

1999 Merlot

Russian River Vineyards
Russian River Valley
Biodynamically farmed



GOLD MEDAL
SONOMA COUNTY
HARVEST FAIR

Vineyard & Vintage: The Russian River Appellation is ideal for Merlot. Its cooler climate produces elegant flavors and delicate nuances. **Mike Topolos' Russian River Vineyards**, just a stone's throw from the river in Forestville, is home of this oldest Merlot vineyard in Sonoma County. It was revitalized using biodynamic farming techniques that combine old world traditions and organic science to balance the needs of the vineyard and its surrounding environment, engendering a better ecosystem, better-tasting grapes, thus better wine. This vineyard was awarded the Gold Medal for Best Vineyard in Sonoma County at the 1997 Harvest Fair, a great honor. The 1999 growing season was long and relatively cool. A couple of small rain storms in September prolonged the ripening. We didn't pick this vineyard until October 25th, later than usual. Many factors determine when the grapes are ripe and its time to pick, not just sugar and acid---physiological ripeness occurs when the seeds turn brown; the skin of ripe fruit starts to soften and change texture; the aroma is richer. Like ripe strawberries, the overall character of the grapes determines ripeness, the moment of harvest and the resulting quality of wine made from the fruit.

The Wine: Hand picked, sorted and destemmed without crushing, preserved about 50% whole berries. Fermentation with a large portion of whole berries helps retain floral and vine ripe fruit flavors in the wine. The cap was hand-punched three times-a-day during 15 days of fermentation in an open-top, redwood tank to avoid maceration of the berries. The new wine was aged in French and American oak barrels for 18 months, longer than usual for Merlot. A bit of Cabernet Sauvignon was blended for a longer, more-structured finish. This wine is unfiltered and unfiltered.

Tasting Notes: The extracted cork shows bits of tartrate crystals indicative of an unfiltered wine. As soon as it is poured, the aroma of crushed, ripe boysenberries rises from the glass, unusual for such a young wine. The color is a brilliantly clear, deep garnet, that clings to the glass in well-formed legs that promise a rich, viscous mouth feel. The flavor builds on these notes expanding up and out to fill the senses with ripe boysenberries, chocolate cordials, cedar cigar box and nutmeg on toast, layered sensations unexpected in a Merlot. It is altogether rich, full, elegant and perfectly balanced. The finish lingers longer than most Cabs. When it finally begins to disappear, you're eager for the next sip. Pair this Merlot with rich, grilled entries, sauced fishes and stews; it's heavenly with rack of lamb.

Harvest & Winemaking Data:

Winemaker:	Robert Rex & Michael Browne
Harvested:	By hand on October 25, 1999
Brix at Harvest:	21.5° Brix
Acid at Harvest:	.80g/100ml as Tartaric
pH (composite):	3.25
Yeast:	Pasteur Red (Bordeaux variety)
Fermentation:	Open-top redwood for 15 days, punched 3 x/day
Max. Fermentation Temp.:	95°F
Malo/Lactic Conversion:	100%
Aging:	18 months in 90% French Oak, 10% American Oak, 35% new overall
Fining:	unfiltered, unfiltered
Blend:	95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon,
SO ₂ at Bottling:	12 ppm free at bottling
Bottled:	292 cases on June 21, 2001
Alcohol:	13.0 %
Released:	January 2002
Awards & Reviews:	Gold Medal - Sonoma County Harvest Fair; 2 Silver medals; 90 points - the <i>Wine Enthusiast</i> magazine

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