of the Stones



2006 La Bruma Sonoma Coast Syrah

Winery/Vineyard

McCrea Cellars

Betz Family Winery

Buty Winery

Peay Vineyards

SYRAH STYLE
Winemaker

COOL CLIMATE
Doug McCrea

COOL CLIMATE
Bob Betz

WARM CLIMATE
Caleb Foster

COOL CLIMATE
Vanessa Peay

State, County

WA, Yakima County

WA, Yakima County

WA, Walla Walla County
OR, Umatilla County

CA, Sonoma County

AVA

Yakima Valley

Yakima Valley

Walla Walla Valley

Sonoma Coast

Vineyard Location

About Central Yakima Valley, above the town of Grandview

Boushey Vineyard, 5 miles north of Grandview, Washington, planted 1996

Both vineyards are near Milton-Freewater, Oregon (Umatilla County)

Annapolis, CA, in the Northwestern corner of the Sonoma Coast

VINEYARD DATA

Predominant Geology (soil type)	20-25 inches topsoil of mainly fine loess mixed with glacial cobblestone. Vines rooted in "vesicular basalt" volcanic soil with cavities; ziolites, calcite and quartz.	Silt loam over basalt bedrock; cobble and calcium content	Ancestral cobble-filled riverbed, called "freewater very cobbly loam" of the Walla Walla River—200 feet of continuous cobbles in a sandy-loam matrix.	Goldridge soils
Elevation	900 feet	1,250 feet	900 feet	700 feet, in the inversion layer
Vine Spacing	5 x 8 feet	9 x 6 feet	4 x 8 feet	7 x 4 feet
Exposure	Due south row orientation on a fairly steep slope.	South	Open field with a 1% Northwest slope	Syrah: Southeast- and West-facing blocks
Clones	Phelps	Phelps	Tablas Creek Vineyard Syrah Clone A, Joseph Phelps Syrah clone and clone #8 Cab Sauv	1 (24%), Estrella (23%), 470 (19%), 174 (15%), and a suitcase selection (19%) we call P2
Irrigation or Dry Farmed	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation	Irrigation
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Traditional	Traditional	Chemical modern; still Salmon-Safe and Vinea-Sustainable certifications on both.	Organic

WINEMAKING DATA

Cold Soak?	Grapes were entirely de-stemmed and lightly split, then dropped directly into one to one and one-half ton fermenters, then cold-soaked 3-4 days prior to inoculation with several commercial yeasts.	No, but 24-hour delay from crush to inoculation	2 days before native ferment began.	4 days
Fermentation/Whole Cluster?	Fermentation regime was entirely punch-down, then racked to barrel in 18 to 20 days.	50% whole berry, all clusters destemmed	30% whole cluster Syrah foot-stomped and fermented by native yeasts. On skins for two weeks, and only free run was used.	100% destemmed, whole berry
Fermentation Temperature	Typically peaked in the low- to mid-80's	82° to 84° F	Max 90° F	Starts at 40° F and goes up to 90° F
Punchdown Methods	New wine was removed from tanks using "sieve-like" cylinders lowered into the fermenters, then pumped directly to barrel. No press fraction is used in this specific wine.	Mostly punchdown, plus 2 aeration pumpovers, approximately 8 days on skins	Manual punchdowns in 2-ton fermenters	Pneumatic and hand punchdowns. Mid-fermentation, may do one or two pumpovers
Oak Program	Oak regime was about 25% new barrels and the remaining barrels ranged from once used to three times used.	100% French oak; 50% new, 50% one fill; combination of 228 liter, 225 liter, 300 liter	Old Burgundy barrels with 15% new wood introduced annually.	24% new Cadus, Damy and François Frères French oak
Barrel Aging	The wine remained 16 months in barrique cooperage of typically 228 liters.	12 months	Wine aged 14 months in 5-10 year-old Burgundy barrels. Used two new French Rhone barrels, making total new wood 12%.	15 months
Racking	Racked twice prior to bottling	On gross lees until April after harvest, lees stirring. Subsequent rack to blend in August, return to barrel. Assembled master blend and bottled in November 2009.	Lees tasted and reviewed for good quality then wine remains in barrel, not racked for one year. Blending at 12 months, bottled at 15 months.	Once, the January following harvest

Sonoma County

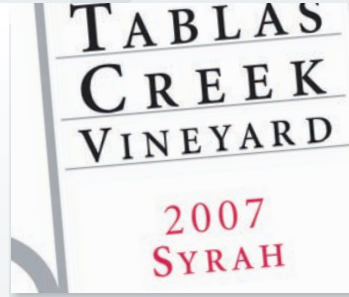
Paso Robles



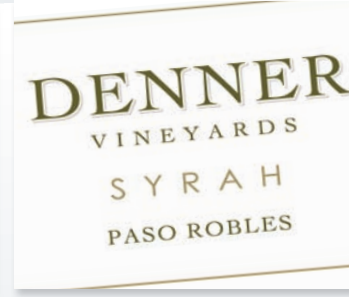
2007 Griffin's Lair Sonoma Coast Syrah



2006 Paolo's Vineyard Dry Creek Valley Syrah



2007 Estate Bottled Syrah



2007 Westside Paso Robles Syrah



2005 The Hedge Syrah

Arnot-Roberts

COOL CLIMATE

Nathan Roberts & Duncan Meyers

CA, Sonoma County

Sonoma Coast

Petaluma Wind Gap, Old Lakeville Road, Petaluma, California

Montemaggiore

WARM CLIMATE

Lise Ciolino

CA, Sonoma County

Dry Creek Valley

South end of Dry Creek Valley

Tablas Creek Vineyard

COOL CLIMATE

Neil Collins

CA, San Luis Obispo

Paso Robles

Adelaida /West side. All estate.

Denner Vineyards

WARM CLIMATE

Anthony Yount

CA, San Luis Obispo

Paso Robles

West Paso Robles

Terry Hoage Vineyards

WARM CLIMATE

Terry and Jennifer Hoage

CA, San Luis Obispo

Paso Robles

Western Hills Paso Robles Templeton Gap

Sedimentary marine deposit, clay, sandy loam

Franciscan Schist

Limestone and clay, calcareous

Calcareous Shale

Linne Calodo

200 feet

750 feet

1,600-1,800 feet

1,200-1,400 feet

1,100 feet

5 x 8 feet

Primarily 4 x 4 feet

8 x 3 feet

8 x 5 feet

Various 3 x 3 feet own rooted, 4 x 7 feet

Southwest

Primarily Southeast

Multiple

Multiple

Southern, Southwest, West, Northeast

877, 470

78% Syrah 1, 22% 877

TCV "A" & "C"

174, Estrella, 383, 99, 470

James Berry Field Selection, 383, 174, Estrella (Chapoutier)

Limited irrigation

Irrigation

Minimal irrigation

irrigation

Dry farmed

Organic

Certified Biodynamic since 2009, practicing Organic and Biodynamic since 2005

100% certified organic farming

Traditional

Organic

"Passive" cold soak (no active cooling, no dry-ice)

4 days

No

5-8 days

Yes

100% whole cluster in 1.5 ton open-top fermentor.

15% whole cluster

Destemmed, high percentage whole berry.

25% whole cluster

Primarily Whole Berry – extended cold soak, natural yeast, extended maceration after fermentation – basket press

>82° F

85° F

70° to 85° F

upper 70's F

Varies — warms naturally from cold soak to 80° F — delestage to control temperatures over 90°

Combination of manual punchdown and gentle pumpovers

Hand punchdowns, 1-3 times per day as needed

Punchdown, pulsair, pumpover

Hand punch down and gravity rack and return

Manual punchdowns every 3 to 4 hours - gravity delestage

Neutral French Oak

100% French, 33% new

1,200 gallon French oak Foudre, with a small percentage (2%+/-) of new French Demi-Muit

60 % new, 40% used French

All French, various cooperages – center of France various toast 60% new 40% neutral

11 months

17 months

18 months

18 months

18-24 months

Once for bottling

The 2006 Syrah stayed on the fine lees for 11 months and was racked three times before bottling unfiltered.

Once to blend and once to bottle

Once for blending, once for bottling

Absolutely not - no fining no filtering minimal, blend dirty

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Oak vanillin ... VANILLA



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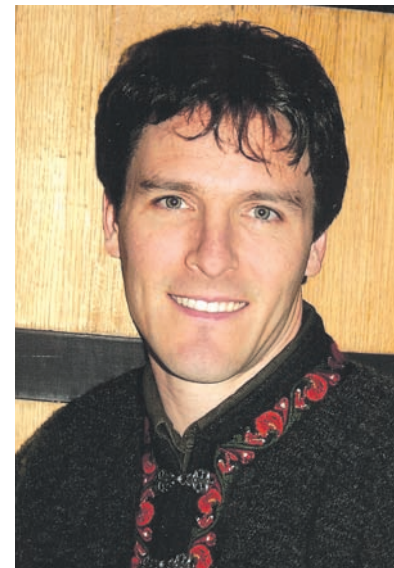
Shine the light on Flavor

Syrah

Buty Winery

Buty Winery 2007 Rediviva of the Stones
(77% Syrah, 23% Cabernet Sauvignon) 14.2 alc.

Caleb Foster has 19 vintages under his belt in Washington, New Zealand and South Africa. Along with his wife, **Nina**, he founded **Buty Winery** in the famous cobblestone section of Walla Walla Valley and produced his first vintage in 2001. In 2006, they purchased 10 acres in the uppermost reaches of the cobblestone tract and have set about planting their organically-farmed vineyard. Foster is focused, and he has an idea. He wants to make the Washington expression of Grange.



Caleb Foster

“This vineyard is located in the ‘cobblestone’ region of Walla Walla Valley. Topsoil is water- or wind-deposited on layers of cobblestones. The cobblestones are the old riverbed of the Walla Walla River and are more than 100 feet deep at this vineyard. The vineyard was planted in 1997 using Phelps and Tablas Creek source material. We farm the vineyard organically, and the vines literally grow on cobblestones. The vines are carefully pruned, and we use controlled leaf-pulling to take care of sunburn. We use strict irrigation management and try to harvest at 25° Brix or less. Sugar usually develops before ripeness so I wait for physiological ripeness, which produces high pH-high acid fruit.

“I am trying to express location and terroir using organic farming methods. Grange is my model so I blend in Cabernet Sauvignon. I think that Syrah is heavier than Cabernet in this part of Washington so half of my Syrah was whole-cluster fermented in this wine. Acids typically are .6 to .85, with pH in the 4.0 to 4.2 range. I make no adjustments, neither water nor acid. The wine is fermented in one-ton bins at 85°F with punchdowns. The wines are not aerated and are handled in a non-oxidative manner. The wine is aged primarily in older barrels on lees, using just 10 to 20 percent new oak.”

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Foster: With Grange as a model and inspiration, I try to take the juicy succulence of Syrah and build in spice with whole-cluster fermentation, and then add some herbal complexity from the Cabernet Sauvignon to get beyond the simple fruitiness of the Syrah.

Betz: The signature of a talented winemaker. Very exact with black fruit and some Bordeaux anise and dried herbs.

McCrea: A beautifully-crafted wine but not my style. It's too dominated by Cabernet but very much like Grange.

Peay: Cabernet adds an herbal element and tension, which I like. High pH shortens the finish.

Ciolino: Herbaceous nose with some pine in the palate. I'd like more length in the finish.

Meyers: He nails the Grange style. Herbal dill notes, not Syrah-like but interesting. High pH makes the finish too round.

Collins: I love the nose. Dark, very extracted. Almost reductive, meaty character in mid-palate. It's big and angry with great acid and balanced tannins.

Yount: Complex red fruit and herbaceous bay leaf. Smooth, round tannins. Leather and tar.

Hoage: Smoke, tar, leather, meaty and herbal. Needs time to smooth out.

Syrah

Sonoma County

Sonoma County is large, and almost every grape variety grows well in one spot or another. Syrah seems to do well in many of the traditionally well-known appellations, like Alexander Valley, Sonoma Valley and Russian River Valley. More recently, cool climate sites in the county have been touted, especially for Syrah. Most of these locations were better known for Pinot Noir; but since some winemakers see Syrah as a more voluptuous version of that varietal on a substantially wider frame, it made sense for them to delve into cool climate Syrah. Sonoma County produces several styles of Syrah. Wines from the cooler Sonoma Coast region display typical cool climate Syrah notes of beef, bacon, pepper, spice and olive with bright acidity and balanced tannins. Moving to warmer areas brings in more black fruit character and softer acids.



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Peay Vineyards

Peay 2006 La Bruma Sonoma Coast Syrah (100% Syrah) 13.9 alc.

Peay Vineyards is all about the vineyard. The site is in the far northwest corner of Sonoma County just four miles from the Pacific Ocean and sits in the chilly inversion layer with fog and wind from the ocean maintaining cool temperatures with plenty of sunlight. Sitting at an elevation that goes from 650 to 825 feet, their 53-acre, organically-farmed vineyard produces definitive cool climate Syrah. Their first vintage was 2001.

Andy Peay helped plant the vineyard but has been more focused on the business end and sales since then.

“La Bruma means ‘mist’ or ‘fog’ and definitely influences this cold site on the Sonoma Coast. Our typical harvest is late October to early November, with sugars sometimes as low as 21.0 but usually around 22.5. Our vines were planted on Goldridge soils in the late 1990s and are organically-farmed. Yields run about two tons to the acre or less. There are four clones: 1, Estrella, 174 and 470. Rain is often a condition and occasionally a problem.

“Blocks for this wine were picked separately during the last week of October, then sorted and de-stemmed into one and three-ton, open-top fermenters. There was a four-day cold soak. Wines were punched down with some pumpovers in mid-fermentation. Fermentations lasted eight to 14 days. There was no extended maceration. We inoculated with malolactic bacteria and racked post MLF. The wine was aged in French oak (**Hermitage, Cadus, Damy, François Frères**), 20 percent new for 15 months. We bottle the wine unfinned and unfiltered and give it a full year of bottle age before release.”

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Peay: The wine is feminine with floral, violet and lavender aromas. There's a slight beefiness and some pepper. It's young and brash with high acid.

Meyers: Good balance. Oak supports the fruit. There are some conifer/forest aromas. Acidity.

Ciolino: Lovely balance. Distinctive cool climate, high-tone aromatics. Mouth-filling and balanced with enough acidity to give a precise finish.

McCrea: Lots of pepper with complex forest floor aromas and flavors.

Foster: More extracted overall. Fruit-centric and a bit hot.

Betz: It has an attractive harmony with pepper and cherry. High acid with plenty of tannin.

Collins: Very spicy nose. Nice red fruits. Restrained and balanced. Elegant. Nice finish.

Hoage: Very pretty with violets and lots of spice. Balanced, delicate and nuanced.

Yount: Incredibly interesting. Cherry pie and pepper. Great acid. Would be lovely with food. Will age well.



Andy Peay

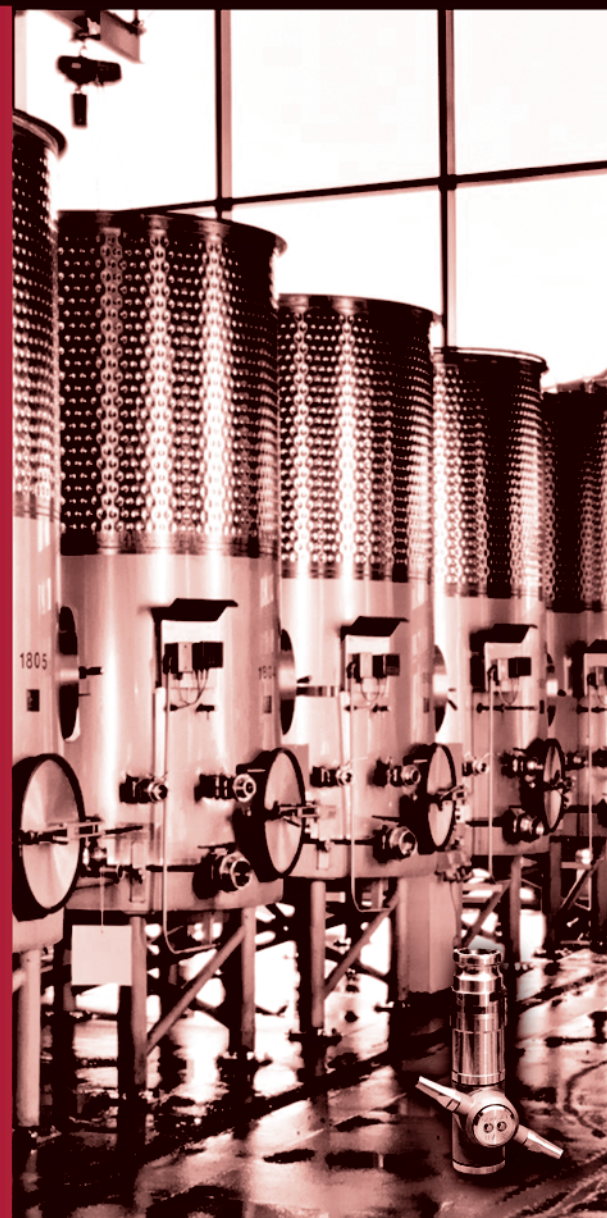
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Syrah

Arnot-Roberts

Arnot-Roberts 2007 Griffin's Lair Sonoma Coast Syrah (100% Syrah) 14.7 alc.

Nathan Roberts and **Duncan Arnot Meyers** were childhood friends. Their **Arnot-Roberts** venture started in 2001. Roberts, a cooper, builds all of the French oak barrels used in the wine production. The pair focuses on small-lot production from cool site vineyards. They are currently working with eight different vineyards to produce a total of 1,200 cases annually. Meyers is



Nathan Roberts and Duncan Arnot Meyers

adamant about using minimalist winemaking techniques, including lots of whole-cluster fermentations.

"Griffin's Lair is the windiest site of our four different vineyard-designated Syrahs. It was planted in 2000 on a hill overlooking San Pablo Bay and the Petaluma River. The vineyard usually produces 2½ tons to the acre. It is definitely a cool region, and cold temperatures help retain natural acidity. The berries are small with thick skins. The soils include gravelly loam, sandy loam and some clay loam farther down the hill—and are well drained with varying amounts of gravel and rock. The vineyard is organically-farmed and comprised of Clones 877 and 470.

"Our model is Northern Rhône, and our philosophy is minimalist intervention. We ferment the wine 100 percent whole-cluster with native yeast fermentations (both primary and secondary). We add no SO₂ until bottling. The wine is aged 11 months in 100 percent neutral French oak barrels and is racked only at bottling with no fining or filtering."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Meyers: Briny, savory and smoky with some iodine. Spicy and aromatic with a clean finish. This is food wine and needs more time to develop.

Peay: Cool site character of olive, graphite and beef. Plump fruit on mid-palate. Good acidity but stem tannins shorten the finish.

Ciolino: Dried beef braseola aromas with a bit of pepper. Palate follows aromas.

Hoage: Lots of olive fruit with a gamey nose. Youthful with sea salt character. Round finish.

Collins: Gamey, bacony. Well made with nice acidity. Tannic but not harsh or astringent.

Yount: Love this different style. Spice, saline, pepper and bacon in nose. Green aroma and good tannic structure. Balanced from stems. Clean whole-cluster flavors.

McCrea: Sweet fruit with lots of pepper. More lush and tannic than the Peay.

Foster: I also get fruit and pepper along with some licorice and some VA.

Betz: Seems like a wine made with minimal intervention skirting a fine line.

Montemaggiore

Montemaggiore 2006 Paolo's Vineyard Dry Creek Valley Syrah (100% Syrah) 14.8 alc.

Lise Ciolino and her husband Vincent purchased their 55-acre property in Dry Creek Valley with 10 acres of grapes in 2001.

Montemaggiore is a hands-on family project for the Ciolinos. They farm the vineyard organically and biodynamically, and Lise does the winemaking.

"The grapes come from our 10-acre estate vineyard on a steep mountainside at 750-foot elevation at the south end of Dry Creek Valley. There are five distinct Syrah plantings, all Syrah 1 and 877 clones. Hilltop plantings in the rockiest soils produce big, bold, fruit-forward grapes with significant tannins. Sites lower on the hill with deeper soils produce more elegant, spicy grapes. Cooler vintages tend to produce more bacon fat, pepper and earthy notes while warmer vintages lean toward blackberry, blueberry and black cherry. The majority of Syrah vines are planted in 4x4 or 4x5 spacing. Aside from site selection and vine spacing choices, we use cane-pruning, shoot-positioning, controlled irrigation and bunch-thinning to control vigor. Our grapes are usually harvested before any rain.



Lise Ciolino

"Determining when to pick the grapes is my most significant winemaking choice. The critical factor in that choice is determining the maturity of the tannins. Our grapes travel less than 1,000 feet to the winery where they are de-stemmed but with 15 to 25 percent whole-cluster."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Ciolino: My goal is to maximize the individuality and strength of character in our wines based on what our vineyard site offers. Primarily, this is accomplished by following organic and biodynamic farming practices, and secondarily, by using minimal intervention in the winery. This Syrah has lots of spicy fruit with blackberry and black cherry notes. There's some pepper and nutmeg. It's full mid-palate with lower acidity and a long finish.

Peay: Juicy blackberry with punchy black fruit and slight iodine. Soft mouthfeel. Bit alcoholic.

Meyers: Explosive berry with spice. Brambly character unique to Dry Creek.

McCrea: Pleasant and fruity with a creamy chocolate layer with prominent oak.

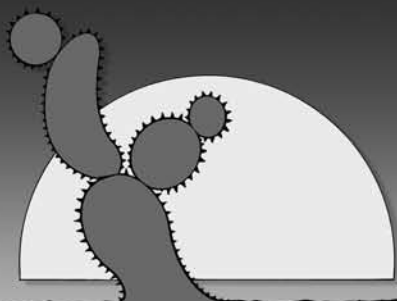
Foster: Pure and penetrating with an oak hit. Good middle body with some astringent tannin.

Betz: Good and different. I get some chocolate, some heat and a lot of oak.

Hoage: Extracted blue fruits. Closer to Paso Syrah. Lots of tannin, nice acidity but finish falls off.

Yount: More cooked, stewed fruit with a bit of lead pencil. Short middle and not enough acid.

Collins: Dark fruit and sour cherry on nose is intriguing. At first the weight is great, but the finish drops off.



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Paso Robles

Paso Robles led the California charge into Syrah and Rhône varieties as a whole, and did a lot to propagate Syrah cuttings from France and moved them into the vineyards. Rhône varieties seem to thrive in this dry appellation, and there is an exuberance among the winemakers that is catching. Paso growers define themselves and their vineyards according to which side of Highway 101 they sit. All of our participants are from the cooler Westside, but these vineyards should still be considered warm sites for Syrah. The Paso Robles style is characterized by intense color, velvety textures, heavy extraction and soft tannins.



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Tablas Creek Vineyard

Tablas Creek 2007 Estate Bottled Syrah (90% Syrah, 10% Grenache) 14.5 alc.

Tablas Creek Vineyard is a central player in the modern Central Coast Rhône explosion. A partnership between **Robert Haas** and the **Perrin** family of **Chateau Beaucastel** fame, Tablas Creek imported vinifera from their home vineyards in France, propagated them in their own nursery and then planted them starting in 1992. They now approach 110 acres of Rhône varieties. The entire property is organically farmed. Winemaker **Neil Collins** has been at the helm for 12 years.

“Our vineyard was planted between 1992 and 1999. The soil is calcareous clay and rock, both boulder and fractured. Our clonal material was imported from Chateau Beaucastel in France and densely planted at 1,600 to 1,800 vines per acre. The vines are primarily south-east facing and planted with 8x3 spacing and trellised low to the ground. The vineyard is certified organic and mostly dry-farmed. Syrah can be vigorous so it requires extra canopy management and aggressive crop-thinning. Our vineyard produces small-cluster, thick-skinned berries with significant tannin and a strong mineral character.

“The grapes are de-stemmed and fermented in small, open, stainless steel tanks using native yeast. Our fermentations run about two weeks. We’ll add acid if necessary but only at harvest before fermentation. The wine is pressed and finishes secondary fermentation in primarily neutral French oak barrels. From there it is aged an additional year in 1,200-gallon foudres. It is bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.”



Neil Collins

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Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Collins: Our goal is to produce the purest possible expression of the unique property that is Tablas Creek. This Syrah has a nose of dark fruits with a rich, meaty character. Tremendous intensity with fresh and lush fruit that cloaks the tannin. It shows good minerality and firm tannin, which should smooth with aging.

Yount: Lots of fruit and minerality. It has high acid, which gives it better length. There's a meaty component. It's the most finessed of the Paso wines, but the tannin is a bit harsh on the finish.

Hoage: Pretty aromatics with high-tone red fruit. I like the acidity. It's elegant wine with a long finish and just a bit of tannic harshness.

Betz: Youthful with great berry focus and black raspberry flavors.

McCrea: Great wine showing restraint with good fruit and some mineral character.

Foster: Lots of fruit and a hint of VA in the nose.

Meyers: Shows a lot of personality and has an animal, feral quality. Overtly soft and not oaky, which I like. Has some Mouvedre character.

Peay: Nice red fruit. Very little pepper. Tannin interrupts the finish.

Ciolino: Fabulous balanced flavors and aromas with a bit more acid. Lots going on and smooth tannins.

Denner Vineyards

Denner 2007 Westside Paso Robles Syrah (90% Syrah, 10% Mourvedre) 15.8 alc.

Denner Vineyards is owned by **Bob** and **Marilyn Denner**, who are also owners of the legendary Ditch Witch product line. They planted 126 acres of vineyard in west Paso Robles in 1999, primarily to Rhône and Bordeaux varietals. The vineyard is sustainably farmed. Winemaker **Anthony Yount** is new, taking over as winemaker in December 2009 after interning for Denner for two seasons and then two years as cellar master at **Villa Creek Cellars**.

"This wine is made from five Syrah clones: 383 and 174 give blue fruit character, Estrella provides creaminess, 470 for leather and pepper, and 99 to add structure. Our soil was at one time submerged seabed and contains lots of calcareous shale. The vines are bi-lateral cordon with vertical shoots on 8x5 spacing. We'll irrigate only when needed. Some blocks produce one ton per acre while others are usually at two tons per acre. This wine is all estate fruit, sustainably farmed.

"We pre-sort the grapes as whole clusters then de-stem and sort once more as berries. The wine ferments with 15 to 20 percent whole-clusters and 100 percent whole berries. There is a seven-day cold soak with a daily punchdown for color extraction and semi-carbonic maceration, followed by fermentation in two-ton, stainless steel fermenters with three to four punchdowns daily along with daily delestage during peak fermentation where temperatures reach 80 to 85°F. Both primary and secondary fermentations are conducted with indigenous cultures. The wine is basket-pressed to barrels: 75 percent new with 90 percent from France and 10 percent from Hungary. Press and free run juice are homogenized, and the wine is racked once prior to bottling."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Yount: We're trying to create a Syrah that is uniquely Californian in style. This 2007 Denner Syrah is a fruit-forward wine dominated by violets and blue fruits with a hint of spice and leather up front. It has a rich mid-palate which shows earth and lavish oak spice. There is a long finish driven by natural acidity and balanced tannin.

Collins: There is apparent oak, but it is well integrated. It's very soft with a bit of lead pencil in the nose and some slight gaminess in the background. It's balanced with acidity and good minerality.

Hoage: Voluptuous wine with spicy, dark fruit flavors. There is an earthy start. It's thick on the tongue with enough tannins to brighten the finish.

Betz: Dried fruit aromas but too heavy. It's Amarone-esque.

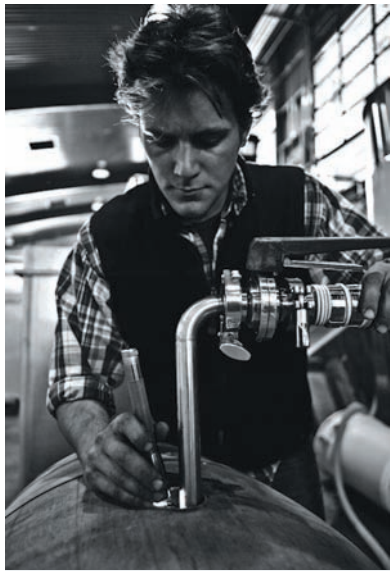
McCrea: Seems to have a lot of residual sugar.

Foster: Rich, plush, warm climate Syrah. I would enjoy a glass but not a whole bottle.

Lise: Big and bold with black fruit. A meal in a glass. Tough to pair with food.

Peay: Sweeter and more raisiny. Some beefy character. Stewed character obscures variety.

Meyers: Dense with raisin and prune and very apparent oak. Long, sweet finish with some leather and alcohol.



Anthony Yount

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Syrah

Terry Hoage Vineyards

Terry Hoage 2005 The Hedge Syrah (100% Syrah) 15.8 alc.

Terry Hoage is a former All-American cornerback out of the **University of Georgia** who went on to have a 13-year career in the NFL. He and his wife **Jennifer** purchased their 26-acre vineyard in 2002. Planted exclusively to Rhône varietals, the vineyard is sustainably farmed. Terry and Jennifer farm the vineyard and produce the wine themselves.

"Originally planted in 1998 to 1999, we grow four different clones, all of which go into the blend: 174 and 383 on 420A, Charpoutier (Estrella) on 3309 and an experimental meter by meter section of own-rooted stock with cuttings from **Justin Smith's** Bone Rock Vineyard. Our property is basically old ocean bed with pulverized limestone soil and a mixture of clay, which holds moisture, allowing for a mostly dry-farmed vineyard. The Syrah is grown with 8x5 and 7x4 spacing on a unilateral vertical trellis. In 2005 we brought in the largest crop ever from our estate vineyard, nearly four tons per acre. The vintage had higher than normal rainfall, which supported the higher tonnage and allowed it to ripen fully.

"The grapes are hand-sorted, de-stemmed and sometimes lightly crushed. We use no SO₂. Using dry ice, we incorporate a whole berry cold soak, which can last up to 10 days. Fermentation begins using indigenous yeast. The wine is fermented in macro bins with punchdowns and delestage as needed. Our fermentations are very fast, usually four to seven days at temperatures sometimes reaching 90 to 95°F. After fermentation, we use an extended maceration for several weeks. The wine is pressed off when extractions are sufficient and tannins are under control. We age the wines in 100 percent French oak barrels using a decreasing amount of new barrels each year: 80 percent in 2005; currently we use about 60 percent new oak."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Hoage: This has elegant jam flavors with lots of weight and intensity in the mouth. Young fruit with plenty of berry flavor. Long finish.

Collins: Youthful dark fruit with a chewy middle and nice, soft tannin. Oak balance is nice. Not overly fruity. Good balance.

Yount: Great aromatics and texture. Cornas butcher character with fruit and minerality. Very soft and lush. Good example of Paso Syrah.

Meyer: Very ripe. Shows what can be achieved at the high end of spectrum. Big red wine that obfuscates terroir.

Peay: Like Ruby Port or Amarone. Juicy berry and blueberry. Soft sweet mouthfeel with aggressive alcohol.

Ciolino: Very Zin-like with overt fruit. Could be from any region. A bit flat on finish.

McCrea: Stylistic choice is prominent. Sort of a Zinfandel of Syrahs.

Foster: It's well done for the style, but frankly this is everything I'm trying to avoid.

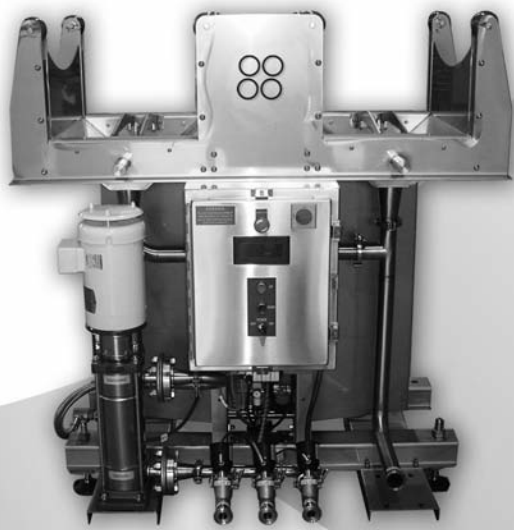
Betz: Very ripe with dried fruit-on-the-vine aromas and flavors. Broad aromas take away precision.



Terry Hoage

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Syrah

Conclusion: Terroir & Winemaking

The inspiration for this article was to select a varietal and see if terroir was a major determinant in the finished wine. All nine of the winemakers were adamant in stating that one of their primary goals was to express the terroir of the vineyard and to interfere with that expression as little as possible with their winemaking techniques. Given the obvious differences in flavor profiles between warm climate and cool climate sites, we thought Syrah would be the perfect variety to use for this study.

I was able to taste each of these wines four different times. There were the three separate tastings: one with each group of winemakers, I worked my way through individual bottles of the selected wines over a three-week period. The experience was a revelation. The breadth of flavor and style was astonishing. At one end of the spectrum were the meaty, peppery, forest floor flavors that came from wines like the Peay and the Arnot-Roberts. At the other end were dense, unctuous fruit-forward monsters, like the Hoage and Denner wines. In between were nuanced expressions of great elegance, like the McCrea and Tablas Creek, the slightly denser Betz Family and Montemaggiore and the uniquely Grange-styled Buty. Each was definitively Syrah, but the stylistic differences were broad and invigorating.

Did terroir play a major role in determining the outcome of these wines? Obviously, it did, but I don't think it was the major factor. I think the winemaking decisions were equally as important if not the overriding determinants of style. In discussing this terroir versus winemaking dilemma, a famous local winemaker

recently told me, "If you give two great chefs chickens from the same farm, the diners will still be completely different."

We all accept that soil type, elevation and climate help comprise terroir. I submit that the people, the culture and the traditions surrounding the vineyards are also part of terroir. The three Washington winemakers had very distinct visions of how to best express Syrah from their vineyards, but they shared a common belief that Washington was the finest place in the world to grow Syrah and that proving it was just a matter of time. The Sonoma winemakers had very different ideas about how to best express cool climate character in Syrah, but they agreed that balance was a key that Sonoma readily provided. In Paso Robles the winemakers differed on when to pick and how to make the wine, but they all agreed that the voluptuous fruit flavors produced in the region made the best Syrah.

Perhaps our original premise was misguided. It became clear that terroir had a lot to do with determining the finished wine in a bottle, but at least equally important were the decisions made and the techniques used by the winemakers to turn the grapes into wine. Each of these nine winemakers was impassioned, philosophically and emotionally, and focused on producing the best expression of Syrah that their vineyards could produce. Trying to separate terroir from winemaking might be a useless exercise, especially if the people making the wine have settled where they are and make the decisions they make because something in their soul attracts them to the very spots they choose for their vineyards. Maybe terroir and winemaking are all part of the same thing. **WBM**

Editor's note: The next varietal review will focus on Pinot Noir and is scheduled for the September issue of WBM.

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