MATTHIASSON

2008 Napa Valley Red Wine

This wine is our attempt at crafting a classic balanced and age-worthy red wine—wine like the wines produced and collected around the world when people like Thomas Jefferson and Winston Churchill wouldn't have dinner without a bottle of Claret. Old school wine with finesse but with guts.

The blend is 67 percent Merlot, 26 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 3 percent Cabernet franc, 5 percent Malbec, and 2 percent Petit verdot.

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 20 months of elevage, with only one racking when it was blended, the wine was bottled, unfined and unfiltered. Only 180 cases were made—100 less than in 2007.

This is a riper vintage, reflecting the warm growing conditions and tiny crop that Mother Nature provided. There is plenty of freshness, but the ripe bing cherry and rich chocolaty tannins really characterize this vintage. The aroma includes red and black cherries, dark chocolate, ripe blackberries, and notes of black tea and bay leaf. The flavor on the palate reminds one of chocolate covered cherries, very juicy, and the finish continues with chocolate, dark fruit, and black tea. There is a fair amount of tannic grip, with a high volume of fine-grained tannins. The pH is 3.68, TA is 6.4, and alcohol is 14.3%.

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 sun 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 leaves change color and drop before any other vineyard in the area, signaling that 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 and Petit verdot are in such small quantities that Steve gleaned out of the ripest spots in various vineyards of his consulting clients.

PO BOX 10880 NAPA, CA 94581 707.265.9349 MATTHIASSON.COM