

AFM Wine & Spirits: Will You Be My Blend?

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This month's connubial theme deserves one marriage and four weddings of wines.



Blends—the marriage of different grapes that intensifies the nose, fruit, complexity and finish of the resulting wines—are increasingly popular and exemplary. Today's savvy winemakers are mixing six or more varieties to create standout selections. Respected wine experts Lori Eccles, who has co-owned and managed Sun Devil Liquors in Mesa for years, and her fiancé, Michael De Loach, president and co-owner of Hook & Ladder Winery in Santa Rosa, Calif., recommend four of their most beloved blends.

- **Tillerman Red 2007** (Hook & Ladder Winery) A single estate vineyard blend from the great Russian River Valley, Tillerman honors De Loach's father, Cecil, who was a tillerman—the back-end driver of a hook-and-ladder truck—in the San Francisco Fire Department before he founded De Loach Vineyards, which he has since sold. Comprising cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot and sangiovese, it delivers deep black stone fruit balanced by earthy, herbal tones with a hint of chocolate.

- **Two Left Feet 2009** (Mollydooker) Husband-and-wife team Sparky Marquis and Sarah Watts took his dad's vineyards and created one of the most successful brands in Australia. Both partners are southpaws (a left-handed person is called a mollydooker down under), but the results are just right. A blend of merlot, cabernet and shiraz, it's dark, rich, supple, fragrant and redolent of deep black cherry.

- **Apothic Red 2009** California winemaker Boyd Morrison's inspired blend of spicy zinfandel, smooth merlot and lush dark syrah. Intense fruit aromas with flavors of rhubarb and black cherry are complemented by mocha, chocolate, brown spice and vanilla hints. A plush, velvety mouth feel and smooth finish round out this intriguing full-bodied wine.

- **Newton Claret 2009** From Dr. Sue Hua Newton (the late Sir Peter Newton and his wife, Sue, created California wine brands, Sterling and Spring Mountain), this impressive wine is named after the British term for Bordeaux. Blending cabernet, cabernet franc, merlot, syrah and malbec, this dark garnet-color wine delivers spicy aromas of clove and cinnamon, layered with dark fruit flavors of black cherry and blackberry supported by juniper and sage.

After meeting about five years ago while De Loach was in town while kicking off his new winery, the couple will be married amidst the vines of Hook & Ladder in Sonoma County in June.

TO LEARN MORE

Hook & Ladder Winery www.hookandladderwinery.com.

Sun Devil Liquors www.topliquors.com.