



2004 Napa Valley Red Wine

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SON

The blend is 40 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 50 percent Merlot, and 10 percent Cabernet franc. The cool Cabernet vineyard, with its tannic structure and firm acidity, and the warm rocky Merlot vineyard, with its rich, ripe, aromatic fruit, are the core of the red wine every year, but the Cabernet franc fruit was so good in the Rippey vineyard in 2004 that we included it in the blend. It brings a dimension of black fruit, spice and dried herbs to the wine.

The fruit was fermented at low temperatures in small, open-top tanks, and punched down by hand two to three times a day. The Cabernet sauvignon and the Cabernet franc were co-fermented, and the Merlot was blended immediately after the lots were pressed, so that the wine could marry from the very beginning.

The wine was aged in Taransaud French Oak barrels, 60% new, and 40% neutral. After 18 months of elevage, with minimal rackings, the wine was bottled, unfinned and unfiltered. 120 cases were made.

The wine is well-structured, with ample fine-grained tannins, intense aromatics and long finish. The deep, dark, rich fruit is balanced by a firm, but supple, tannic structure, and a freshness and minerality that can be very elusive in the Napa Valley.

The Vineyards

The Red Hen Merlot Vineyard, along Dry Creek, at the very top of the dry creek 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. With very low vigor, the vines are naturally small berried and early ripening. The stressed vines are extremely low yielding, 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 until we discovered it in 2003.

In the mouth of the Dry Creek canyon, upstream from the Red Hen, the Meadowbrook Cabernet Sauvignon receives the nightly air current off of Mt. Veeder, which also blocks the intense late afternoon sun. This makes it the cool foil to the warmer Red Hen. The coolness and protection lets the fruit develop and maintain an unusually strong backbone of acidity and tannin. Every year, on schedule, as the nights get cold, the switch turns in the vines and the leaves turn color and drop before any other vineyard in the area, and the fruit is ready to harvest. The vineyard sits on old creek deposits, and the spots selected for harvest are on shallow, heavy clay with coarse sand, over dry cobbles and silt.

The Rippey Cabernet franc sits on steep terraces in Browns Valley, on the crest of the hills that separate Carneros from the Napa Valley. The cool climate and long season lets the black fruit aromas develop, without losing the spice and dried herb components. The soils are of marine sedimentary origin, and give up water slowly throughout the season, allowing the vines to be dry-farmed even though they sit on a hillside.