

Varietal Focus:

# Merlot

Lance Cutler will be leading a seated tasting at **IQ** 2015. For more information on the seated tastings and the full agenda, visit the IQ website [www.winebusinessIQ.com](http://www.winebusinessIQ.com)

Lance Cutler

**MERLOT IS A DARK-SKINNED** grape variety that is used both as a blending grape and a stand-alone wine varietal. Merlot grows most famously in Bordeaux, France, and it is by far the most planted variety of that famous region. In fact, the variety is so popular all over the country that France grows more than two-thirds of the world's Merlot.

Merlot buds earlier and ripens earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon. It is susceptible to shatter in bad weather during flowering, and its thin skin makes it vulnerable to Botrytis bunch rot if there is too much rain or moisture. Merlot grapes tend to be large and hang in loose bunches. Merlot tends to have higher sugar than Cabernet Sauvignon, along with less tannin and lower malic acid levels.

Because Merlot is grown all over the world and can put out large crops, while still producing wines that are supple, fruity and lack astringent tannins, many producers have used the variety to produce inexpensive, innocuous wines. These wines lack complexity and interest, but they are soft and undemanding. Millions of cases of undistinguished Merlot have flooded wine markets for years, and critics have rightfully chastised these wines as dull and bland. This Varietal Focus concentrates on what makes Merlot special: well-made, challenging wines that offer bold fruit character, lush mouthfeel and good tannic structure.

Merlot can set large crops, especially after a good flowering season. Regulating crop size seems to affect quality in a good way. The vines thrive in well-drained soil. Merlot is notorious for approaching full ripeness and then stalling in sugar production, only to quickly over-ripen in the face of warm weather. This ability to achieve full physiological ripeness has led to two primary styles for the wine. The New World style emphasizes ripeness, inky color, full body and lush tannins. Flavor profiles lean toward plum and blackberry. A more traditional style involves picking at slightly lower sugars, trying to maintain acidity. The resulting wine is medium-bodied, with lower alcohol and more red fruit character like raspberries. These wines can also exhibit leafy, vegetal notes or earthy, black tea aromas.

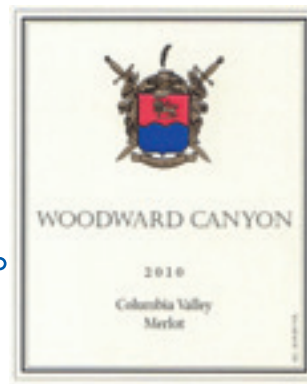
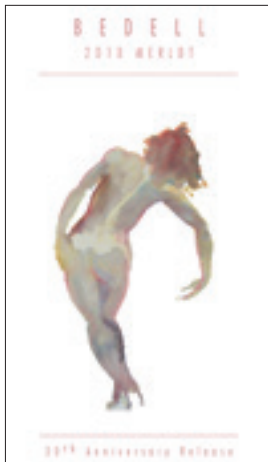
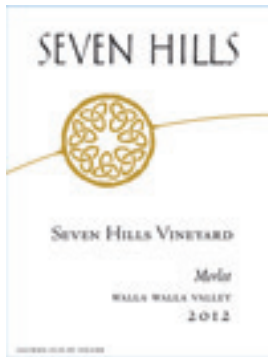
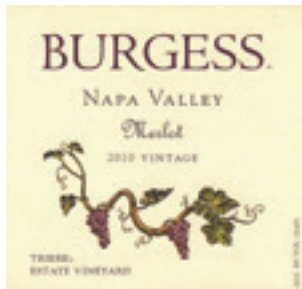
Merlot is grown all across the globe, including in countries as diverse as Italy, Romania, Australia, Argentina, Bulgaria, Chile, Greece, Hungary,

Mexico and South Africa. It is the second most planted grape in Israel and can be found in Turkey, Croatia and Slovenia. In the United States, California and Washington have had the most success with the variety, but even Long Island, New York is having a successful go at it.

In Bordeaux, Merlot is used primarily as a blending grape where it lends suppleness, ripe fruit character and a more generous mouthfeel to the more tannic Cabernet Sauvignon or the leaner Cabernet Franc. On the Left Bank of the Gironde River, in Médoc and Graves, Merlot usually comprises less than 25 percent of the blend. On the Right Bank however, in St. Emilion and Pomerol it usually makes up the majority of the blend, often with Cabernet Franc as the other main player. Merlot is also grown in Provence, the Loire Valley and Languedoc-Roussillon.

Merlot is prolific in warm climates but does better in cooler regions. It is grown all over California, and the wines can range from fruity and simple to ripe, mouth filling, supple monsters. It does very well in Washington, where it is the second most widely planted red grape. The state's long days and cool nights help produce a wine loaded with rich fruitiness but retaining a firm structure. The very special seashore conditions on New York's Long Island lend their Merlots an almost saline character along with dark fruit and black tea flavors.

Napa Valley has long been renowned for Cabernet Sauvignon, but it has produced wonderful Merlots for decades. **Renée Ary** submitted the legendary **Duckhorn Vineyards** Napa Valley Merlot Three Palms Vineyard. **Tom Rinaldi**, who helped make Duckhorn legendary, gave us his **Provenance Vineyards** Merlot. **Steve Burgess** added his family's **Triere Estate Vineyard** Merlot. Three celebrated Washington winemakers, all of whom were essential to the varietal's success in that state, participated. **Mike Januik** contributed his Merlot from the renowned **Klipsun Vineyard**. **Casey McClellan** brought his **Seven Hills Vineyard** Merlot, and **Kevin Mott** added **Woodward Canyon's** Columbia Valley Merlot. Long Island has hung its hat on Merlot as its best red wine. **Rich Olsen-Harbich** shared his 30th Anniversary Release Merlot from **Bedell Cellars**. **Barbara Shinn** and **David Gates** brought their Nine Barrel Reserve Merlot. **Anthony Nappa** submitted his Reserve Merlot from his eponymous winery.



# Napa Valley

Napa Valley is just 30 miles long and a few miles wide, but it has a wide diversity of elevations, microclimates and soil types. It is also one of the smallest viticultural areas in the world, and its total planted acreage equals just one-eighth of Bordeaux's. Napa Valley is famous, and it is most famous for Cabernet Sauvignon; but right after Cabernet, Merlot is the most planted red variety in the valley with just a shade under 6,000 acres. Vineyard land in Napa Valley is expensive, and the wines that come from that land have to sell for high prices. The Cabernet Sauvignons are recognized as some of the best in the world. The same can be said for the Merlots.



Three Palms Vineyard

## Duckhorn Vineyards

2011 Napa Valley Merlot Three Palms Vineyard,  
3,500 cases, 14.5% Alc., \$95

**Renée Ary** moved to California from the East Coast. She graduated from college and landed a job at **Robert Mondavi's** Oakville winery as a lab assistant. She moved to **Duckhorn Vineyards** in 2003, working under winemaker **Mark Beringer**. She moved from lab manager to enologist to assistant winemaker to associate winemaker, until early in 2014, when she was named as Duckhorn's fourth winemaker.

### According to Ary:

"Three Palms Vineyard provides us with incredible fruit that makes full-bodied, structured wines with classic fruit expression. Our goal is to showcase the depth, complexity and structure of that fruit by making a wine with balanced tannins and seamlessly integrated oak. The wines offer red fruit, sweet spices and a firm, yet velvety structure with elegant, earthy undertones.



"Three Palms Vineyard has a very consistent terroir of rocky volcanic soil over its 83 acres. The vineyard sits on the valley floor with rows running northeast/southwest and has very good drainage. Vine spacing is 8x10 feet with a modified California sprawl. The vineyard is farmed traditionally and uses drip irrigation. The vineyard was planted from cuttings. The Merlot comes from Bear Flats, Cabernet Franc from Tamagni and Cabernet Sauvignon from Rutherford. Rootstock for the Cabernet is 110R while rootstock for the other two varieties is 110 R and 1103.

"In the vineyard we drop fruit early and then again for underripe or unbalanced fruit. We pull leaves to achieve dappled sunlight in the fruit zone, and we pull laterals to control vigor. Production is in the 3 to 4 tons per acre range. We pick based on flavor and tannin structure while keeping Brix and acidity analysis in mind. We are looking to lose pyrazines and get currant, cherry and plum flavors in the Merlot. With the Cab Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon we want structure and intensity, but we don't want it to overpower the Merlot.

"We make multiple passes when we pick, often four to five times for the Merlot. We drop any bad fruit by hand and pick into half-ton bins. We destem without crushing to a shaker table for further sorting. We cold-soak for three days at 45° F to help mid-palate feel and weight. We will add tartaric as needed post cold-soak, adjusting to .58 TA. We warm the must to 60° F before adding D254 and D21 yeast. We will add nutrients at inoculation and again after one-third Brix depletion.

"We try to ferment at 82° F in the juice with a max of 86° F to 88° F in the cap. We pump-over twice daily using gentle sprinklers, turning full-volume for the first three-quarters of fermentation. Then we switch to half-volume to finish. We typically press at 0° Brix and blend the press and free-run portions. We settle in a tank for five days and then inoculate with malolactic at -1° Brix. Wine goes to 100 percent French oak barrels, and 80 percent of those are new. Typically the wine stays in barrel for 18 months: a first racking after three months and a second at eight to nine months. The 2011 vintage gave us more tannin, so the wine aged in barrels an extra six months.

We cross-flow filter and sterile-filter to bottle and then bottle-age for eight months. Since the 2011 got an extra six months of barrel-aging, it did not receive the bottle-aging time."



### Tasting Notes

**Ary:** I get aromas of cedar, red currant, pomegranate and plum that follow through to the palate to fine tannins that create a velvety texture. There are savory nuances. Great acidity rounds out the finish and holds up the fruit. There is a firm tannin structure.

**Rinaldi:** There is something like a really rich olive oil kind of characteristic there that I enjoy. This was fully ripened and muscular, especially for 2011. It has a cedar characteristic and a sweet barrel component that sort of rounds out the muscular nature of the wine. It is very clean. Technically, I call it nice stuff. It is something you can have with a meal right now, and I know you can age it.

**Burgess:** The aroma gives some nice spice, herbal, cedar aromatics. When I taste the wine, there are a lot of dark fruit flavors; predominantly blackberries, cassis and some red fruit. The mid-palate shows nice bright red fruit with clean acidity. There is a pretty tannic finish that I appreciate. Overall, it is a very complex, delicious wine.

**McClellan:** This is a great California-style Merlot. It has a clean nose without overt oak. The nose is integrated. There is warmth, sweetness and spice on the palate going in the black fruit direction, with an undercurrent of bright black fruit and some creaminess. Nicely structured and well-balanced.

**Januik:** This is my favorite of the three Napa wines. I like the oak component in it. There is black fruit but also raspberries. Nice medium plus length to it. The Washington wines seem to have a bit more structure in general. There is a nice fullness at the end.

**Mott:** This wine has more oak, but I like it. There is good fruit, so the oak is well done. There is tart berry fruit in the aroma. The mouthfeel has good tannin structure. More fruit comes through in the mouth than the other wines in the flight.

**Nappa:** The nose is a bit muted by the oak. There is bright cherry fruit that goes into a floral mid-palate. There is definitely a lot of tannin across the board. It finishes round. The oak is more apparent up front. The acid and alcohol are well balanced. I think it needs more time.

**Shinn/Page:** The tannins are dry, but there is nice black fruit and plum character here. I get some tomato leaf/tobacco character that I like a lot. The acidity is refreshing, and the wine is very balanced.

**Olsen-Harbich:** My favorite of the flight but I think it will show even better with time. There is a lot going on. It has the most oak, but it is well-integrated and will develop with age. It is very well-structured and very well-made.

## Burgess Cellars

2010 Triere Estate Vineyard Merlot, 2,710 cases, 14.6% Alc., \$32

**Steve Burgess** is president of **Burgess Cellars**. His main responsibilities deal with sales and marketing, but he also assists the winemakers with sensory evaluations of the wines and stylistic decisions. He is also in charge of vineyard management for the estate vineyards.

### According to Burgess:

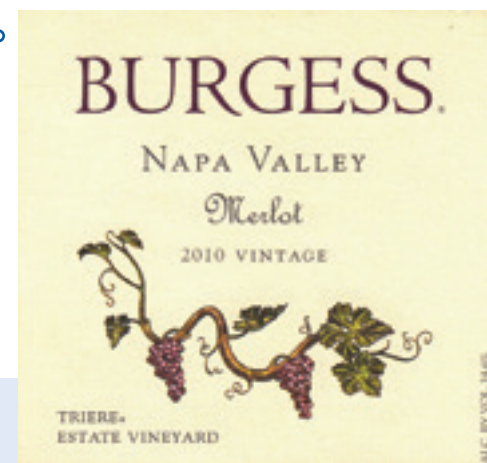
“Our estate vineyard in the Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley provides us with wonderful fruit. We try to make the purest expression of this fruit, which means wines that are characterized by cherry and blackberry fruit, with little herb or other non-fruit flavors. We want to make a wine that is fully ready to drink upon release but will continue to improve for another three to four years.

“Triere Vineyard is comprised of alluvial soils from Mount Veeder, consisting of gravelly to clay loam soils. The elevation is just 90 to 100 feet. Vine spacing varies but is mostly 8x10 feet. We have a variety of clones and rootstocks. The vineyard is CCOF-certified organic, and we use drip irrigation. We try to develop large heads for shade and then pull leaves, looking for about 30 percent sunlight in the fruit zone. We pull shoots and green fruit in August and average about 4 tons per acre.

“We determine when to pick by looking for ripe fruit flavors and waiting for green seed astringency to turn more coffee-like. Along with waiting for brown seeds, we wait for the tannin profile to soften on the vine so we can go about full extraction in the winery. We use infrared analysis to observe our vineyard, and we make several passes through the vineyards, yielding seven to 10 different lots. We have a very responsible, long-term regular crew that hand-picks the fruit, sorting as they go. The sorted fruit comes to the winery, where 50 percent of the berries are crushed and all of it is destemmed. It goes to a rotary fermenter after 60 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> has been added. We inoculate with yeast within 24 hours.

“The fermenter gets a few turns during the first days when temperatures are between 72° F and 80° F. As fermentation proceeds, we raise it to two to three cycles per day of multiple rotations. We look for gentle fermentations with a maximum fermentation temperature of 86° F. The rotary fermenter gives us rapid color and flavor extraction while minimizing harsh tannins. We press at 6° Brix to get the seeds away from the must and avoid any bitterness. We keep free-run and press separate and even have two separate press fractions to consider for blending.

“The juice goes to stainless steel tanks to finish fermentation. When fermentation finishes, we inoculate with malolactic in tank then rack to French oak barrels, using 10 to 15 percent new oak. Because we have several different lots coming into the winery and each lot yields three different wines (from free-run to various press lots), we end up with between 20 and 30 different lots to blend. We try to make those blend determinations after eight months’ aging. Then the wine goes back to barrel for another four to six months for a total of 14 to 16 months of oak aging. We bottle using a plate and frame filter down to 0.8 microns and generally age the wine for two full years before release.”



### Tasting Notes

**Burgess:** I get strawberry, herbal, Bing cherry aromas. The flavor has a dark core of Bing cherry with some blackberry, raspberry sweet herb aromas and a hint of mint. It has mouth-watering acidity with soft tannins.

**Rinaldi:** There is a “Red Hots” cinnamon, spice, menthol character. Red is the key. It is tangy with a long rich chew. It is full-bodied with some muscle and a bright, spicy note to it. It is alive.

**Ary:** I am getting an intense candied cherry, blackberry up front with some minty, medicinal undertones and some flinty nuance as well. There is a little bit of chocolate on the finish with dusty tannin and some wood showing on the mid-palate that carries into the finish, giving structure that promises age-worthy wine.

**Mott:** I get some leather and nice cooked meat aromas. Fruit is more like candied plum. It coats the mouth nicely without being too heavy. It has soft tannins that are not aggressive. There is some dried fruit character, like raisin and dried plum flavors. The oak treatment is very subtle.

**Januik:** I think there is some jammy character and also some spice and leather. In the mouth it has that slightly more drying extraction that I would expect from a rotary fermenter. It is not overly astringent, but it is more apparent than in other wines we have tasted.

**McClellan:** This is bigger than Washington Merlot with riper character, like dried plum and dried fruits with dates and figs. The sweetness on the mouth is probably due to higher alcohol and fruit ripeness. The tannin is substantial. It is a bigger, more muscular style. Oak is balanced. It is fun to drink.

**Shinn/Page:** This is a big fruit bomb, very extracted. There is almost an essential oil type of floral character. It is very beautiful. It is elegant and balanced with black cherry and dried mushroom. The acidity doesn’t continue through the finish.

**Nappa:** There is an herbal character along with light fruits, more cherry for me, but plenty of floral notes. It has soft, elegant tannins. The oak and alcohol are very balanced. It finishes with darker fruit than it starts with, but it is a bit flat.

**Olsen-Harbich:** I have trouble with this wine. I find it very muted. The nose is dull, and I don’t get a lot of aromatics. I get some cooked plum, brown leather and mushroom flavors. It is not a wine I would enjoy.

## Provenance Vineyards

2010 Provenance Vineyards Napa Valley Merlot  
7,480 cases, 14.5% Alc., \$40

**Tom Rinaldi** has made wine at some of the valley's most important wineries, apprenticing at **Freemark Abbey**, **Rutherford Hill Winery** and **Round Hill** before joining **Dan** and **Margaret Duckhorn** to help found Duckhorn Vineyards in 1978. Over two decades, he established himself as one of Napa Valley's premier fashioners of elegantly classic Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. He moved to **Provenance Vineyards** where he has continued as a winemaker working with **Napa Vineyards** to make delicious wines.

### According to Rinaldi:

"We want to make an approachable, rich, mouth-coating wine that goes well with food but will age for five to 10 years. We aim for 'plush' tannins and a long, non-phenolic finish.

"The grapes for this wine come from two distinct vineyards: Las Amigas in Carneros and Oak Knoll in Napa. Both are valley floor elevations with gravelly loam soils and are well-drained, which we think is essential to making good Merlot. We feel that good drainage is more important than clones, unless you just have a 'wrong' clone. Our clones happen to be Merlot 1, 181 and a small amount of Merlot 3. Rootstocks are 3309 and 101-14. The vineyards are planted to 6x7 foot spacings with VSP. Both vineyards are farmed traditionally and use drip irrigation.

"We 'prune to capacity,' not spur count. We like morning sun exposure and pull leaves to get it. Because we are in cool areas, there is little sunburn. Aeration is important. We like for a breeze to pass through the fruit zone, sort of like a Southern gentleman enjoying his porch. We insist that clusters not touch, remove weak shoots, pull suckers and drop green fruit. We use NDVI infrared scanning to assess vigor in the vineyard, and we struggle to get 3 to 4 tons per acre.

"Picking is determined by flavor and appearance. I no longer depend on a refractometer to make picking decisions. I look for the grape flavors to turn jammy. I want the seeds crunchy brown, with lignified stems, deep green leaf color and tendril droop. When ready, we pick as soon as it is convenient, depending on tank availability and picking crews, etc. We keep end vines and front rows separate.

"We make multiple passes through the vineyards. We hand-pick early in the morning, always before noon, into macro bins. We sort, both by hand and mechanically, using a shaker table and blower. We also remove any liquid juice arriving with the grapes. We destem, add 35 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> and use a gentle peristaltic pump to move the must to tanks. We cold-soak for two to three days at 55° F. We add yeast (BM4x4, D254 or FX10) using small inoculums to slow the beginning fermentation. We make no acid additions and very rarely need to add water. Nutrients are essential to good Merlot fermentations, so we assess the juice and add basic complex nutrients, like DAP and Fermaid, making the additions in the first two days.

"We use gentle irrigated pump-overs until we reach 18° Brix then more vigorous pump-overs two or three times a day down to 5° Brix when we back down to one daily pump-over. We ferment at a maximum temperature of 80° F. We pump-over full tank volume and will aerate when necessary. We press at dryness, keeping free-run and press juice separate. The separate portions go to barrel for malolactic fermentation, which takes about a month. After malolactic, we will rack, bump SO<sub>2</sub> to 35 ppm and top monthly, depending on pH.

"We age the wine in barrels using 30 percent new French oak with the balance in barrels that have had Sauvignon Blanc in them for three months. We will rack three to four times over the 20 months of aging or more if a barrel is closed or skunky. To bottle, we determine the free-run/press juice blend and pass through a .65 micron filter. We do not fine. We age for six months to one year before release."



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## Tasting Notes

**Rinaldi:** I'm finding the wine to be straightforward. It's cassis, raspberry and red fruits, which I like to see. I'm picking up some cedar character and some red licorice notes. It is fruit-forward, and the oak is very subtle. The wine is clean with no microbes or weirdness. There's a rum-raisin character that is distinctive to Merlot. There is nothing green about it but some cooked red pepper. It coats all parts of the palate. There are some bracing tannins that promise aging.

**Burgess:** On the aroma I pick up some strawberry jam, blueberry and sweet herbs. When I taste the wine, I get cherry cider and fresh raspberry and Chambord. The finish was nice with balanced acidity and soft tannins and the flavor of tart, dried cherries. A savory, hedonistic style of Merlot.

**Ary:** I pick up ripe, rich red fruit, fig compote, black cherries and some black leather/marzipan coming out on the finish. Some cocoa powder adds to the texture on the palate, which is supple with firm tannins on the finish. It is approachable, but you can definitely lay it down.

**Januik:** The most herbal of the flight. There is a green component. It is very supple with nice length and flavors. I get more bright fruit in the mouth than the nose. This has medium structure with medium length. It is the most supple wine in this flight.

**Mott:** I agree about the green notes, which dominate the fruit, unfortunately. There is fruit, but the herbal notes keep jumping out in the nose. The oak aromas are fine. Mouthfeel is supple. I'd prefer a bit more backbone and tannin. It is a little too soft for my taste. Very easy to drink.

**McClellan:** I get some slight green bean notes, but there is leather and some delightful sweetness there as well. There is some fresh fruit component as well. The wine is complex with opposing forces in it. Oak and tannin are nicely balanced. It is like an intriguing puzzle.

**Olsen-Harbich:** This wine has some floral aromatics. I like the lightness in the palate. It is more balanced than the Burgess, to me, with red fruits and a level of restraint.

**Shinn/Page:** I get a lot of sweet oak that overshadows the fruit, but it is nice with blackberry fruit and fresh acidity. It is clean and shows a bright mid-palate. The balance surprises me. I thought the Napa wines would be monsters.

**Nappa:** It is fruity on the nose with blackberry and darker fruits. It is full-bodied, but the tannins remain light and elegant. It is big but restrained. I get spiciness, like sage or oregano, on the finish. Nothing was overbearing. It was all in balance.

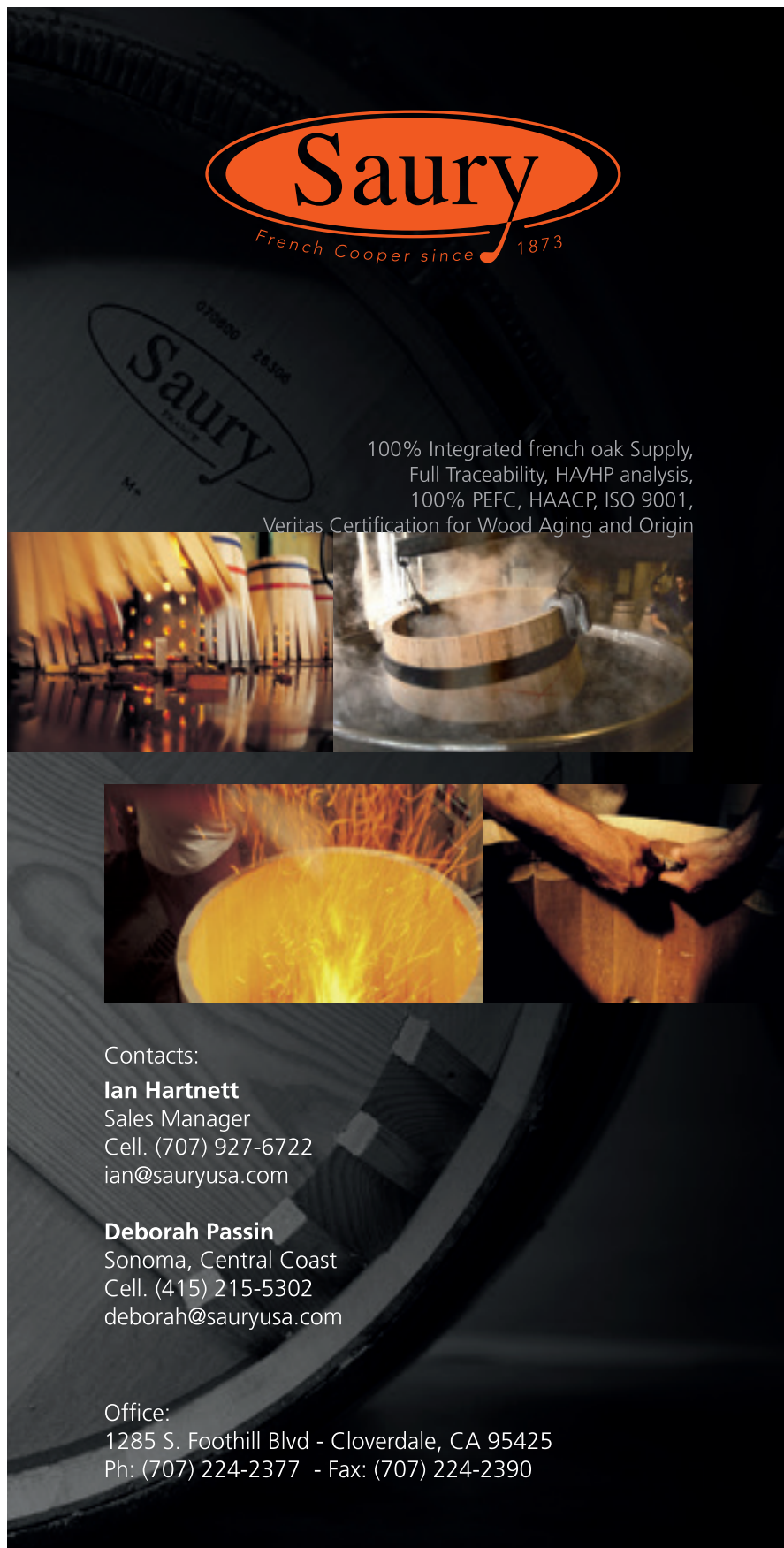


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WINERY	Burgess Cellars	Duckhorn Vineyards	Provenance Vineyards
<b>Wine</b>	2010 Triere Estate Vineyard Merlot	2011 Napa Valley Merlot Three Palms Vineyard	2010 Napa Valley Merlot
<b>Blend</b>	100% Merlot	87% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc	100% Merlot
<b>Winemaker</b>	<b>Kelly Woods/Matt Reid</b>	<b>Renée Ary</b>	<b>Tom Rinaldi</b>
<b>Style Goals</b>	Get optimal maturity from growing the right grape in the right place; show black cherry with little herb and other non-fruit flavors	Showcase depth, complexity and structure of fruit from Three Palms; make balanced wine with balanced tannins and seamlessly integrated oak with elegant, earthy undertones	Make an approachable, rich, food-friendly wine; aiming for plush tannin and a long non-phenolic finish
<b>AVA</b>	Oak Knoll District	Calistoga	Napa Valley
<b>Vineyard</b>	Triere Estate Vineyard	Three Palms Vineyard	Carneros and Oak Knoll
<b>VINEYARD DATA</b>			
<b>Predominant Geology (Soil Type)</b>	Alluvial soils from Mt. Veeder of gravelly to clay loam	Volcanic rock	Well-drained gravelly loam
<b>Elevation</b>	90 to 100 feet	Valley floor	Valley floor
<b>Vine Spacing</b>	8x10 feet	8x10 feet	6x7 feet
<b>Rootstock</b>	Varied	110R and 1103P	3309 and 101-14
<b>Exposure</b>	Half north/south, half east/west	Northeast/southwest running rows	Oak Knoll north/south; Carneros east/west
<b>Clones</b>	Varied	Merlot, Bear Flat cuttings; Cabernet Franc, Tamagni; Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford	Merlot 1, 181 and a bit of Merlot 3
<b>Irrigation or Dry-farmed</b>	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation
<b>Farming (Organic, Biodynamic, Traditional)</b>	CCOF-Certified Organic	Traditional	Traditional
<b>Production</b>	3 to 5 tons/acre	3 to 4 tons/acre	Struggle to get 3 to 4 tons/acre
<b>Vineyard Practices</b>	Develop large heads for shade, pull leaves looking for 30-percent sunlight in fruit zone, pull shoots and green fruit in August	Drop fruit early and then again, pull leaves to achieve dappled sunlight in fruit zone, pull laterals	Prune to capacity, leaf morning side, weak shoot removal, separate clusters
<b>WINEMAKING DATA</b>			
<b>When to Pick</b>	Wait for black cherry flavors with little herb or other non-fruit flavors; look for brown seeds, wait for tannin profile to soften; use infrared analysis in vineyard	Pick based on flavor, tannin and structure while keeping analysis in mind; looking to lose pyrazines and get currant, cherry and plum flavors	Based on flavor and appearance of the vine, looking for jammy, with crunchy brown seeds with lignified stems, deep green leaf color and tendril droop
<b>SO<sub>2</sub></b>	60 ppm at crusher	50 ppm at crush, 50 ppm post-ML, 35 ppm at bottling	35 ppm at crusher
<b>Crush Format</b>	Destem, crush 50 percent and send to rotary fermenter	Pre-sort, destem, sort at shaker table	Destem, hand- and mechanical-sort
<b>Cold-soak</b>	None	Three days at 45° F	Two to three days at 55° F
<b>Yeast</b>	Inoculate within 24 hours	D254 and D21	BM4x4, D254, FX10
<b>Fermentation Temperature</b>	Max of 86° F	Max of 82° F in juice, 86° F to 88° F in cap	Max of 80° F
<b>Fermentation Technique</b>	Rotary fermenter, pressing at 6° Brix	Pump-over twice daily with air first two days then aerate as necessary	Gentle pump-overs with irrigation device
<b>Nutrients</b>	N/A	Superfood and DAP pre-fermentation	DAP and Fermaid in first two days
<b>Acid Addition</b>	N/A	Adjust to .58 TA after cold-soak	None
<b>Malolactic</b>	Inoculate in tank, finish in barrel	Inoculate for ML and finish in barrel	N/A
<b>Racking</b>	Three times	Rack after 3 months, again after 8 to 9 months	Three or four as necessary
<b>Oak Program</b>	10% to 15% new French oak	80% new first 18 months, 51% new, 49% second use final 6 months	Primarily French, 30% new
<b>Barrel-aging</b>	14 to 16 months	24 months	21 months
<b>Filtration</b>	Plate- and frame-filter to 0.8 microns	Cross-flow then sterile-filter	Yeast-free filtration at 0.65 microns and no fining
<b>Bottle-aging</b>	2 years	Usually 6 months, this vintage 1 month because of extra barrel-aging	Approximately 1 year

WINERY	Shinn Estate Vineyards	Anthony Nappa Wines	Bedell Cellars
<b>Wine</b>	2010 Nine Barrels Reserve Merlot	2010 Reserve Merlot	2010 30 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Release Merlot
<b>Blend</b>	94% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot	100% Merlot	100% Merlot
<b>Winemaker</b>	<b>David Page, Barbara Shinn, Patrick Caserta</b>	<b>Anthony Nappa Wines</b>	<b>Rich Olsen-Harbich</b>
<b>Style Goals</b>	Trying to make a delicious, elegant and balanced statement of place	Looking for ripe fruit to give structure and full body along with varietal character in an approachable wine	Make a wine true to North Fork Long Island with moderate alcohol; good fruit and crisp acid to make the wine refreshing and full of flavor, including a saline component native to the area
<b>AVA</b>	North Fork Long Island	North Fork Long Island	North Fork Long Island
<b>Vineyard</b>	Shinn Estate Vineyards	Sam McCullough Vineyards and Mattebella Vineyards	Bedell Estate Vineyard
<b>VINEYARD DATA</b>			
<b>Predominant Geology (Soil Type)</b>	Haven A and Haven B, both gravelly loam	Plymouth and Riverhead sandy loam	Loam top-soil over gravelly sand and clay Haven loam with some Riverhead sandy loam
<b>Elevation</b>	24 feet	15 to 25 feet	28 to 50 feet
<b>Vine Spacing</b>	7x4 feet	Mixed	9x5 feet
<b>Rootstock</b>	3309, 101-14, Riparia Gloire	Mixed	3309, 101-14, Riparia
<b>Exposure</b>	North/south	North/south	Northeast
<b>Clones</b>	Merlot: 1,3,8,12; Cabernet: 4; Petit Verdot: 2	Clone 1, 3, 181	Clones 1, 3, 181
<b>Irrigation or Dry-farmed</b>	Irrigated	Irrigated 2 out of 5 years	Dry-farmed
<b>Farming (Organic, Biodynamic, Traditional)</b>	Non-certified biodynamic, 100% organic	Traditional	Certified sustainable via LISW
<b>Production</b>	3 tons/acre	2 to 3 tons/acre	2.5 tons/acre or less
<b>Vineyard Practices</b>	Natural vegetation covering vineyard floor including under trellis, compost and organic matter for soil; shoot-thin, drop fruit if necessary, pull leaves; netting for birds	VSP, drop fruit as needed, pull leaves in fruiting zone	Drop fruit, pull leaves but leave leaf over bunch, bird netting
<b>WINEMAKING DATA</b>			
<b>When to Pick</b>	Color density of skin when crushed in hand, seeds cracking in mouth, berry pulling from pedicle, grapes fall when vine is shaken	By taste but more often by disease pressure or weather events	Flavor and analysis, falling berries when vine shaken; visual condition, crunchy seeds, rub skin to check color; weather events
<b>SO<sub>2</sub></b>	No SO <sub>2</sub> at crush, 20 ppm post-ML	30 ppm on fruit, 50 ppm after ML	None until bottling then 28 to 30 ppm
<b>Crush Format</b>	Destem, no crushing; sort on sorting table	Destem, no crush then hand-sorted to bins by gravity	Crush and destem then sort to remove jacks
<b>Cold-soak</b>	None	None	48 hours at 40° F
<b>Yeast</b>	No added yeast	Indigenous yeast, wild ferment	Indigenous
<b>Fermentation Temperature</b>	80° F to 85° F at peak	Unregulated 65° F to 85° F	70° F to 88° F
<b>Fermentation Technique</b>	Cannonball method: dumping juice on top of cap in tank	Minimal punch-downs once a day then twice daily during peak fermentation	Pump-over 1 to 2 times daily
<b>Nutrients</b>	Organic Fermaid, half at fermentation start, half at mid-fermentation	No DAP but complex yeast nutrient if needed	None
<b>Acid Addition</b>	Added to must before fermentation	1g/L post-ML for pH adjustment if needed	None
<b>Malolactic</b>	Native ML in barrel	Natural ML in barrels lasts 2 to 4 months	Spontaneous ML in tank and barrel
<b>Racking</b>	Racked every 4 to 5 months for a total of 4 rackings	Racked by gravity three times; post-ML, after first summer, before bottling	Twice annually
<b>Oak Program</b>	85% new French oak, 15% 1- to 3-year-old French oak	100% French oak, 30% new	100% French with 10% new
<b>Barrel-aging</b>	20 months	20 months	12 months
<b>Filtration</b>	Not filtered	No filtering or fining	K 10 pads then 1 micron
<b>Bottle-aging</b>	22 months	None	6 months



WINERY	Januik Winery	Woodward Canyon Winery	Seven Hills Winery
<b>Wine</b>	2011 Klipsun Vineyard Merlot	2010 Columbia Valley Merlot	2012 Merlot Seven Hills Vineyard
<b>Blend</b>	97% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Sauvignon	98% Merlot, 2% Grenache	100% Merlot
<b>Winemaker</b>	<b>Mike Januik</b>	<b>Kevin Mott</b>	<b>Casey McClellan</b>
<b>Style Goals</b>	Try to produce a wine that has both structure and suppleness at the same time	Ripe berry fruit aromatics with subtle oak aromas; full body with good mid-palate leading to a long finish balanced by good tannins	A lush, fruitful Merlot with brightness, ripe fruit and soft tannin; lower alcohols, subdued oak and enough acidity to keep wine lifted and juicy
<b>AVA</b>	Red Mountain	Columbia Valley	Walla Walla Valley
<b>Vineyard</b>	Klipsun Vineyard	71% Weinbau Vineyard, 29% Woodward Canyon Estate Vineyard	Seven Hills Vineyard
<b>VINEYARD DATA</b>			
<b>Predominant Geology (Soil Type)</b>	Warden	Weinbau: silt loam over clay lenses; Estate: Ritzville silt over fractured basalt	Ritzville silt loam
<b>Elevation</b>	700 feet	770 to 900 feet	1,000 feet
<b>Vine Spacing</b>	6x10 feet	9x6 and 9x3 feet	12x8 feet
<b>Rootstock</b>	Own-rooted	Own-rooted	Own-rooted
<b>Exposure</b>	Southern	Southern exposure on both vineyards	Slight northwest slope
<b>Clones</b>	Clone 3	Clone 3	N/A
<b>Irrigation or Dry-farmed</b>	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation	Irrigated
<b>Farming (Organic, Biodynamic, Traditional)</b>	Traditional	Weinbau is traditional; the estate vineyard is IOBC through the LIVE program	Certified sustainable, LIVE Salmon Safe IOBC
<b>Production</b>	3.5 tons/acre	3 to 3.75 tons/acre	2.5 to 4 tons/acre
<b>Vineyard Practices</b>	Usual for high-end vineyard	Shoot thinnings to open canopy, cluster-thinning after fruit set, adjust shoot positioning with moveable catch wires	Shoot- and cluster-thin, leaf pull, deficit irrigation post-set/pre-veraison, mechanical weeding
<b>WINEMAKING DATA</b>			
<b>When to Pick</b>	Primarily by taste	Vineyard visit, crush sample and let sit 24 hours before testing for Brix, TA, pH; final decision based on sensory evaluation	Look for mix of red and black fruit flavors, avoid hyper-maturity, check pH and Brix
<b>SO<sub>2</sub></b>	35 ppm at crusher	SO <sub>2</sub> at crusher depending on grape condition	20 ppm at crusher, 30 ppm post-ML
<b>Crush Format</b>	Crush and destem	Cluster-sort, destem, no crushing	Sort in vineyard, destem then light crush
<b>Cold-soak</b>	None	48 hours at ambient temperature	24 hours' ambient temperature
<b>Yeast</b>	EC 1118	Prise de Mousse and native yeast	L2056, some ADY
<b>Fermentation Temperature</b>	Max of 88° F	1.5 ton fermenters 75° F to 80° F, 3 ton fermenters 80° F to 85° F	Mid to high 80s peak
<b>Fermentation Technique</b>	Pump-over twice daily	Small tanks punch-down, large tanks pump-over	90% pump-over, 10% punch-down three times daily, about 50% ferm volume per PO w/air
<b>Nutrients</b>	DAP 2 to 3 days after crushing	DAP and micronutrients based on YAN	DAP and Fermaid 48 hours post-inoculation
<b>Acid Addition</b>	Usually none	None	Look for 3.5 to 3.8 pH post-ML; will adjust if necessary
<b>Malolactic</b>	Inoculate in barrel, usually finishes in four to six weeks	Spontaneous in barrel	Inoculate in tank post-press, finishes in barrel
<b>Racking</b>	After ML and then every 4 to 5 months	Rack and add SO <sub>2</sub> after ML, no set schedule after that	After ML then every 3 to 4 months
<b>Oak Program</b>	100% French, 50% new	100% French with 40% to 50% new	100% French, 40% new
<b>Barrel-aging</b>	20 months	22 months	20 months
<b>Filtration</b>	Rough filtration	If levels are good, 3 micron filter; if levels too high, then DE-filter followed by 0.45 micron	1 micron prior to bottling
<b>Bottle-aging</b>	4 months	6 to 12 months	3 months

# North Fork of Long Island

The North Fork of Long Island was declared an AVA in 1986. It is a long peninsula, about 40 miles, surrounded by Long Island Sound, Peconic Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. This maritime influence moderates temperatures, helping to protect the vines with mild winters and lengthen the growing season with relatively cool summers. For the most part, the ground is flat with sandy soils that provide good drainage. The Northern latitude provides long summer days, and harvest season can extend well into November. Merlot makes up about 40 percent of total grape plantings in North Fork and is by far the most popular red wine. Vintage is very important, with warmer vintages thought to provide better wines.



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# Bedell Cellars

2010 Bedell Cellars 30th Anniversary Release  
Merlot, 1,200 cases, Alc. 13%, \$30

**Richard Olsen-Harbich** has more than 34 years of experience as a winemaker on the North Fork of Long Island. He even wrote the North Fork, Hamptons and Long Island appellations into existence back in 1986. A pioneer of sustainable winegrowing, an early proponent of indigenous yeast and a great advocate of local style and flavor, Olsen-Harbich has represented the Long Island wine community for most of his wine life. He has been winemaker at **Bedell Cellars** for the past five years.

## According to Olsen-Harbich:

“We are trying to craft our Merlot in the emerging North Fork of Long Island style, which means elegantly balanced wines with moderate alcohol, minimal oak and refreshing acidity. In addition, the area lends a signature saline quality to the wine, not salty, more like seashore, along with plum, raspberry and violet aromas and flavors.



“Our 80-acre estate vineyard is certified sustainable. We view our vineyards as part of the larger surrounding ecosystem. Our goal is to achieve a natural balance between the vines and the soil, utilizing extremely low yields to maximize native aromas and flavors. Our soil is predominantly Haven loam, and the vineyard has an elevation of 28 to 50 feet. Our vine spacings are set at 9x5 and 9x4 feet, and the vines are planted on 3309, 101-14 and Riparia rootstock with Merlot clones 1, 3 and 181.

“Vineyard management is the key to getting good fruit. We are basically dry-farmed and will drop fruit to achieve about 2.5 tons per acre of Merlot. We use leaf removal to expose clusters but like to retain leaves over the bunches, sort of like a ‘baseball cap,’ to protect from the sun and encourage photosynthesis. We also use bird netting, which is pretty much a necessity here.

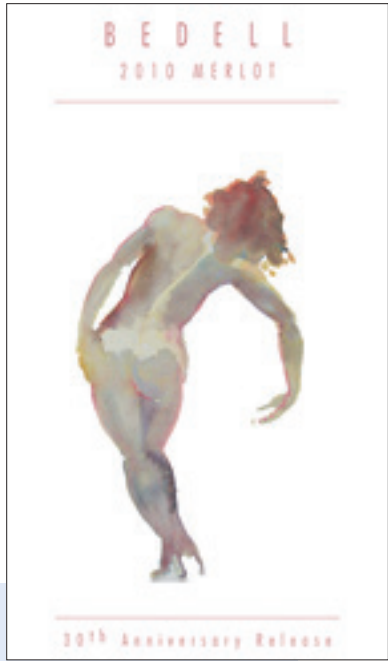
“To determine picking, we go primarily by taste and the visual condition of the vines. There is no closing window for ripeness here on the North Fork. Weather is very important and influences picking decisions. We’ll shake the trellis to see if berries fall. We like crunchy seeds and will rub the skins in our hands, checking color. We look for flavor development and will do basic analysis as well.

“Grapes are hand-picked into lug boxes, destemmed and crushed so that half of the berries have popped skins. They go to a sorting table where jacks are removed. The must is moved to 3- to 8-ton tanks by gravity. Tops are put on the tanks, and the must is cooled for 48 hours at 40° F. We usually use no SO<sub>2</sub> but will if acetobacter or Botrytis is present. Spontaneous fermentation usually begins in a day or two.

“Every parcel of Merlot is separated into small batches to capture the distinctiveness of the soil, which gives us 12 to 15 different lots to work with. We will ferment in the 88° F to 90° F range although less ripe lots might be kept as low as 75° F. We use a screen cart to remove seeds, along with a Manzini piston pump to pump-over, usually once a day, then maybe twice a day at peak fermentation. Fermentations last about three weeks. We keep free-run and press fractions separate and settle the wine in tanks for two days before moving to barrels.

“We limit the use of oak to allow the primary fruit character of the grapes to lead the way. We use neutral barrels and wooden vats with only 10 percent

new oak to minimize tannins and oak influence. Wine goes through malolactic without inoculation. Lots will age between nine and 18 months. One year post-harvest we will rack and make our first blend. After that, we keep refining the blend with the various lots. We will use K10 pads to filter and then 1 micron cartridge filters at bottling, which we think cleans and freshens the wine and protects it during aging. The Merlot gets six months’ bottle-aging before release.”



## Tasting Notes

**Olsen-Harbich:** This was a beautiful vintage, and the wine shows it. The oak is not prominent. There is black fruit with good extraction. There is some tea tannin; and while it has some power and depth, it remains elegant and soft, which I like. There is some jammy fruit flavor in the mouth.

**Nappa:** Fruit, fruit, fruit. This is the darkest color of the three wines in this flight. It is soft, and I get lots of raspberry and cherry. It is elegant on the palate, moving to strawberry and raspberry. It is medium-bodied with a real long, lush finish. The tannin, alcohol and oak are all well-integrated.

**Shinn/Page:** Quite balanced with red and black fruit. Very clean wine. It is bright and fresh with good acidity and smooth tannins. It is classically North Fork, with raspberry and blueberry leading to some savory, herbal notes.

**Ary:** Opens with some sharp acidity, some tobacco, tea leaf and raspberry aromas that carry into the palate. It is a light- to medium-bodied Merlot. There are firm tannins that kick in three-quarters of the way into the palate and carry through to the finish, providing nice length.

**Burgess:** I believe there are some sulfite issues that give an almost plastic aroma. There is a cherry tomato, dusty flavor and a real tart cherry finish. I don’t think the tannins are big, but I get high acidity.

**Rinaldi:** This is fruit-forward with a red nature. Mid-palate is a bit thin and dilute, but it stays with you. It has an angular note to it that kicks in on the finish. It is a tad dried out and begs for food to accompany it.

**McClellan:** It has nice color, some tannin. There is a bit of vegetal hint underneath. Red fruits, a gentle-style Merlot.

**Januik:** It is herbal but less so than the others in this flight. There’s a little black fruit, but it is mostly herbal. It has softer acidity in the mouth than the others.

**Mott:** There is some subtle plum fruit with a touch of green herbaceous character. It’s a bit more Old World in style. It is less ripe than what we get. It’s very different from here. It opens up with nice spice. It coats the tongue nicely. There is an edgy finish. I think it would be better with food.

# Shinn Estate Vineyards

2010 Nine Barrels Reserve Merlot, 225 cases, 14.5% Alc., \$42

**Barbara Shinn** and **David Page** met in 1988 in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1990 they moved to New York City to open a restaurant called **Home**, one of the first farm-to-table restaurants on the East Coast. After being successful with Home and adding two more restaurants, they opted to purchase the historic **Tuthill** homestead in Mattituck, New York in 1998. They planted 20 acres of grapevines and built a winery and farmhouse bed and breakfast. By 2010 they had become the first East Coast winery and inn to be solely powered by alternative energy.

## According to Shinn/Page:

“We want to try to let the wine express itself. We hope that will lead to a delicious, balanced, pure expression of place. We ferment on native yeasts, which lend complexity, and we are finding that allowing the ground cover to grow naturally has increased aroma intensity.

“The soils here are Haven A and Haven B. Elevation is 24 feet, and vines are spaced at 7x4 feet. The exposure is north/south. We tend to get quite a bit of rain during growing season, so we seek rootstocks that control vigor, like 3309, 101-14 and Riparia Gloire. These rootstocks give us shallow root systems, which mitigate the water we get as the top soil dries out, thanks to our well-drained soil. We also use aggressive native cover crop, even under the trellis systems. We find that cover crop helps dry out moisture but will retain moisture during times of drought. Our Merlot clones are 1, 3, 8, 12, 181 and 347. We have irrigation if needed and use it to help new vines get a foothold.

“We have natural vegetation covering the vineyard floor and under the trellis. We use compost, compost teas and other organic matter for soil fertility. We will mow under the trellis for vegetation control. We shoot thin and drop fruit when necessary, pull leaves on both sides at fruit set for full cluster exposure and use side netting to control bird damage. Our production is 3 tons per acre.

“We determine when to pick mostly by sensory clues. The grapes should have varietal character and balanced ripeness when you eat them. The seeds should shatter when you chew them and give off a nutty flavor. Grapes should pull away dry from the pedicle and should release from the vine when gently shaken. Clusters smell earthy on the vine, and the vineyard gets quiet when it is time to pick. One week before perceived harvest we track Brix, pH and acid.

“Grapes are hand-picked to lug boxes and destemmed using no rollers. Grapes are sorted on a sorting table, with whole berries getting dropped into a moveable tank and then dropped through the top door into a closed tank. We use no must pumps. We use no SO<sub>2</sub> at crush. We use no cold soak. We use native yeast, and fermentation usually starts in one day. We will adjust for high pH by adding tartaric acid, and we will use organic Fermaid if necessary.

“We neither pump-over nor punch-down. Instead we use a cannonball method by draining fermenting juice into a tank, lifting it above the tank and releasing the wine into the top of the tank to turn the cap over. Fermentations reach 80° F to 85° F. We will use extended skin contact up to four to six weeks, so total time on skins can go 50 days total. Free-run juice is kept separate from the press fraction.



“The wine sits in a tank for a few days and then gets racked to barrels for native-driven malolactic. We use French oak barrels and one-third new barrels. We’ll add 20 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> after ML. We top barrels every two to four weeks and rack five times during aging. When racking, we go to stainless and then back to the same barrel, so the wine spends its entire life in the same barrel.

“The wine ages for 20 months. It is bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. The wine receives 22 months’ bottle age before release.”



## Tasting Notes

**Shinn/Page:** Incredibly elegant. There is a pretty, feminine element to this wine that is so pretty. Beautiful color. It is very floral, showing some chocolate, cocoa and nice blackberry, red cherry fruit. There is a little black tea along with pepper and cardamom spice. Great mineral character. It is elegant, mouth-filling with fine tannins, and the finish has good length. It should have a long life.

**Nappa:** The wine is a bit closed. It is fruit-forward on the nose with blueberries, blackberries and dark fruits. Soft, rounded tannin on the palate that goes into an herbal, anise flavor. On the finish it is acid-driven with oak showing, but it is very balanced.

**Olsen-Harbich:** A great example of North Fork Merlot. It is clean, well-made wine with a lot of dark fruit swirling around with a bit of saffras in the background. There is black tea tannin for nice mouthfeel. Oak is well-integrated and balanced with refreshing acidity.

**Mott:** At first I got green herbaceous notes; now there is vanilla oak, which overpowers the fruit with some candied character. It is full in the mouth, but the middle kind of dries out and falls away with some drying tannins.

**Januik:** Besides the herbal character I get some golden beet aromas with some talc character. This one has the highest acid of the group and the shortest finish.

**McClellan:** I get a strong oak presence, with some fruit that pops out nicely but rapidly melts away. The finish is more oak and structure on the back end. I was originally attracted to this, but I found myself wanting more fruit character.

**Rinaldi:** A lot of bells and whistles. I like the bold aromatics, almost blueberry to it. There is berry, cherry forward, perhaps strawberry. It is clean as a whistle. Acidity is a bit challenged, but it is a big wine with lots of muscle. I would not recognize this as Merlot, but it is nice red wine.

**Burgess:** Nice aroma of smoky dark fruit. There are varietal flavors of cherry with a smoky, meaty quality. There is a rhubarb, blackberry finish. I like this wine.

**Ary:** I pick up some riper fruit profiles in the nose with rum-raisin, black cherry. It has light weight in terms of body. There is an austere tannin structure, making it a bit gritty on the finish. It is a wine that needs time.

## Anthony Nappa Wines

2010 Reserve Merlot, 75 cases, 14.8% Alc., \$40

**Anthony Nappa** studied botany at the **University of Massachusetts** in Amherst and completed a degree in fruit and vegetable agriculture from the **Stockbridge School of Agriculture**. He went to New Zealand where he received degrees in viticulture and oenology at **Lincoln University** in Christchurch. He has worked as a winemaker in New Zealand, Southern Italy, California, Massachusetts and New York where he was head winemaker for **Shinn Estate Vineyards** from 2007 to 2011. Anthony has been the head winemaker at **Raphael Vineyards** since 2013 and established his own **Anthony Nappa** brand in 2007.

### According to Nappa:

“I want to craft a wine that represents this unique place and its maritime climate as well as each particular vintage. I want ripe fruit, structure and full body, and I work to manipulate tannins and extraction so that the finished wine is approachable without using additives or adulteration of any kind.

“We purchase grapes from two vineyards: Sam McCullough Vineyards and Mattebella Vineyards. Both vineyards are managed quite differently. Overall, while sourcing fruit, I strive to work with vineyards that produce great wine.

I believe that environmentally conscious grape growers produce grapes that make better wine, and I am not worried about how pretty the grapes are. I like to say we purchase grapes from the least manicured vineyards.

“The vineyards on Long Island sit at 15 to 25 feet elevation and consist of Plymouth and Riverhead sandy loam soils. Vine spacing is mixed, and Sam’s vineyard has double rows and then a space row followed by another double row, etc. The rows run north/south, use mixed rootstock and have Merlot clones 1, 3 and 181. We have irrigation but only use it about two out of every five years. Vines are VSP. We pull leaves on both sides, drop fruit as needed, hedge and use bird netting. We end up with 2 to 3 tons per acre.

“To determine picking, we go mostly by taste, but here on Long Island we often wait as long as we can for red fruit to ripen. Overripe fruit is not normally a problem, so I don’t focus on Brix levels. Weather events and disease pressure (like Botrytis) will influence most picking decisions. When possible, we want ripe fruit character, no green tannins and brown crunchy seeds. Grapes were hand-picked into lugs, destemmed with no crushing and passed through a sorting table to remove any green material.

“The whole berries drop into 1-ton bins, where I sprinkle 25 to 50 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> on top before covering with plastic. The bins sit in ambient temperature for up to a week with no punch-downs while a wild fermentation starts underneath and the cap starts to lift. After that, we move to one or two punch-downs a day, getting more aggressive towards the end of fermentation. We use no DAP but will use complex yeast nutrient if necessary. Temperatures are unregulated and run between 65° F to 85° F. We use extended maceration during and post fermentation lasting over five weeks while we taste daily before pressing.

“Free-run juice and press juice are kept separate as are various lots. The wine goes to barrel for natural malolactic. All of the barrels are French oak, and we use 30 percent new barrels. After malolactic, we will adjust using tartaric acid if pH is above 3.9. We rack after ML, after the first summer



and before blending. The wine is barrel-aged a total of 20 months. It is bottled unfiltered and unfiltered; but because of our finances, it goes straight to market with little or no bottle age.”

### Tasting Notes

**Nappa:** This wine is earthy with dark fruit but more on the cherry side. There is a coffee grind texture on the palate instead of the black tea in the Bedell wine, along with some slate minerality. It is full-bodied but with less acid than the Shinn wine. The alcohol and the oak are balanced. There is some herbal tobacco spiciness on the finish.

**Olsen-Harbich:** Blue and red fruit aromas with spicy character and some raspberry. It is very elegant and refreshing with a saline, seashore character, which I really like. It is fruit-forward and really well-balanced. The oak is completely integrated with the fruit.

**Shinn/Page:** It changed in the glass, going from dried herb to a more cola aroma. I get tar and a little nice smoke in the background with some bitter chocolate and petrol, savory quality. Delicious wine with spice and well-integrated oak.

**Ary:** I get some hydrogen sulfide aromas in the nose, a bit reductive. I get black cherry, strawberry. The tannin profile takes over early on with pretty firm structure, making it a bit dry on the finish.

**Burgess:** I also notice some off-aromas, seems like plastic or possibly acetone. There is a dusty ripe tomato smell with a nice black cherry finish. There is also a heavy toasted oak aroma. It is light-bodied, not too viscous with dry tannins.

**Rinaldi:** Pretty subtle, not much right off the top. I don’t get any off-aromas but nothing really varietal either. There is some black pepper and a bit of char. It is tangy and tarry at the same time. Surprising light color, almost brick and garnet. Short finish and a bit raspy.

**Januik:** This is more herbal than the Bedell but also with a sensation of black pepper. There is some sweetness in the finish. There may be some plum in this one, but it is still more herbal with a supple mouthfeel.

**McClellan:** The nose opens with overt oak and vegetal tobacco notes. The mouthfeel is nice and soft. There is very gentle red plum fruit underneath, but the oak is a little pushy on the palate. It has a nice soft finish with some fruit sweetness wrapped up, with a gentle tannic dryness to the finish.

**Mott:** The nose has some tobacco and a very subtle volatile component. It is full in the mouth, on the edge of sweetness. It has a bit more overall extraction than the other wines in this flight.

blackbird

# Washington State

Seattle is known for its dreary, almost constant rain, so it comes as a surprise to many people to find out that most of Washington state's grapes are grown in deserts on the eastern portion of the state. Growing grapes in desert conditions has some advantages. There are few soil-borne diseases, so most vines are own-rooted. More hours of sunlight at the higher latitudes, high diurnal temperature swings and strong winds to toughen skins and amplify tannins contribute to the structure of the wines. Most important, especially for Merlot, growers can control the amount of water delivered to the vines with irrigation. Too much water makes flabby, unexciting Merlot wine, but deficit irrigation schemes and desert soils that provide good drainage have increased Merlot quality in Washington, creating wines that are supple but with great structure.



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## Woodward Canyon Winery

2010 Columbia Valley Merlot, 619 cases,  
14.9% Alc., \$44

**Kevin Mott** began his career in the wine industry in 1986 at **Ste. Chapelle Winery** in Caldwell, Idaho, progressing from cellar worker to winemaker. In 1999 he helped develop **Chalone Wine Group's** Sagelands Vineyard in Washington's Yakima Valley, working as general manager/winemaker until moving to **Canoe Ridge Vineyard** in 2002. There he served as winemaker, overseeing both winery and vineyard operations. He came to **Woodward Canyon Winery** in the summer of 2003 as winemaker.

### According to Mott:

"We are looking to make a wine with ripe berry fruit aromatics with subtle oak aromas. We want to emphasize the fruit, but have a good tannic structure that lends full body, a good mid-palate and a long finish.

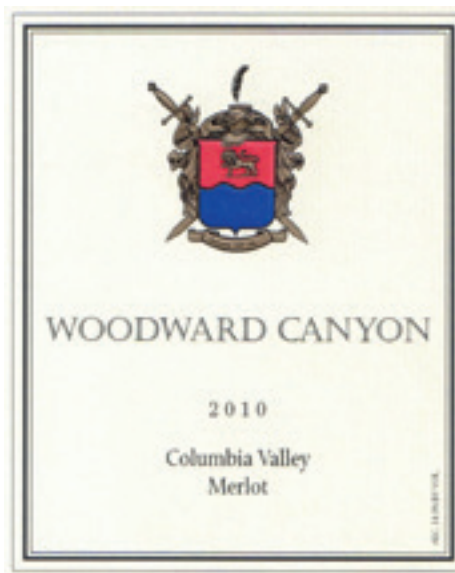
"The grapes for this wine come from two distinct vineyards. Weinbau Vineyard provides 71 percent of the grapes and gives bright fruit and suppleness. It sits at 770 feet with silt loam above clay lenses, 9x6 foot spacings and a southern exposure. Woodward Canyon Estate provides 29 percent of the grapes and gives us great herbal aromatics and complexity. This vineyard sits at 900 feet, with Ritzville silt loam over fractured basalt, 9x3 foot spacings and a southern exposure. It is certified IOBC (the International Organization for the Biological and Integrated Control of Noxious Animals and Plants) through the LIVE program (Low Impact Viticulture and Enology).

"Both vineyards are own-rooted, planted to Clone 3 Merlot and drip-irrigated. We utilize shoot-thinning to open the canopy. We cluster-thin after fruit set and make adjustments to shoot-positioning throughout the growing season. We look for sunlight without burning. Production at Weinbau is about 3.5 tons while the estate vineyard is lower, at 3 tons per acre.

"To determine picking we pull samples, crush them and soak overnight. We analyze for Brix, pH and TA, but the final picking is based on taste—we look for green herbal character to recede. Grapes are hand-picked to half-ton bins, destemmed (not crushed) to tanks where 75 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> is added. A 48-hour cold-soak follows at 65° F when *Prise de Mousse* is added to the Weinbau portion, and native yeast carries out the estate fermentation. No acid additions were made. DAP and micronutrient additions were made based on YAN analysis.

"Our 1.5-ton fermenters get punched-down twice daily then less at the end with max temps between 75° F to 80° F. Our 3-ton fermenters get pumped over twice daily with peak cap temperatures between 80° F to 85° F. We taste for tannin and mouthfeel, usually pressing after seven days so tannin doesn't overwhelm the fruit. We drain free-run juice directly to barrel, keeping press juice separate. Barrels are 100 percent French with 50 percent new. We top every two weeks until primary fermentation is finished and go through spontaneous malolactic in barrel.

"After ML, we rack to tank, add SO<sub>2</sub> and go back to barrel for 18 to 22 months. We rack depending on the wine with no specific schedule. If glucose/fructose and malic acid levels are good, we go through a 3 micron filter at bottling. If any component is high, we DE filter followed by 0.45 micron filtering. We age the wine six to 12 months in bottle before release."



### Tasting Notes

**Mott:** 2010 was a cool vintage, so I don't get the intense bright fruit we normally get in this wine. There is dark fruit with spice and herb. I like the coating on the side of your mouth and tongue. It has good length on the palate. There are nice fine-grain tannins that are not astringent but lend the wine great structure and a long finish.

**Januik:** I agree with what Kevin says about the vintage. There is still plenty of dark fruit in here. The fine-grain tannin comment was a good description. There is a nice suppleness to it with a long finish.

**McClellan:** This wine has great presence with rich, black fruit density and a spice component. It is beautiful Merlot. It has supportive, but not overt, tannin. There is great weight and length. It is a pleasing, hedonistic Merlot.

**Olsen-Harbich:** This is a powerhouse. Big style with dark fruit, cherry, tobacco and smoke with integrated oak. The oak is driving the wine. It is a big powerful boy and will be around for a while.

**Nappa:** Dark and jammy, still with some black olive on the mid-palate contributing to full body on the palate. It is the biggest in terms of oak and the hottest. This has big, green tannins and black licorice, and needs a big steak.

**Shinn/Page:** If North Fork Merlots are feminine, these are completely masculine. This is a smoky, steakhouse wine. I don't get any of those wild, dried herb notes that I like.

**Rinaldi:** I love the aromatics. It is classic Merlot with tea-like aromatics. It is all encompassed, like picking up a handful of tea and taking a sniff. There is nothing red or black about it, just tea. It is clean and no spikes of new oak. I love the mid-palate. I am a sucker for that kind of sweetness that opens up into muscle. I get some heat from the alcohol. It still has youthful tannin that needs to resolve. Well-made, muscular, delicious Merlot.

**Ary:** I get some Port-like aromas along with some heat. There are herbal and marzipan undertones with richer fruit expression on the mid-palate. It finishes pretty big with lots of chewy tannin.

**Burgess:** I get a blackberry popcorn aroma but super clean. The taste is hot with black tea, cherry cola and cherry preserve. There is some cedar, oak and cherry pie. A great example of a serious banker-style Merlot. Macho guys would head to a steakhouse and have this Merlot.

## Januik Winery

2011 Klipsun Vineyard Merlot, 295 cases,  
14.4% Alc., \$30

**Mike Januik** started making wine in Washington state in 1984. He worked at several wineries before becoming winemaker at **Chateau Ste. Michelle** for 10 years where he was responsible for both red and white wine production. While there, he became one of Washington's first winemakers to champion single-vineyard designated wines. He started his own **Januik Winery** in 1999 and in 2007 opened his state-of-the-art winery **Novelty Hill/Januik** in Woodinville.

### According to Januik:

"I am trying to produce a wine that has both structure and suppleness at the same time. We use a single block from Klipsun Vineyard which makes wine typified by its dark fruit aromatics and lots of length.

"The vineyard sits at an elevation of 700 feet with southern exposure and Warden soils. The vines are own-rooted and planted to 6x10 foot spacings. The entire block is Clone 3. The vineyard is farmed traditionally and has drip irrigation. The vineyard is well-managed, and I find it is better to let farmers farm their land rather than have me tell them how to do it. Production runs 3.5 tons per acre.

"As we near harvest, we make weekly visits to the vineyard to taste grapes. We also run analysis but pick primarily by taste. We are waiting for 'green' flavors to dissipate. We want the skins to lose whatever chewiness there is before we pick. Typically, when the flavor is where we like it, the grapes are in the 25° Brix range. Grapes are hand-picked to half-ton bins and then trucked to the winery. The fruit usually arrives very cool, especially the Merlot, because it is the first red grape we harvest and we have plenty of room in the winery. We store the fruit overnight in a cool room at 55° F. We crush and destem the fruit (with adjusted rollers) and add 35 ppm SO<sub>2</sub>. Typically, the grapes require no sorting. We pump the must to open-top fermenters and add EC 1118 yeast.

"We rarely add acid, but we do add DAP two to three days after crushing as needed. We usually pump-over twice a day, allowing the temperature to rise to 88° F. We taste every day, looking for structure and length, and adjust the time of pump-overs accordingly. This is intuitive and where we rely on our experience with the vineyard and as winemakers. We press after six to seven days, blending free-run and press juice together but never pressing above .4 to .6 BAR. We let fermentation continue in tanks and then go to barrels at 1° to 2° Brix. Fifty percent of the barrels are new. We keep topping the barrels as fermentation finishes. I am trying to minimize contact with air, and I don't like partially filled tanks.

"We inoculate for ML in barrel, after checking malic levels, because occasionally the malolactic fermentation is already finished by then. When ML is finished, we rack the wine to a tank, bump the SO<sub>2</sub> and go back to barrel. Then we rack every four to five months. The wine ages in barrel for 20 months when it is racked to tanks and settles for two to three weeks. We egg-white fine using fresh eggs. We plate and frame filter through Seitz 100 pads. Then the wine is aged four to five months before release."



### Tasting Notes

**Januik:** Over the years people have said that my Merlots taste more like Cabernet. I think it has to do with the structure we find with the varietal here in Washington. I get a lot of raspberry, along with some dark fruit. I like the impression of sweetness on the finish of this wine. Some of that comes from the 50 percent new oak we use. This is a wine that occupies every part of your mouth, from entry to finish.

**Mott:** It has nice raspberry, ripe Bing cherry fruit. I get some black licorice, which I love. It has nice subtle oak that doesn't overshadow the fruit. There is good tannin structure in the mouth. I feel the tannins, but there is no drying effect. This wine is ripe, without being overly fat.

**McClellan:** Great example of Red Mountain Merlot where the structure is balanced. As Mike said, you can feel this wine in your whole mouth. It doesn't disappear. It courses through the palate. There is a lovely red cherry component, and I think this will be age-worthy.

**Olsen-Harbich:** Well, we're off Long Island. This has an earthy nose with a very subtle hint of barnyard that I find pretty. It has a lot of dark fruit and soft tannin. Oak is well integrated. The wine has a lot of power. Compared to Long Island these Washington wines are from a whole different realm of flavor and texture.

**Shinn/Page:** This is slightly reductive. It is jammy but within reason. There is power but soft tannins with flavors of chocolate and dark fruit. There is some mineral but not at all like here.

**Nappa:** Definitely a different animal. It is earthy, definitely not fruit-forward. This has blackberry with some black olive, which is a flavor I really like. The body is lush with good acid. It has high alcohol, but the acid and oak are definitely in balance and give it a nice, long finish.

**Burgess:** I like the toasty plum and cherry aromas and flavors and how they match, confirming one another. It doesn't have the longest finish, but there are nice dusty tannins and a mid-body weight to it that I like. Overall, a very good wine if not the most complex. It's my favorite wine of the flight.

**Rinaldi:** I love the aromatics. I'm getting some cigar box, rum-raisin and high-end tea that is distinctive to Merlot. It is clean as a whistle. Complex with a green cedar note but nothing simple at all. Mouth-coating, pleasing to the palate and opens up nicely with a lot of stuff going on. It is a bit jumbled and young, but there is licorice, tobacco and mint. It is complex, and it's a winner.

**Ary:** My favorite wine of the flight. Starts out with some complex minty, herbal tobacco aromatics that follow through to the palate. There are rich, dark fruit and espresso flavors with fine grape tannins that create a rich velvety texture. It presents a really long finish.



## Seven Hills Winery

2012 Merlot, Seven Hills Vineyard, 560 cases, 14.2% Alc., \$38

**Casey McClellan** was raised in Walla Walla, Washington and started working in agriculture in the seventh grade. In 1982, he joined his father in planting the now-famous **Seven Hills Vineyard**. Inspired by this experience, McClellan went on to earn a Master's of Science with a focus on enology from **UC Davis**, and in 1988, he and his wife, **Vicky**, founded **Seven Hills Winery**.

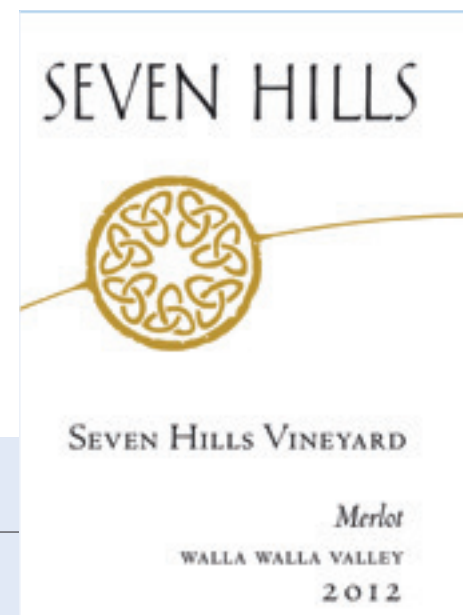
### According to McClellan:

"I want to make a lush, fruit-forward Merlot with brightness, ripe fruit and soft tannin. I want good structure, adequate acidity and modest oak. We want a wine that goes with food, which requires lower alcohols, subdued oak and enough acidity to keep the wine lifted and juicy.

"This wine is made 100 percent from our Seven Hills Vineyard in Oregon. The vineyard is composed of very deep Ritzville silt loams on a flat bench at 1,000 feet. Spacing is 12x8 feet, and vines are own-rooted with unidentified mixed clones. The vineyard is certified sustainable, LIVE/Salmon Safe/IOBC. We have drip irrigation and have moved from sprawl to more VSP. We do shoot- and cluster-thinning, pull leaves on the east side, do mechanical weeding and deficit irrigation post-set/pre-veraison. The old part of the vineyard yields 2 to 2.5 tons per acre while newer plantings will go up to 4 tons.

"I monitor Brix and pH but go by taste. I look for a mix of red and black fruit flavors and try to avoid hyper-maturity, preferring to keep alcohols below 14.5 percent and usually picking below 25° Brix. We hand-pick into half-ton bins, sorting as we go, then destem and crush with widened rollers. We add 20 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> and cold-soak at ambient temperatures for 24 hours. We inoculate with L2056 ADY. We will add nutrients 48 hours after inoculating. We do 90 percent pump-overs three times daily until the cap is broken up. We do fewer towards the end. Fermentation usually goes seven to 10 days with maximum temperatures in the mid-80s range.

"When near 0° Brix, we press to tank, combining press and free-run juice. Primary fermentation may finish in tank. We inoculate for ML in tank and then rack to French oak barrels with 40 percent new. We rack post ML and add SO<sub>2</sub>. We age in barrel for 20 months, racking every three to four months. We filter to 1 micron and age in bottle for three months before release."



### Tasting Notes

**McClellan:** This is a medium-bodied Merlot with a little brightness underneath that gives it some lift. It has an interesting fruit component that is less cherry or raspberry and a bit more Marionberry or exotic berry. The weight and structure are very typical. There is really nice spiciness in the mouth, with the oak coming out a bit in the back of the mouth along with some nice tannin on the finish.

**Mott:** I agree with Casey about the berry component. It is really bright, almost like jam or huckleberry. Very nice. The mouthfeel is great: ripe with a forward palate that coats the mouth. The tannins are nice without any bitterness or astringency. It is mouth-coating with a soft texture.

**Januik:** The higher pH lends this wine a softness. There is an herbal quality, which I say from a strictly positive view. The mouthfeel is soft with medium length, with no strong, astringent tannins at all.

**Nappa:** I am getting raspberry on the aromas, and then it goes to blacker fruits with some olive. It is not tannic, but lush with fruit, and a bit hotter than Januik. It has nice oak and a long finish.

**Olsen-Harbach:** This is fruitier than the Januik. Bright, up-front boysenberry and loganberry, with a tangy, brambly character that I like. It is lively. High alcohol but pretty well-integrated. It has a bright finish. Very nice, pretty and clean.

**Shinn/Page:** I get some raw meat aromas, which are pleasant, but with a nice fruit quality to it. There are all kinds of things going on: tomato leaf, tobacco, white truffle. It is mouth-filling. Don't know if I recognize this as Merlot.

**Ary:** There is a lot of oak up front on the nose with forward coffee, toasty notes coming through. Nice, intense blackberry, blue fruit undertones. It has a lush mid-palate. It is structured but balanced by the fruit expression and the overall weight in general, which I like.

**Burgess:** The aroma had nice cherry-flavored vanilla character, so a combination of fruit and oak. It seems a bit dirty with some sulfide issues. The taste has lush cherry, plum flavors. I like the finish, which shows nice balance and is relatively long.

**Rinaldi:** I think the aromatics were the high point of this wine. I got pomegranate and deep Red Hots along with some black olive, but the red nature ruled. There is angularity on the palate, making the wine come across a bit tart. A lot of alcohol is showing now. On the finish this wine sort of disappears; it just went away.



ERIC JORGENSEN

## Conclusion

The biggest surprise of the tasting was the role terroir played in defining the wines. The wines of each selected region shared many aspects in common but stood out with notable differences from the other regions. There was no confusing the Merlots of Washington with the Merlots of North Fork or Napa.

Napa seemed to provide the grandest, most succulent and full-bodied Merlots. The wines also carried the most oak but were able to handle it well. Dark, ripe fruit with spice and some leather were the common descriptors. Washington Merlots had a bit less opulence and a tad more structure, with fine grain tannins and a bit less oak. Aromas and flavor tended more to the red fruit category, and there was some black olive or tea in the aromas and flavors. North Fork had both a red and black fruit component, and the wines shared a saline minerality and good acidity. Locals described the North Fork wines as elegant and feminine, but the wines were seen as herbal by the other winemakers.

As demonstrated in past varietal focus tastings, winemakers like the wines they make and assume their style of wines best represent the standard for a given variety. The winemakers agreed that all of the wines were well-made but differed over what made the perfect Merlot. Napa winemakers commented that the North Fork wines didn't taste like Merlot to them. North Fork winemakers said that the Washington wines were definitely a different animal. Washington winemakers found that the wines of Napa were very big and ripe but could have used a bit more structure.

Even in Bordeaux, Merlot is very different from the Right Bank and the Left Bank of the Gironde, and both are unlike Merlot from Languedoc-Roussillon. Wherever it is grown, Merlot is a variety defined by great body, attractive fruit character and a plush, supple mouthfeel. The surprise is that Merlot is so influenced by terroir that it acts like a chameleon. Merlot is a prime expression of the place it is grown while regularly providing wines of attractive body and soft tannin. When grown with quality in mind, it is a variety that is eminently drinkable at a relatively young age, but one that admirably represents its origins. **WBM**

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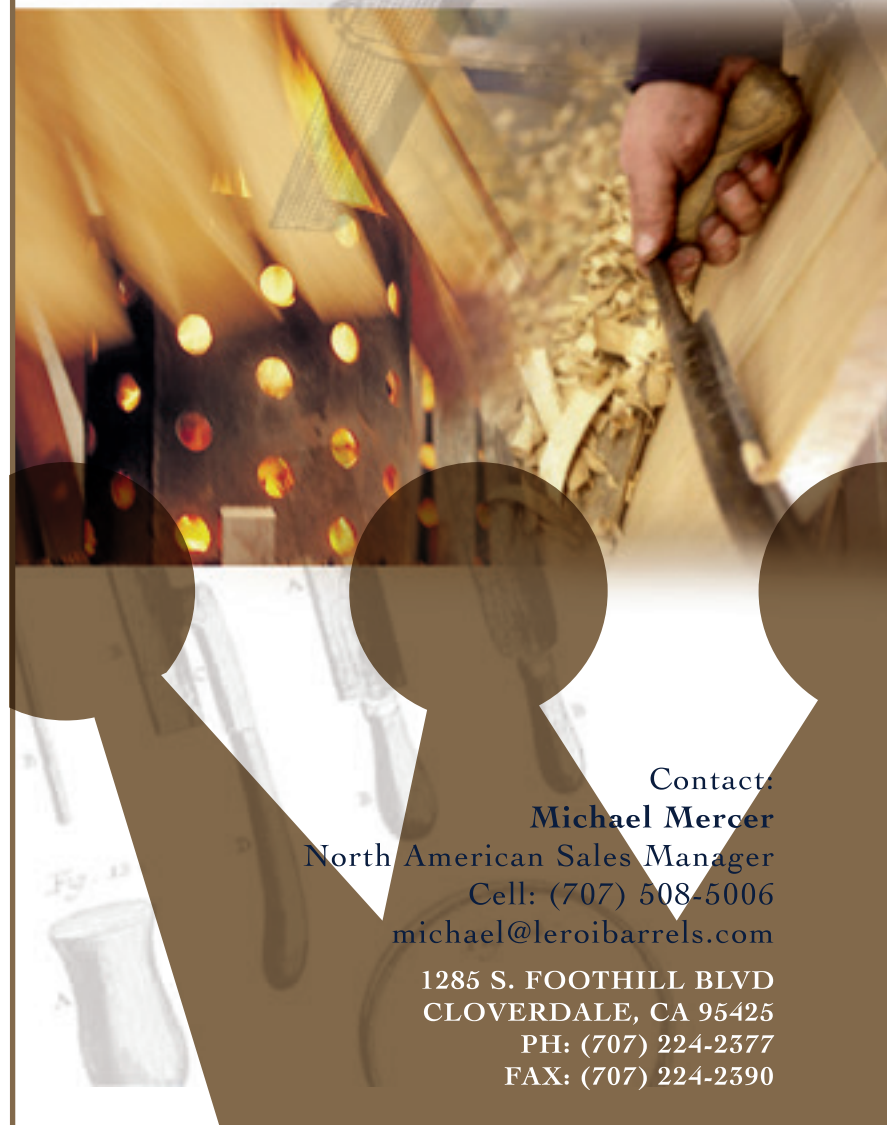
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