



2013 Napa Valley Red Wine

This wine is our attempt at crafting a classic balanced and age-worthy red wine—wine like the wines produced and collected around the world when people like Thomas Jefferson and Winston Churchill wouldn't have dinner without a bottle of Claret. Old school age-worthy wine with finesse but with guts, and complete from beginning to end.

The blend is roughly 52 percent Merlot, 34 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 10 percent Cabernet franc, 2 percent Malbec, and 2 percent Petit verdot.

The fruit was fermented at low temperatures in small, open-top tanks and punched down by hand one to three times per day, depending on how the wine tasted during the fermentations. Maceration was 18-24 days. The wine was partially co-fermented (fermented together as one lot), and the remainder racked and blended before malolactic fermentation, so that the wine could marry from the very beginning—much magic happens during fermentation, and co-fermenting can create a seamless wine in a way that doesn't always happen with blending after the fact.

The wine was aged in 50% new French oak (Taransaud), and 50% older French oak barrels. The wine was given 20 months of elevage (aging in barrel). Around 100 cases worth of wine (four full barrels) were lost in the 2014 Napa earthquake when the barrels came crashing down, so only 294 cases were made this year.

The peak of the drought, the 2013 vintage was hot and dry, and created structured and dark-fruited wines—very different than the softer and fruitier 2012 vintage. Additionally, in 2013, for the first time, we changed our Cabernet sauvignon vineyard component to the powerful and dark-fruited Dead Fred Vineyard. Despite the drought and the new vineyard, the wine retains its typical bright red fruits and mineral character and cedar and tobacco aromas but with a strong rich black fruit and graphite component. As always it has its classic Red Hen Merlot cherry, dark chocolate, Marionberry, olive, black tea and forest character. And there is the trademark structure for aging, heightened by the dry growing season. This wine will develop for many years. The pH is 3.54, TA is 6.7, and alcohol is 13.6%.

The Vineyards

The Red Hen Merlot Vineyard, along Dry Creek, at the very top of the creek's alluvial fan, is a warm site with very light and thin soils, composed of a foot of silty loam sitting on top of at least 20 feet of pure cobble. The vines are naturally small berried and early ripening. The stress results in extremely low yields, barely making over a ton per acre of intense and concentrated fruit. In the 1950s through the 1970s, this block produced the top fruit for Christian Brothers, when it was still run by the Church (it was called "block 74"). The vineyard provides rich ripe aromatic fruit.

The Dead Fred Vineyard in Coombsville sits on a rocky volcanic knoll, with soil of gray volcanic ash and rhyolite (compressed ash) rocks. Its south-western exposure causes it to pick up heat during the day, and the proximity to the mouth of the Napa Valley keeps the nights cool. This combination of volcanic soil, daytime heat, and nighttime cool creates fruit that is uncommonly structured and ripe, yet fresh and mineral. We leased it and started farming it organically in 2012.

The Cabernet franc and Petit verdot are from The Matthiasson Vineyard, our home, and the Malbec is from one of Steve's clients in St. Helena.