



2011 Napa Valley Cabernet franc

N
S
S
A
H
T
M

Cabernet franc can be Pinot-like in that it is very representative of the site where it is grown, and at it's best it is feminine, intriguing, and difficult to understand. Beguiling. For our 2009 vintage we focused completely on the mineral aspects of it's character and ended up with a wine that somehow manages to be both delicate and powerful, aromatic, long, and low in alcohol. It's a completely different expression of Cabernet franc than one usually finds in the new world, inspired by Chinon, but something totally unique in and of itself—a true representation of the terroir of our Napa vineyard, showing a feminine side of Napa that is rarely seen any more.

The wine is 100 percent Cabernet franc. 2011 was our second crop (we grafted the budwood onto mature Merlot vines in 2008), harvested a small amount in 2009 and lost the entire crop due to a heat spike in 2010. To achieve concentration and enable an early pick we thinned off two thirds of the fruit. That, plus dry-farming, helped the vines get fully ripe at only 22.5 brix, capturing the herbal and floral notes before they burned off in the heat of the summer.

The grapes were destemmed and crushed with rollers, and fermented on the skins at very cool temps in an open-top fermenter. We did manual punch downs once a day. We pressed just after dryness, and aged the wine in a neutral barrel for 20 months.

The pH is 3.75, and the alcohol is 11.6%. 24 cases were made.

The Cabernet franc has a seductive nose of lavender and sage, rose petals, crushed tea leaves, and brambles. It is very soft in the mouth, with an iron-like minerality and rose-water bramble-berry character. It's light on the palate but firm at the same time—it's a wine with many contradictions that is hard to describe with tasting notes. Easy drinking, but incredibly complex.

The Vineyard

The Cabernet franc represents 2 rows in our home vineyard in the Western Oak Knoll area of Napa Valley. The clone was brought from Bordeaux in the late 90s by someone who will remain unnamed—he refers to it as “clone X.” It was grafted onto 15 year old Merlot vines. Organically managed and dry-farmed, with fruit trees at the ends of the rows, the vines are serenaded throughout the season by kids, coyotes, owls, bees, and the occasional roar of one of our old tractors.