



FROG'S LEAP

2023
MERLOT
RUTHERFORD, NAPA VALLEY

A BRIEF HISTORY

A part of the Frog's Leap family since 1990, Merlot is one of the most complex and difficult wines that we make—and also one of the most rewarding. The Rutherford district of Napa Valley, the locus point for our Merlot, is home to about 25 different soil types, and these soils have mixed and morphed over the eons to paint a picture that resembles a kaleidoscope. Merlot thrives only on a very narrow slice of these soils. It needs lots of clay in the soil—what old timers call “cold feet”—but the clay can't be too heavy, or it would delay ripening too much. If the soil is too weak, the fruit won't ripen; if too fertile, the vines become overly vigorous, shading the fruit and leading to unbalanced flavors. The grape requires a great deal of care in site selection and fine tuning during the growing season to come to optimal ripeness, and our dry farming and organic practices play a key role in this.

No less care is required in the winery, where the variety is often miscast as a “baby Cab.” If one pushes the extraction too hard, or overwhelms the wine with lots of new oak, it quickly gets anonymous, charmless and disjointed. On the other hand, if one is too gentle with the winemaking—the “baby Pinot” approach—then the resulting wine can feel narrow and undeveloped, having never been allowed enough room to reach its potential. However, when we get this Goldilocks variety just right, it is very hard to beat—red fruit flavors, plums and sage with an endless, supple texture. There is nothing quite like great Merlot

ABOUT THE WINE

2023 was one of the most epic years for all the grapes that we farm, and the Merlot was a perfect example. A moderate summer followed by a downright cool harvest and ample crop levels dramatically slowed down the pace of ripening. Our final harvest for the Merlot came on November 2nd, by a good margin our latest harvest date for any grape destined for dry wine in our history. These extraordinary conditions gave the grapes lots of time under the sun, but without the over-maturity and corresponding loss of acidity that usually comes with extended “hang time”. The result is something special. The 2023 is fully loaded with Merlot's distinctive fruitiness: ripe plums and black cherries straight out of the orchard, complete with a veneer of dusty earthiness reflecting the soils that they were grown in. This wine has great bones, by which I mean a kind of sense of completeness to the tannins, fully integrated with the acidity, that gives it a powerful presence on the palate while not distracting from the wine's aromatic complexity. In the end, great Merlot is all about balancing its generous, plummy cherry-cola fruitiness with the tannin and acidity that drive its tension and inherent power. I think the 2023 achieves that goal perfectly, and I'm excited to drink it for decades into the future. R.W.



BALANCE, RESTRAINT AND DEEP RESPECT FOR THE NATURAL EXPRESSION OF THE VINE



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2023 MERLOT

RUTHERFORD, NAPA VALLEY

WINEMAKING

Destemmed and crushed to tank, native fermentation. Natural malolactic in barrel. Aged in French oak for 18 months, 10% new. Un-fined (wine is vegan), lightly filtered prior to bottling

THE BLEND

65% Merlot, Red Barn Vineyard, Rutherford
20% Merlot, Williams-Rossi Vineyard, Rutherford
8% Cabernet Sauvignon, Truchard Vineyard, Carneros
7% Merlot, Truchard Vineyard, Carneros

THE VINES

100% Certified organic. The soils in the dry-farmed Merlot block at Red Barn have a relatively shallow layer of loam and gravel on top, with deep layers of clay below, the remnants of the outer edge of an ancient alluvial fan. The Merlot soils at Williams-Rossi are younger (geologically), and the dry-farmed vines sit primarily on clay with very little loam. The Merlot soils at Truchard are clay deposits set on steep hills, derived from the uplifted fluvial shale and sandstone that are characteristic of Carneros, while the Cabernet sits at the top of one of these hills, where the soil turns rockier and more suitable for Cabernet.

STATISTICS

harvest: September 23 to November 2, starting at Williams-Rossi and finishing at Red Barn, with Truchard coming in late October.
at harvest: 23.5 deg. brix, 6.4 g/L TA, 3.49 pH
final: 13.4% alc., 5.5 g/L TA, 3.56 pH, 0.03% residual sugar
bottled: May 23, 2025
5,296 cases

WINEMAKERS

John Williams
Rory Williams
Pablo Polanco

VINEYARDIST

Frank Leeds

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