

Abstract for Weinakademiker Thesis (D7):

Zinfandel Returns to Home: Success Story or Not?

by Daniel Čečavac

Motivation

Tribidrag is ancient Croatian cultivar from Dalmatia first mentioned in 15th century. During that time, most grape varieties were simply called bianca or negra – while Tribidrag enjoyed a cult status. It was economically one of the most important grape varieties – delivering steady yields, quality wine but also having a role as a pollinator in creation of new cultivars. It would most probably be extinct if it hadn't been identified as Zinfandel back in 2001. Since then, the variety revived and put Croatia on the world wine map. From only 22 original Tribidrag vines found in Dalmatia at the time, there are now more than 400,000. That being said, I wanted to investigate what was happening in the last twenty years and to what extent the revival was successful or not.

Objective

The objective of this research paper is to evaluate the current sustainability and market potential of Tribidrag grape variety. What are the trends and market reactions? How many styles of Tribidrag are there? The story behind the labeling confusion. What is the global image and how competitive it is? Furthermore, the paper aims to identify the production of Tribidrag in Dalmatia – including vineyard plantings, number of producers, viticultural challenges and vinification practices. It proposes several solutions in more sustainable vineyard management and oak regime. The objective also identifies the next recommended steps for the sustainability of Tribidrag on the global market. The paper aims to identify individual styles, consistency and production approaches through comparative tasting of eight Tribidrag samples from two recent vintages.

Methodology

Methodology for this research paper included personal interviews, e-mail communications, books, websites, newspapers and comparative wine tasting. Due to the lack of available literature, 11 interviews were made in person and via e-mail with people from different backgrounds – in order to obtain necessary information to answer the thesis objectives. Those included people from the wine industry – mainly winemakers and wine growers, wine importers and distributors, wine professors and wine writers. Therefore, personal quotes in this research relate to those people. In total, six personal interviews were audio recorded while 5 interviews were made through e-mail communication.

Books and journals from the leading Croatian ampelographers and wine writers were used in order to get a better understanding of Tribidrag position and its potentials. In total eight Tribidrag samples were tasted from four case study wineries. The wines were delivered to my home address for the purpose of this research.

Content

The main body of the research paper is divided between four parts. Part I – Evolution, begins with a brief history of Tribidrag, its importance in Dalmatia and its recent revival. The chapter continues with the Zinquest case and the early days of establishing the new vineyards in Dalmatia. Furthermore, part one discusses the importance of the “Tribidrag baptize” in 2012 book *Wine Grapes* by Harding, J., Robinson, J., Vouillamoz, J., and ends with the case study of Zlatan Otok winery. Part II - Hello, I am Tribidrag, investigates the current production of Tribidrag in Dalmatia. It continues with in-depth coverage of the planting material, viticultural challenges and the terroir. The final stage of Part II includes analysis of the extraction, MLF and the oak regime – with the case study of Benmosche Family. Part III - Blessing and curse, focuses on Tribidrag styles currently present at the market, its global competitiveness and the labeling confusion for the variety’s name. The final Part IV – HOME 2.0, evaluates the sustainability of Tribidrag and its revival in Croatia. The chapter takes a brief overview of the last two decades. Conclusively, Part IV sets the tone for a clear vision – in which the major next steps in viticulture, production and marketing are identified.

Conclusion

The research results revealed a successful story. From the first experimental vineyard in 2004, today there are 78 hectares. Although tiny in global perspective, it is slowly positioning itself among the 7 leading indigenous Dalmatian varieties. Tribidrag has steady growth and the production is expanding. There is diversity in styles coming from many different terroirs in Dalmatia. Tribidrag positioned itself in a premium category and the evidence from the research shows it can compete with both Zinfandel and Primitivo in above-mentioned category. Furthermore, the research paper indicates that viticultural challenges are being more manageable and that the learning curve in both vineyard management and winemaking is rising. There is however a challenge in selecting only one name on the label for easier communication and better competitiveness. The other major challenge goes on building a long-term national marketing strategy. Having in mind that 20 years ago this variety was at the brink of extinction – the research paper concludes that Zinfandel returned home successfully.