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2008 wineries of the year

Frog's Leap



John Williams

REGIONAL

Founded: 1981
Winemakers: John Williams and Paula Moschetti
Viticulturist: Frank Leeds
Acres owned: 150
Annual production: 64,000 cases
Estate grown: 70%
Owners: The Williams family
Known for: A longstanding commitment to organic practices
Location: Rutherford, CA
Website: frogsleap.com

Frog's Leap Winery's credo of keeping wine fun and moderately frivolous belies the fact that the winery is one of the oldest and most dedicated practitioners of modern organic viticulture in the Napa Valley. The Frog's Leap approach may be lighthearted, but their commitment is not. As a *Winery of the Year* for the fourth time in six years, Frog's Leap has taken the right path.

Williams attributes at least part of his dedication to organic practices and to the fact that he grew up in the sixties. He also recalls a few 'disastrous' years of conventional farming. That drove him to contact the Fetzers to ask them what they knew about organic farming—the family had just begun converting their vineyards. "They said, 'You can come on up,'" Williams recalls, "but we don't really know what we're doing. We just listen to this guy Amigo Bob."

In May of 1988, Williams hastily arranged a meeting with his growers and Amigo Bob Cantisano, an organic farming consultant with a laid-back, tie-dyed affect "right out of central casting," says Williams. His growers—Andy Hoxsey and Frank Leeds among them—were uncomfortable with this latent hippie in their midst. "But once they heard him speak with such passion about soil health and ecosystems, and that this was not simply a tree-hugging exercise but a better way to farm, they got over it," says Williams. Amigo Bob has been a consultant for Frog's Leap ever since, and one year later, Williams, Hoxsey and Leeds had one of the first certified organic vineyards in Napa Valley.

Frog's Leap is in Rutherford, and in 1996, debuted a bottling by that name. The 2004 Rutherford, mostly cabernet sauvignon with about eight percent cabernet franc, was a marvelous evocation of that area's alluvial soils, supporting a cool, bright core of lavender-tinged dark berry fruit. But their top wine this year was a claretlike zinfandel, floral, brisk and lean, yielding scents of plums and violets and a finely etched texture. The 2006 fruit came in at 23.4 degrees Brix, for an alcohol of 13.4 percent—unusual in these days of monster zins. —P.J.C.



TOP-SCORING WINES

93 '06 Napa Valley Zinfandel \$27 (6/08)

91 '04 Rutherford Napa Valley Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon \$75 (4/08)

87 '05 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon \$39 (4/08)

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