

For more information, contact:
Jane Hodges Young
The Meritage Alliance
707-694-1916
janeyoung@att.net

***WHAT'S IN A NAME?
M-E-R-I-T-A-G-E SPELLS SUCCESS!
MERITAGE ALLIANCE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS***

SANTA ROSA, CA, Monday, January 7, 2013—It all began with a name. Now, 25 years later, Meritage is the fastest growing wine category in the United States – across all price levels – and the thirst for wines blended in the tradition of Bordeaux shows no sign of abating.

“When the Meritage name was trademarked in 1988, many in the industry thought the idea was crazy,” said Susie Bynum, chairman of The Meritage Alliance, which will kick off a year-long observance of its 25th anniversary this week. “Time has proven them to be wrong. Blended wines – particularly those crafted from the traditional Bordeaux grape varieties – have skyrocketed in popularity, especially over the last three years. Like they say, you can’t argue with success.”

According to a survey commissioned by *Wines and Vines Magazine*, sales of blended red wines were up 26% in 2012, making it the third year in a row that red blends were leaders of the pack. *Wines and Vines* noted that Bordeaux-style blends dominated the category

Meritage came into existence because a group of California vintners – unhappy with varietal labeling regulations adopted by the U.S. government in 1985 -- sought to develop a special name to better define the exceptional quality of their Bordeaux-style blends.

“The government restricted wording used on labels of wine containing less than 75% of a single grape variety to ‘table wine.’ They also rejected use of the descriptor ‘Bordeaux-blend,’ which had been commonly used by wineries up until that time,” Bynum explained. So, in 1987, a group of two dozen winemakers, led by Agustin Huneeus, Mitch Cosentino, David Stare and Julie Garvey, conducted a contest to come up with a new name to help identify premium quality, handcrafted, blended wines made in the Bordeaux tradition. The word Meritage was selected from more than 6,000 entries and The Meritage Alliance (originally The Meritage Association) was founded in 1988.

Today, nearly 320 wineries in 26 U.S. states and six countries – Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Israel and Mexico – are members of The Meritage Alliance. Membership in the organization reflects the popularity of Meritage. “We’ve grown by more than 50% in the last five years alone,” Bynum said.

While the wines are wildly popular, one thing is certain. There's about a 90% chance that those drinking them – and even a majority of those making the wines – don't know the correct pronunciation of the word.

“Meritage rhymes with ‘heritage,’ but most people think it's a French word so they pronounce it like it rhymes with ‘garage,’” Bynum said. “Meritage is actually a combination of the word ‘merit’ – for the quality of the grapes – and the word ‘heritage,’ which alludes to the centuries-old tradition of blending wine.”

Bynum agrees that 25 years of education regarding the correct pronunciation has basically fallen on deaf ears.

“But in the end, that really doesn't matter,” she said. “We don't care what they call it as long as they are buying it.”

And obviously, they are!