



2018 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 (Steve started managing the vineyard back in 2002), and it was the inspiration for starting our own commercial wine venture.

This is our first Red Hen Merlot since 2015, and sadly our last ever, as the vineyard was purchased by Joseph Phelps and our lease terminated.

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 1 new French oak Bousset barrels, and the rest older neutral barrels. The wine was bottled after 20 months of elevage, with no rackings.

The pH is 3.50, the acidity is 6.6 g/l, and the alcohol is 13.8%. 70 cases produced.

The wine has the richness and aromatic profile of Merlot, with impeccable balance and elegance. The Red Hen Merlot always has beautiful acidity even at a high level of ripeness, one of the fascinating aspects of this special terroir. The vineyard always gives intense cherry and fresh bay aromas, and is balanced by notes of chocolate, tea and earth. 2018 was a cool and consistent year, so the wine is even more fresh and high-toned than usual, with a vibrancy that will complement food and reward long aging. As always it is defined by its beautiful and complex fruitiness and savory herbal qualities.

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 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"). It was forgotten about as a top quality site until we rediscovered it in 2003.