



2005 Napa Valley Red Hen Vineyard Merlot

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SON

The wine is 100 percent Merlot from block 3C of the Red Hen Vineyard. We selected this block because of the incredibly expressive wine that is produced from the rocky, low-fertility soil. The owners of the vineyard are great farmers, but because we feel so strongly about hand-crafted wine, and about this site, that we chose to lease it and farm it ourselves.

The fruit was fermented at low temperatures in small, open-top tanks (outside, next to the vineyard), and punched down by hand two to three times a day, depending on the rate of extraction. Since the temperatures were cool, the fermentation was long and slow, and lasted for over a month. Long cool fermentations are important to us, because they preserve the aromatics, and with intense fruit like the Red Hen Merlot, they avoid heaviness and lead to a more balanced mouthfeel.

The wine was aged in 1 new French oak (Bousset) barrel, and 2 older neutral barrels. After 18 months of elevage, with no rackings, the wine was bottled, unfiltered and unfiltered. 70 cases were made.

The wine is very structured—more cabernet-like—but has the richness and aromatic profile of Merlot. The vineyard is known for strong cherry and chocolate aromas, and it is balanced by notes of tea and earth.

The Vineyard

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 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.