



## Surfer sorts out syrah, shiraz

By Fred Tasker  
May 22, 2008

Peter Fraser, 34, is a surfer dude of sorts. He spends half the year near the beaches of his native Australia, half near the Pacific swells of California.

He doesn't get as much hang-ten time as he'd like, however. He's the full-time winemaker at Yangarra Estate Vineyard in Australia, helping to oversee its harvest in March. And the full-time winemaker at Kinton Vineyards in California, working with its harvest in October.

Fraser has another distinction I like. He makes shiraz in Australia, syrah in California. So he's the perfect person to grill about what the heck is the difference, if any, between those two grapes and their wines.

The back story: The syrah grape for centuries has been the mainstay of the best wines from France's Rhone Valley. Then about 100 years ago growers took syrah from there to Australia, renaming it shiraz along the way.

Today the Rhone's syrahs are big, powerful and worthy of aging; Australia's shiraz wines are soft and ripe, ready to drink upon purchase.

To add to the confusion, some California winemakers now are growing syrah grapes but calling the finished wine shiraz. As if wine fans aren't already adequately confused.

So: Are they the same wine?

Fraser shrugs: "It's just marketing."

He pooh-poohs the notion that the Rhone's syrah grape has mutated into something different in its 100 years in Australia.

"There's such a mish-mash of clones that the two are virtually synonymous."

The biggest difference, he says, is that Australia is warmer, so shiraz gets riper, softer, sweeter. He says it can be seen in his 2006 Yangarra Shiraz and his 2005 Kinton syrah – the same grape, the same growing and vinifying methods, yet the shiraz is riper, softer. Case closed.

Fraser is free to experiment because both wineries are owned by Jess Jackson, the iconic California wine pioneer who founded the Kendall-Jackson winery in 1982 and today is in charge of a wine empire. "Jess wants gems," he says. "He encourages experimentation, he gives a free hand, and he understands that it takes time and money. He's very inspiring."

Even if it keeps Fraser from his boogie board.

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### HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

**2006 Yangarra Shiraz**, McLaren Vale, Australia: ripe black cherry and bittersweet chocolate flavors, ripe, soft tannins, smooth; \$23.

**2005 Kinton Syrah**, Santa Barbara, Calif.: aromas of roses, tar and cassis liqueur, crisp acid, big, ripe tannins, powerful; \$16.

**2006 Yangarra "Cadenzia"** (grenache, shiraz, mourvedre grapes), McLaren Vale, Australia: hint of oak, very rich black cherry and mocha flavors, smooth, ripe tannins; \$26.

**2006 Old Vine Grenache**, McLaren Vale, Australia: concentrated, intense black cherry liqueur flavors, opulent and smooth and rich; \$26.

### RECOMMENDED

**2007 Yangarra Grenache/Shiraz Rosé**, McLaren Vale, Australia: crisp and tart, with maraschino cherry flavors and a hint of tannin; \$15.

**2007 Yangarra Viognier**, McLaren Vale, Australia: crisp and fresh, with flavors of tart peaches and nectarines; \$23.

**2007 Yangarra Rousanne**, McLaren Vale, Australia: peaches, minerals and spice, crisp and lean; \$23.

**2007 Yangarra Unoaked Chardonnay**: McLaren Vale, Australia: crisp and creamy, with delicate citrus flavors; \$14.