



2015 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 age-worthy wine with finesse but with guts, and complete with a beginning, middle, and end.

The blend is roughly 49 percent Merlot, 38 percent Cabernet sauvignon, 6 percent Cabernet franc, 5 percent Petit verdot, and 2 percent Malbec.

The fruit was fermented at low temperatures in small, open-top tanks and punched down by hand one to three times per day, depending on how the wine tasted during the fermentations. Maceration was 18-24 days. The wine was partially co-fermented (fermented together as one lot), and the remainder racked and blended before malolactic fermentation, so that the wine could marry from the very beginning—much magic happens during fermentation, and co-fermenting can create a seamless wine in a way that doesn't always happen with blending after the fact.

The wine was aged in 50% new French oak (Taransaud), and 50% older French oak barrels. The wine was given 20 months of elevage (aging in barrel).

2015 was a very warm year, the warmest since 1997. This resulted in a plumper and richer vintage for this wine, but the Southern Napa vineyards held plenty of freshness and high-toned aromatics. As always the wine is defined by its typical bright red fruits, mineral character, cedar and tobacco aromas, but this year with more rich black fruits and graphite. And there is the trademark structure for aging, which is why we hold the wine an additional three years in bottle before release. This wine will continue to develop for many years.

The pH is 3.65, TA is 6.3, and alcohol is 13.9%. 391 cases produced.

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 1950s through the 1970s, 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. We started farming this block organically in 2005.

The Dead Fred Vineyard in Coombsville sits on a rocky volcanic knoll, with soil of gray volcanic ash and rhyolite (compressed ash) rocks. Its south-western exposure causes it to pick up heat during the day, and the proximity to the mouth of the Napa Valley keeps the nights cool. This combination of volcanic soil, daytime heat, and nighttime cool creates fruit that is uncommonly structured and ripe, yet fresh and minerally. We leased it and started farming it organically in 2012.

The Cabernet franc and Petit verdot are from The Matthiasson Vineyard, our home, and the Malbec is from one of Steve's clients in St. Helena.