

# 2003 Merlot Cuvée

75% Merlot, 11% Cabernet Sauvignon

8% Malbec, 6% Sangiovese

North Coast

**W**e could have called this wine **Merlot** as the requirement for doing so is that it be 75% Merlot. However that would miss the point. It's all about the blend. **Cuvée** means, "wine blend" in French. I'm often comparing winemaking to cooking because it makes so much sense. What makes a dish, a bowl of soup special, a reduction sauce so delicious is the combination of flavors, the layers of sensations we experience. This is the essence of this Cuvée. The femininity of the Merlot is mirrored by the structure of the Cab, which also adds finish the Merlot alone lacks. The Malbec gives depth of flavor low on the palate, below your tongue as it stretches your cheeks. Sangiovese elevates floral tones to heights Merlot can never achieve on its own. This is a whole new reason to drink Merlot. Even Miles from *Sideways* would like this one.

**The North Coast AVA** (Appellation) encompasses Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino and Lake Counties of Northern California, making up a growing region second to none in the world. Grapes for our Merlot Cuvée come from several of our partner vineyards in the North Coast, growers with whom we share the passion for making great wine from great grapes. They include Ladi's Vineyard, Windsor Oaks Vineyard, and Bugay Vineyard in Sonoma County, Roumiguere Vineyard in Lake County and the Trio Vineyard in Napa Valley.

**The 2003 Vintage** is a difficult vintage to classify. The weather was erratic with a wet and cold bud break, several heat spikes in the summer and rain in Napa in August. The quality is vineyard specific with vineyards closer to the coast doing best. Beautiful fall weather allowed flavors to fully develop after a shaky start. *The Wine Spectator* rated the vintage lower than it deserves. We've found that the long barrel aged wines are well-structured, full-bodied, and delicious.

#### Most recent review:

*Connoisseurs' Guide to California Wine*  
Volume 31 Issue 9: July 2007

#### 89 Points

75% Merlot, 11% Cabernet Sauvignon; 8% Malbec; 6% Sangiovese. From its layered aromas of oak-sweetened cherries to its very smooth, neatly proportioned flavors, this engaging Merlot hits all of the right varietal marks and shows a fair measure of fruity depth in the bargain. It is nicely rounded in feel with muted tannins and a lengthy, easy-to-taste finish, and, while it can hold well in the cellar for three or four years, it delivers lots of straightforward appeal right now. \$28.00

#### Winemaking Data:

Winemakers:	Robert Rex, Michael Browne, Michael Collier
Fermentation:	Hand sorted fruit, whole berry open-topped, hand punched fermenters
Press:	Low pressure (0.8 bars), multiple cycle, low (145gal/ton) yield
Aging:	34 months in 85% French, 15% American oak barrels, 35% new
Finishing:	Unfined and screened before bottling
Alcohol:	14.4%; Residual sugar: 0.4%
Bottled:	850 cases on September 12, 2006
Released:	December 15, 2006
Reviews:	Not submitted.

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