FROG'S LEAP




# 2020 CABERNET SAUVIGNON WILLIAM ROSSI

## RUTHERFORD, NAPA VALLEY

### A BRIEF HISTORY

Over the years, we've spoken at length about our farming practices: our early adoption and advocacy for organic farming, our dogged insistence on dry farming all our grapes, and the attention to detail that those practices require of us. These practices are designed to encourage and emphasize the natural differences of soil, water, climate, and microflora that make each vine different from the next, and give rise to idiosyncrasies in wines from different sections of a vineyard. At Frog's Leap, our effort always extends toward making wine honestly, where a given vintage of wine is always true to its time on the vine and the place where it was grown.

It was with this philosophy that we approached a new wine, the Williams Rossi Cabernet Sauvignon. In 1995, we were introduced to siblings Louise and Ray Rossi and their historic Rossi ranch, situated at the northern end of the famed western bench in Rutherford. By 1997 we were helping Ray farm the ranch, taking all the fruit from the vineyard. In 2007, Frog's Leap acquired the ranch and began to plant vines in areas that had long lain fallow and replant diseased blocks. Rossi is a complicated ranch with a kaleidoscope of different soils—ancient rivulets of heavy sand and gravel streak east-west though rich gravelly-clay loams, marked by almost imperceptible changes in elevation. While heavy pure clay dominates the westernmost area, a little to the north that clay mixes with gravel to create our best Merlot ground. In other words, the stage was set for a ranch whose wines could speak to the heart of our core purpose of cherishing the different and the idiosyncratic, if we were willing to make the effort. The Williams Rossi Cabernet Sauvignon is the culmination of that effort.

When making a reserve-style wine, a winemaker will usually look to select his or her "best" barrels in the blend. For my dad and me, the basis for that selection is made in the vineyard. Each year, our eyes are focused on how the vines planted in each soil type are adapting to the conditions posed by the vintage, and we head into harvest with that knowledge. When sampling, we select areas of the ranch—largely defined by specific areas of soil—that are exceptionally delicious that year, and ferment them separately. These mini-fermentations, usually so small that they are done in individual barrels, are then selected down to the best barrels after the wines are complete. The specific blend will change from year-to-year as different areas respond to vintage conditions, giving a wine whose character is wholly rooted in the connection that our family has to our home here in Rutherford.

### ABOUT THE WINE

2020 kicked off three straight years of drought conditions in Napa, and the dry winter weather pushed the vines to set a very small crop. Pleasant weather—warm but not hot—over the summer allowed the grapes to ripen evenly and enter the harvest season on an even keel. Then Nature decided to turn on the afterburners. Hot, strange weather arrived in mid-August, kicking off harvest early, and picks followed fast and furious. The Cabernet harvest at Williams Rossi began on September 7th and wrapped up in less than a week, with brix levels slightly elevated, but in good balance overall thanks to the optimal growing conditions over the summer, which helped preserve natural acidity and pH balance. While it was certainly a rollercoaster year on many levels, we are thrilled with the 2020 Williams Rossi Cabernet. A quick note on the vintage's infamous wildfires—the Cabernets from Williams Rossi were

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safely tucked away in the cellar and away from any issues with the smoke that descended on the valley at the end of September. The 2020 Williams Rossi Cabernet is very smooth and well balanced on the palate, but with a streak of high-tone, racy fruit on the nose from the warm harvest conditions. Fully ripe summer fruit, black licorice, cardamom and mocha add great depth. While it maintains a beautiful floral edge to the aromas, the 2020 doesn't feature the herbal/green profile as much as other vintages—likely a product of the hot finish to the year. It's very approachable at release, and while great with food, it is also an ideal candidate for sipping on its own, contemplating the roses and thorns of this tumultuous year. —R.W.

## ABOUT THE SOILS

All vineyard blocks are from the Williams Rossi Vineyard, on the northern end of the Rutherford bench.

South Creek – This block has the highest percentage of very gravelly soil on the entire ranch, and a large section of the block hosts relatively low-vigor vines with tiny bunches and small berries. This section is one of the most sensitive to heat and is often the first off the vine at Rossi, as was the case in 2020.

Hilltop – A similar story accompanies the gravel bar in Hilltop block, which is narrower than its cousin in South Creek. Hilltop is our cheeky name for a block that sits at the center of the ranch, near enough, and sports an average elevation an astounding 2 feet higher than the rest of the ranch (wait…why aren't you astounded?). Hilltop always brings a lot of high-tone herbal-floral character to the blend.

Throne – This block is split into two soil types – very gravelly on the west side, and heavier in clay on the east. In 2020, the small berries in the west carried the day, adding intense fruit and floral lift to the blend.

Front Northeast – Located in the NE corner of the ranch, right up against Highway 29, this block's light, gravelly soils usually ensure that it's one of the first to be picked at Rossi. Purple-black exotic fruit and an exuberant, plush texture is the hallmark of this block.

Front Mid – Right across a driveway from Northeast block, this block shares in the light, gravelly soils of its neighbor. Again, exotic black fruit and a sweet midpalate define the flavors here.

Front South – Always one of the last blocks to pick at Rossi, Front South has a small rise in the center of it that has a higher percentage of gravel, where the vines and berries get smaller than elsewhere. Always very high in acidity, its fruit character nevertheless trends toward very ripe plums and exotic fruit.

Cab Franc – The only instance of this variety on the ranch, this block sits between our Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blocks. The northern end of the block ripens faster than the rest of the block, and we often pick it separately. In 2020, the high-tone herbal-floral character of Cab Franc was much in demand, helping to lift up the overall blend and bring balance to the warm, dry conditions of the year.

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### THE BLEND

85% Cabernet Sauvignon
15% Cabernet Franc

15% – Cabernet Sauvignon, South Creek block (SE corner gravel bar)
Planted 2008 in very gravelly loam, Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 7th . Barrel fermented.

15% – Cabernet Sauvignon, "Hilltop" block (S gravel bar)
Planted 2010 in gravelly loam, Clone 4 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 8th. Barrel fermented.

15% – Cabernet Sauvignon, "Throne" block (West gravel rise)
Planted 2009 in a mix of clay loam (east area) and gravelly loam (west area). Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 8th. Barrel fermented.

15% – Cabernet Sauvignon, Front Northeast block (southern low-vigor area)
Planted 2012 in very gravelly loam. Clone 4 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 7th. Barrel fermented.

15% – Cabernet Sauvignon Front Mid block (Northern gravel)
Planted 2014 in very gravelly loam. Clone 4 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 7th. Barrel fermented.

10% – Cabernet Sauvignon, Front South block (center gravel patch)
Planted 2008 in gravelly loam. Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 12th. Barrel fermented.

15% – Cabernet Franc (northern low-vigor area)
Planted 2010 in clay loam with gravel topsoil (esp. on the north side). Petrus clone on St. George. Harvested Sep. 8th. Barrel fermented.

### STATISTICS

at harvest: 25.2 deg. brix 6.5 g/L total acidity, 3.57 pH
final: 14.5% alcohol, 6.7 g/L total acidity, 3.61 pH, 0.01% residual sugar
bottled June 16, 2023
368 cases produced from 15 barrels

### WINEMAKERS

John Williams
Rory Williams
Pablo Polanco

### VINEYARDIST

Frank Leeds