



2012 Napa Valley Merlot, Red Hen Vineyard

The wine is 100 percent Merlot from the historic Red Hen Vineyard. Our block is in the far northwest corner of the vineyard, nestled into the crook of Dry Creek. This block has been the basis of our Red Wine since 2003, when Steve was overseeing the farming, and it was the inspiration for starting our own commercial wine venture. The vineyard sold, and our block is so rocky and low yielding that the new owners of the vineyard planned on putting their reservoir in this location. We couldn't let this happen, so we convinced them to lease us the block so we could farm it ourselves.

The fruit was fermented in a small, open-top tank and punched down by hand two to three times a day, depending on the rate of extraction. The wine was aged in 3 new Bousset barrels, and 6 older neutral barrels. After 20 months of elevage, with no rackings, the wine was bottled. The Red Hen Merlot always has tremendous acidity even at a high level of ripeness, one of the fascinating aspects of this special terroir.

The pH is 3.33, the 5,5 g/l TA, and the alcohol is 13.9%. 268 cases were made.

The wine has the richness and aromatic profile of Merlot, with impeccable balance and elegance. The vineyard always gives intense cherry and chocolate aromas, and is balanced by notes of tea and earth. 2012 was a mild year, so the wine is softer than normal, more luscious in the mouth, with beautiful complex fruitiness.

The Vineyard

The Red Hen Merlot Vineyard, along Dry Creek in the Oak Knoll district, 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 10-20 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 1950's through the 1970's, this block produced the top fruit for Christian Brothers, when it was still run by the Church (it was called "block 74"). It was forgotten about as a top quality site until we rediscovered it in 2003.