

Syrah in Tuscany: will this David become a Goliath?

ABSTRACT

MOTIVATION

I have always been a fan of syrah in general and very passionate about Italian wines too. Since the day I have tasted the very best Tuscan syrah a couple of years ago I have always wondered whether many great syrah wines were produced in Tuscany and if so, where they were to be found. I had limited knowledge of this grape's presence in Tuscany but was eager to find out if syrah had the potential to grow up towards an omnipresent influential grape variety in Tuscany.

OBJECTIVES

This wondering whether syrah's future in Tuscany was sealed or not *an sich* did not bring me much answers and I did not get further than "maybe or probably" as an answer to myself. But those considerations of probability were never objectively under build. Therefore I wanted to provide myself with clear objective arguments as to the future of syrah in Tuscany. I wanted to examine whether syrah has a great future ahead in Tuscany or, on the contrary, whether my own great syrah experiences so far were isolated cases and would not get a broad following.

HOW I TACKLED THIS SUBJECT

For achieving my objectives I had to conduct my research in quite a broad way and over multiple tracks. I did some brief *theoretical research* on the viticultural characteristics of the syrah grape so as to better understand it. I also measured the key viticultural factors to its increasing success against the factual situation within Tuscany. To get a clear and objective image of what's on the field I had multiple *e-mail contacts* with wineries from every corner of Tuscany and with different consorzi. Their opinion about the future of syrah in Tuscany was very revealing. I also had very interesting *talks* with two winemakers at the Prowein fair in Düsseldorf.

To get a definitive overview of the current framework within which syrah had to develop itself I *examined the legal rules* of every single red wine appellation within Tuscany and did detailed research on the presence of syrah (based) wines within those appellations. Finally, to know what the influential opinion makers regarding Italian wine thought of syrah's future, I analysed all the *articles on Tuscan wines* that appeared in Decanter Magazine from 2009 onwards and read as many *books* on the subject.

CONTENT

In a short first preliminary chapter I clarify my motives for choosing this topic.

Then, before researching the probability of increasing success I had to recall briefly the main characteristics of the grape. One cannot forecast a grape's future without knowing the grape's needs in terms of viticulture. Subsequently I wanted to map the actual but general syrah quantity in Italy and Tuscany, thus enabling myself to get a first good overview of the state of play. All this is elaborated in a second chapter.

In the context of my subject a short historical perspective of the syrah grape in Tuscany could not be let out either for a clear chronological understanding would enable me to predict the future better. This historical aspect is described in a short third chapter.

To keep my research as open minded as possible, I have tried to answer the question whether syrah had to become more successful in the first place and if so, for which reasons. Subsequently I have examined whether all the objective (viticultural) conditions to an increasing success could be met in Tuscany. A lot of work went into the necessary research of all the Tuscan appellations. I have verified if syrah's potential growth was supported by the legal rules or not. This meaty bit is elaborated in a fourth long chapter which is subdivided in different parts.

Finally, based on the conclusions drawn from my research, I have answered the question title of my dissertation in a fifth conclusive chapter.

CONCLUSION

Soil and climate are in general no prohibitive factors to an even further increasing presence and success of syrah. Latitude is not a key factor either.

The important barriers blocking a steady growth are traditional attitude, lack of open mindedness and fear for the unknown. Indeed, probably the biggest hurdle to be overcome for future syrah success is the ghost of tradition and the blind and obstinate confidence in local grape varieties of which sangiovese is of course predominant.

Another heard – albeit in my opinion less important – argument is the current and increasing market tendency towards local varieties which would make selling (varietal) syrah a very tough call. I cannot imagine that a wine lover would not buy a truly great Tuscan wine merely on the consideration of it not being made of local varieties.

There is a clear path for syrah in Tuscany to its increasing success. Winemakers and stakeholders should do a maximum effort to build this path on the route of appellations and not via the IGP category. I fully agree with many wine writers and consumers that the IGP category has become an empty box indeed, completely anonymous and in Italy even more so than in other countries. The greatest future for syrah in Tuscany lies in the many diverse and often undiscovered appellations able to develop a genuine territorial identity.

I have learned a lot while writing this dissertation and I am very curious to see and follow up the developments in the changing Tuscan wine landscape. Above all, I am convinced that there is an important place for syrah in this vinous perpetuum mobile.

June 2013

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