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TASTING NOTES

## PASSIONATE POURS: FIFTY SHADES OF GREY SYRAH IS NOW IN RENO

By Laura Longero  
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I don't take my sex with a side of BDSM, but if I did, I would need a glass of wine first. Or a bottle. Or several. Deep Valley Cellars of Ukiah, Calif., has partnered with E.L. James, author of the "Fifty Shades" trilogy, to produce Fifty Shades of Grey Red Satin and Fifty Shades of Grey White Silk.

"Wine plays an important role in 'Fifty Shades of Grey,' reflecting the sensuality that pervades every encounter between Anastasia and Christian," James said. "I've always had a penchant for good wine, so helping to create the blends Red Satin and White Silk felt like a natural extension of the 'Fifty Shades' trilogy. I hope all of you curl up with a glass to savor the romance and the passion."

Winery materials describe the 2010 Fifty Shades of Grey Red Satin as a "decadent blend" of flavors like black cherry, cocoa powder, creamy caramel and vanilla, leather

and clove. Varietally, Red Satin is a blend primarily of petite sirah and syrah, and it was aged in French oak barrels.

As I do not write about books, I haven't had the pleasure of reading the "Fifty Shades" trilogy, and I'll admit my brain nearly imploded when a friend read a few passages from the first book to me a few years ago. But I'm not here to attest to the quality of the literature, only to the particulars of the wine. To wit:

**2010 Fifty Shades of Grey Red Satin**

**Price:** \$17.99

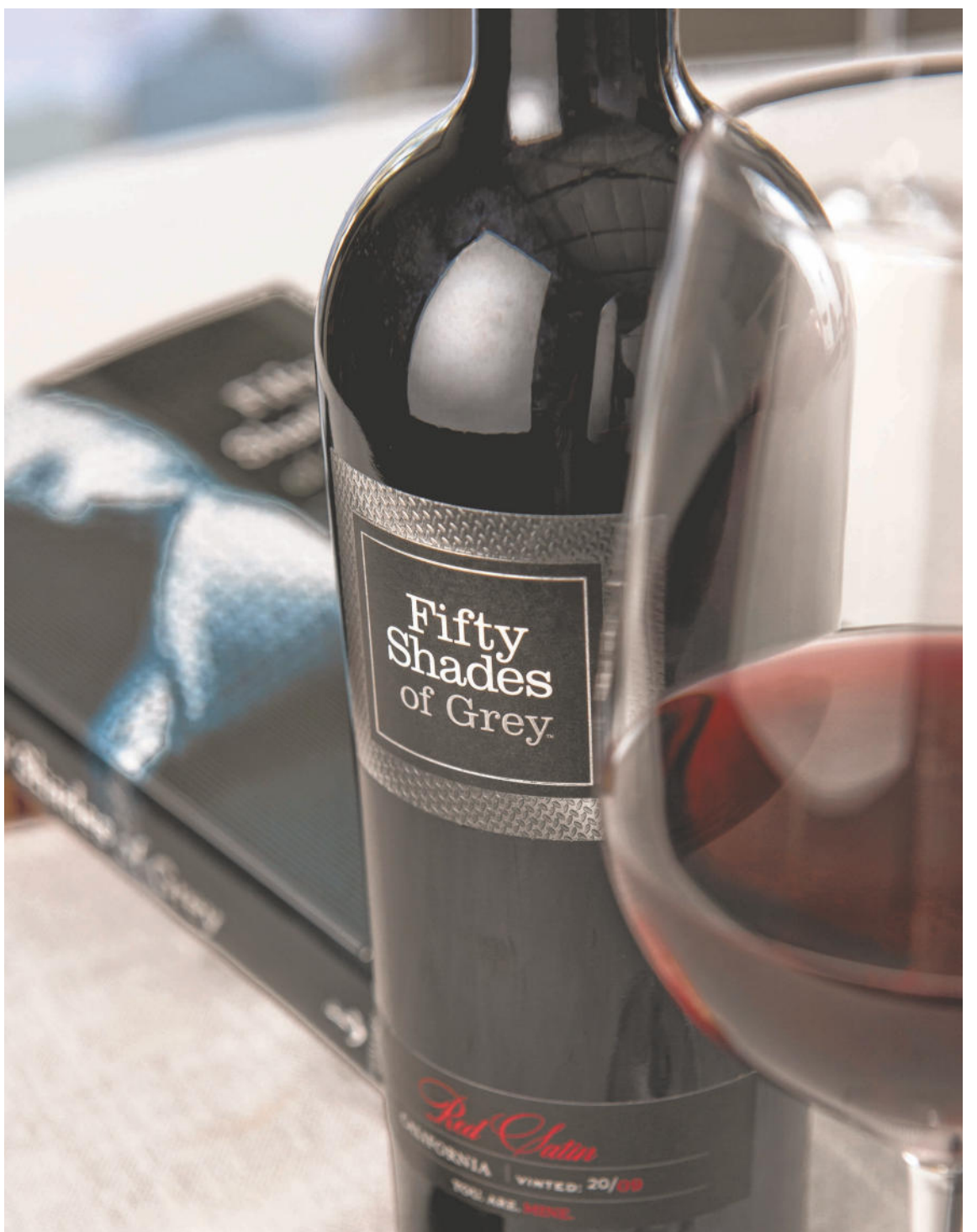
**Alcohol:** 13.5 percent

**Available at:** Total Wine & More, Save Mart Supermarkets and Vino 100

**Tasting notes:** Berry-stained in color with aromas of cocoa, cherry and blackberry, the wine is rich and round on the palate, fruit-forward with mild acidity and a smooth finish. It's bold and would be best paired with grilled meats.

Or handcuffs.

Details: [www.fiftysadeswine.com](http://www.fiftysadeswine.com).



Fifty Shades of Grey Red Satin, a partnership between a California winery and erotic "Fifty Shades" trilogy author E.L. James, is a syrah blend. Serve with grilled meats. Or a whip. PUBLICITY IMAGE

JANES ON WINE

## THOUGHTS ON THE MOST OVERRATED WHITE AND RED WINE VARIETALS

I recently had a wine that got me thinking.

It was the 2010 Bruno Giacosa barbera d'Alba, a wine from a great vintage and a great producer that was nonetheless uninspiring. I was surprised at the poor showing, but I realized when writing a tasting note for the wine that I'm regularly disappointed in barbera as a grape varietal. And that got me thinking: What other varietals do I regularly find to be overrated?



**Only one style**

For white varietals, this is a somewhat difficult task of identification. At first consideration, chardonnay might seem to be an easy target. While I'd agree that California chardonnay is an overrated wine, chardonnay the varietal is far from overrated. I think it's actually the world's greatest grape (yes, I hear you snickering).

Pinot gris also comes to mind for criticism, but I think that only applies to the Italian pinot grigio. In other parts of the world, pinot gris makes some world-class wines through different wine making techniques.

For me, the white grape that keeps popping up as highly overrated is albariño, one of Spain's most popular varietals. First, albariño rarely makes world-class wines. Sure, there are a few exceptions, but in general, the majority of ambitious albariños don't hold their own well with the world's other top whites.

Second, the varietal really only lends itself to one style of wine, the aromatic, dry style. It's not used in

sparklers, not in late harvest wines, and it's not much for making a rich and weighty style. A third thing in albariño's disfavor is that it is expensive for what you get. Most you'll find are in the \$20s — that is a lot of money for a basic aromatic dry white. Finally, the grape doesn't travel well, which is to say most examples of albariño outside of Spain are little more than generic.

**Doesn't age**

When thinking about red varietals that are overrated, along with barbera, quite a few made my initial list: merlot, pinotage, malbec, perhaps even sangiovese. I finally settled on zinfandel as the most overrated red varietal. I feel like the Reno area has a pretty high number of zinfandel fans, so before I get boos and hisses, please read on.

Like albariño, zinfandel rarely makes world-class wines. Take the world's best cabs, pinots, and syrahs and taste them with the world's best zinfandels. There's a big discrepancy in quality due in large part, I believe, to the varietal. Zinfandel also doesn't generally produce wines that age particularly well. Again, there are exceptions, and yes, it's an assumption that the ability to age is a factor in calling a varietal great. But by and large, even higher quality zinfandels I've tasted don't get dramatically better with age.

Zinfandel also doesn't lend itself to making a variety of wine styles. By contrast, consider syrah, which in a cool climate like the Hermitage appellation in France yields leading wines, and in the Barossa Valley in Australia, a very warm climate, also produces



Zinfandel grapes might make wines that are popular in the United States, but when that popularity is considered against the fact zinfandels aren't widely found outside this country, the grape can be deemed overrated. GETTY IMAGES



A cluster of albariño grapes, a popular varietal that columnist Mark Janes considers overrated because, among other things, it generally makes only a dry aromatic wine that's fairly expensive for what you get. GETTY IMAGES

top wines, just in a different style.

Finally, as a sort of indirect piece of evidence for zinfandel being overrated (at least in this country), while there many zinfandels on wine store shelves around Reno and other American cities, zinfandel is a wine you won't find outside of the United States to any significant degree.

**Academic exercise**

The wine world is fortunate to have scores upon scores of grape varietals. This diversity gives wine a great advantage over beer and spirits, its big-

gest rivals. Every varietal and wine has its time and place. And though I've deemed them overrated, there are occasions when I want to drink albariño and zinfandel.

Though considering which varietals are overrated might be something of an academic exercise, it's still a way to begin thinking about which grapes seem to let you down more often than not, and why. This exercise further invites the question about what are the criteria by which we determine a varietal to be lesser or greater. We'll save that discussion for another column.

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