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2007 Napa Valley Red Wine

The blend is 61 percent Merlot, 28 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 5 percent Cabernet franc, 5 percent Petit verdot, and 1 percent Malbec.

The fruit was fermented at low temperatures in small, open-top tanks and punched down by hand one to three times a day, depending on taste during the fermentations. Maceration was 28 days. The wine was partially co-fermented and partially blended immediately after the lots were pressed, so that the wine could marry from the very beginning.

The wine was aged in 50% new French oak (Taransaud, Boutes, Bossuet), and 50% neutral barrels. After 18 months of elevage, with only one racking when it was blended, the wine was bottled, unfinned and unfiltered. 280 cases were made.

This vintage has the freshness and liveliness that that we strive for, and which is hard to attain in the Napa Valley, where richness and power come so easily. The aroma includes mint, dried herbs and earth, red and black cherries, dark chocolate and ripe blackberries. The flavor in the palate is also of dark chocolate with a fruit core of ripe cane berries, and the finish continues with chocolate, black fruit, and black tea. The tannins are fine-grained. A very important goal for us is that wine has ample concentration and is very long, but is not heavy on the palate, and this vintage is our best yet in that regard. The character and structure of the wine is very classically inspired. The pH is 3.54, the TA is 6.10, and the alcohol is 14.5%.

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 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"). The vineyard provides rich ripe aromatic fruit.

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 clay with coarse sand, over dry cobbles and silt. The vineyard provides structure and firm acidity.

The Cabernet franc, Petit verdot and Malbec are in such small quantities that Steve gleaned out of the ripest spots in various vineyards of his consulting clients.