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One grape, two names, and some super wines

THE DARK-SKINNED syrah grape – also widely known as shiraz – is one of the world's most widely-grown varieties and no wonder. Primarily used for reds, it produces delicious, full-bodied wines exploding with flavour that can be drunk young but improve with ageing.

Its names have their roots in the two main centres of production: France's Rhône Valley and Australia. Legend has it that syrah originated in Shiraz, capital of the Persian Empire, before its arrival in the Rhône.

From there, the grape travelled Down Under in the 19th Century and it's possible shiraz is an Australianisation of the name. Either way, it's now cultivated across the globe and the use of syrah or shiraz tends to signify the style of wine; syrah often denotes a more restrained, elegant Old World style of wine whereas shiraz indicates the richer, fruit-forward Australian-style wine.

Core characteristics of both are black fruits, medium/high tannins and pepper and both go well with meat and cheese. For vegetarian dishes containing aubergines, mushrooms and the like, a delicious European syrah is your best bet.

YOU SAY SYRAH, I SAY SHIRAZ

1 Wine Society Australian Shiraz (£7.50, 14%)

A full-bodied beauty from The Wine Society, bursting with cherries, blueberries and a smidgin of spice in the finish for added zing. Not too heavy, not too light, the perfect wine to warm your cockles on a cold winter evening. As the world's oldest wine club, the Society scores time and again and this is another winner. Available from The Wine Society.

2 Errazuriz Estate Shiraz 2016 (£13.95, 13.5%)

Another full-bodied, fabulous wine, this time from Chile, with competing flavours of black fruits, spices and dry tannins to tempt your tastebuds. A smattering of floral notes gives a lovely aftertaste. Available from Ocado.

3 Les Janelles Syrah Pays d'oc (£7, 12.5%)

This great value French red is beautifully deep in colour, flavoursome and big, without being cloying. Aromas of wild berry fruits (think

raspberries, blackcurrant and gooseberries), peppery spice and a long, satisfying finish give incredible bang for your buck. Available from the Co-op.

4 Robert Oatley McLaren Vale Signature Shiraz 2016 (£13.95, 14.5%)

You'd expect nothing less than brilliant from the hills of Australia's southern McLaren Vale and the Oatley name but this shiraz blows the doors off. Blueberries and spice and all things nice. A very classy wine. Pricier but worth it. Available from Wine Direct Sussex.

5 Marius IGP Pays d'Oc, Grenache/ Syrah (£9.80, 13.5%)

Another deep purple red with a dark, spicy nose and flavours and aromas of red fruits and berries. Grenache grapes give it a sweeter, more floral flavour than single varietal wines. But equally powerful on the palate. Available from Hay Wines and Southwick Court Fine Wines.



Share your own drink-related tips with matt.nixon@reachplc.com