

Varietal Focus:

Red Wine Blends

Lance Cutler

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING of winemaking, good winemakers have focused on making the best wines possible. In special vineyards, with certain varieties and in particular vintages, using a single varietal may produce the best wine. In other circumstances, blending different varieties can help winemakers produce a superior product.

Winemakers approach wine blending in different ways and for different reasons. They blend to increase or decrease acidity, to enhance fruit character or mouth-feel, and to tame tannic astringency and alcoholic perception. Blending can start in the vineyard by blending different blocks of the same varietal, or combining different varieties planted in a particular vineyard and co-fermenting them. Varietals can be picked and fermented separately, using different methods, and then blended together later during the aging process. Even placing a particular wine in different types of barrels, stainless tanks or concrete vessels, and then mixing them together can enhance a wine's complexity.

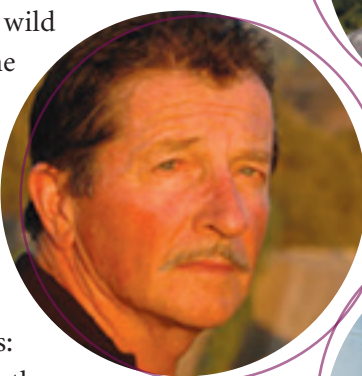
Historically, and especially in Europe, wine blends were often strictly controlled by government regulations. Classified regions were restricted as to which varieties could be planted, so winemakers blended various combinations of grapes to produce more balanced wines. Bordeaux, France most famously used combinations of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot and even Carmenere to craft complex, long-lived wines. If a vintner used any other grapes, then the wine could not be labeled Bordeaux.

Similar restrictions applied in Italy, Spain, Germany and other parts of France. More famous blends include Rhône blends, which used Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre along with other rustic varieties, to create lively, spicy wines. Rioja focused primarily on Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo and Graciano to produce world class wines. Italy had strict wine-blending laws, according to the **Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita** (DOCG), until Italian winemakers created the Super Tuscan blend, which featured Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon, but allowed Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Merlot and Petit Verdot.

New World winemakers jumped on the blending bandwagon with wild abandon. While many winemakers looked to European models for the blends, many more shunned any links to tradition. Where European blends were often restricted by the government, New World blends, with a few exceptions, were as capricious and whimsical as winemakers could imagine. Red wine blends evolved into a category unto itself. Winemakers leapt into this new frontier, making big, bold, multi-faceted wines as defining personal statements.

This article focuses on red wine blends from three diverse regions: Washington state, Napa Valley and Paso Robles. No restrictions as to the components of the blend were placed on participants. Instead, they were asked to submit the wine that they felt best represented their success at achieving their individual stylistic goals.

The featured winemakers and/or owners in this Varietal Focus include: **Stephen Tebb** of **Robert Craig Winery**, **Christopher Howell** of **Cain Vineyard and Winery**, **Kyle Janzen** of **Bacio Divino Cellars**, **Stephan Asseo** of **L'Aventure**, **Fred Holloway** of **Justin Vineyards & Winery**, **Roger Nicolas** of **RN Estate Vineyard**, **Chris Camarda** of **Andrew Will Winery**, **Erica Orr** of **Baer Winery**, and **Billo** and **Pinto Naravane** of **Rasa Vineyards**.



Lance Cutler has been a working winemaker in Sonoma County for 35 years.

He has been a contributing editor for *Wine Business Monthly* for more than 10 years. His unique perspective on winemaking has led to our Industry Roundtable series and Varietal Focus series. Lance is also the author of four books, including *The Tequila Lover's Guide to Mexico*.

Robert Craig Winery

2009 Robert Craig Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon 14.8% Alc. \$80

88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot, 4% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc

Stephen Tebb has been the winemaker at Robert Craig Winery for three years. After graduating from **UC Davis** with a B.S. in Viticulture and Enology, Stephen worked for 12 years at Napa Valley's **Codorniu Napa/Artesa Winery**, advancing from intern to assistant winemaker. He then explored California's Central Coast and Santa Cruz Mountains as winemaker for **Clos LaChance** before returning to the Napa Valley and joining Robert Craig Winery.

According to Tebb:

"The goal here is to be vineyard-expressive. With this Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon blend, that means there is a savory, spice, mountain flower character that is nervy and edgy. We try for a 'classic' style that touts good acidity, with fruit character and balanced oak. In short, we try for big, age-worthy Cabernets that also display balance and nuance.

"This vineyard consists of volcanic soils that absolutely require irrigation to survive. Yields are very low, usually around 1½ tons per acre and never more than 2 tons per acre. The soil is varied, and vigor is varied, which requires that we place extra emitters in dry zones. Vine spacings run 8x7 feet, and the exposure is south by southwest. The vines are primarily clone 7 although there is a half-acre of clone 337. It is all planted on 110R rootstock. In the past we were primarily cordon-pruned, but we are moving to cane pruning to have more control of each vine. We remove extraneous shoots and suckers, some leaves, and we cluster-thin as needed.

"Our vineyard sits at 2,300 feet, and early in the season we are much cooler than the valley floor, so we have a late bloom. Because we are above the inversion layer and above the fog, we have cooler days and much warmer nights than the valley floor during ripening season, so we catch up by harvest time. The warm temperatures at night help produce non-photosynthetic ripening, which means sugars rise less dramatically.

"To harvest, we run tests on Brix, TA and pH first, then we taste for flavor. Typically we pick between 24° to 25° Brix with 0.5 to 0.6 acid and pH of 3.7. I look for brown seeds that have a nutty flavor, along with good fruit flavors that exhibit no green flavor. I also check weather forecasts before making picking decisions. We pick different sections of the vineyard several times.

"Grapes are picked into half-ton bins and go to the crusher on a conveyor belt where they are destemmed but not crushed. We add 50 ppm SO₂. We berry sort and then pump to tanks, which cracks 30 to 40 percent of the skins. We cold soak for about five days at 55° F with a daily pump-over. We check YAN levels and add nutrients as needed in two portions. We inoculate with D 254 and F-15 yeast. We pump-over twice a day early and late during fermentation and three times daily during peak fermentations where temperatures



Winemaker Stephen Tebb

max out at 90° F but usually run about 85° F. During pump-overs, we aerate through a screen, although early and late pump-overs incorporate sprinklers. Fermentations usually last 10 to 14 days.

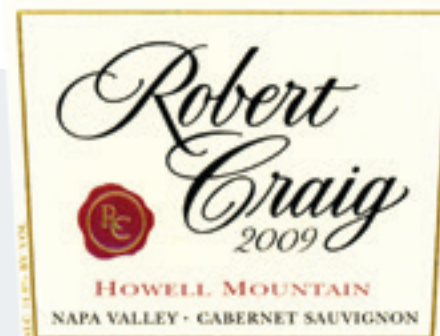
"Although each lot is handled differently, we generally press at dryness, keeping free run and press fractions separate—although we can blend them later in the process. We prefer to settle the wine in a tank for a day, add malolactic inoculums and then rack to barrels. We use 100 percent French oak with 75 percent new oak. All of our barrels are thin stave for less aggressive flavors. We top monthly and rack in the summer, again at blending and finally for bottling. We choose our blending components based primarily on the amounts and varieties planted in our Howell Mountain Vineyard. We use virtually all that we grow in this blend. In all, the wine ages in the barrels for 18 months. It is bottled unfiltered; and if we can, we like to give it one year of bottle age before release."

Tasting Notes

Tebb: *It's about red fruit with currant, plum and sort of a burnt rocks character. There's a nice savory, brambly aroma like wild berry fruit. On the palate the wine is bright and lively with good acidity. There are tannins evident, but they are subtle and supple. The finish is long and lingering.*

Howell: *I sense richness and cocoa along with dried cherries and fine tannins. It is fairly rich on entry and the palate. It is not sweet, but there is a sense of sweetness in the mouth. It is not over-extracted, but I might prefer something a bit less ripe.*

Janzen: *Aromatically I pick up crushed, volcanic rock with fine hints of herbal. Palate-wise I get thorny berry fruit that is well-balanced with good acidity. It has a brightness, a pop on the entry that holds the fruit all the way through.*



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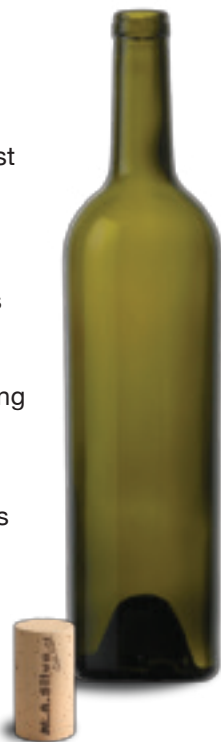
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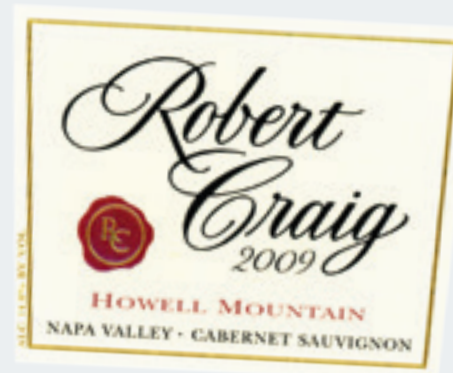
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Asseo: To start, I found the nose a bit closed. There is a very nice touch of oak but well-integrated and soft. After a bit, I got this nice toasted aroma. In the mouth, the wine is delicate with a nice attack with medium to full body and very nice balance. I don't think the wine is overripe at all. There is a very long finish that I like very much.

Nicolas: This is a much riper version of a Bordeaux style. It is very rich in the nose with a lot of blackberries. It is smooth and pleasant in the mid-palate, very polished. It is a bit short in the end. It has more to offer in the forefront than in the back to me.

Holloway: The wine is dark, rich and full, but it carries a lot of drying tannin. For me, in the middle, the tannins kind of take over and distract you from the flavors that are there. It needs some time. This is a good example of the difference between Napa and Paso. If you like something with a bit more grip in its tannins, then Napa is the place to go. If you look for something more round and mouth-filling, then Paso achieves that.

Orr: Pretty classic Napa Cabernet. It is really powerful and concentrated with black fruit, but it is also pretty tannic. It is very big but fruitier and fresher than I would expect of an '09.

Camarda: It has Napa Cabernet character. It is well-made and fruit-solid. For me, I want to take more away from the wine. It may be a blend, but all I get is the Cabernet.

Naravane: I, too, would be hard-pressed to find something other than Cabernet in the wine. That said, I do like the wine quite a bit. It is a very bold, ripe style of wine; however, it does have this nice minerality on the finish, and underneath that there is immense structure to the wine. It is very well-made wine.

Cain Vineyard and Winery

2007 Cain Five 14.4% Alc. \$100

**68% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Merlot, 6% Malbec,
5% Petit Verdot, 5% Cabernet Franc**

Christopher Howell is winemaker/general manager for Cain Vineyard and Winery on Spring Mountain in the Napa Valley. A native of Seattle, he began drinking European wines and then the wines of Washington state. He moved to France to study enology and viticulture in Montpellier and Bordeaux. He says he has spent the last 25 years unlearning and relearning everything he thought he knew about winemaking.



CHARMAINE GRIEGER

Winemaker and general manager Christopher Howell

According to Howell:

“I want the vineyard to dictate the style, and for Cain Vineyard, that seems to be a wine that has generally fresh ‘green’ aromas, sort of a pre-cassis, Douglas fir, with refined tannins. We predicate our blend on complexity, balance and finish. Mouth-feel and texture are important criteria.

“Our vineyard is planted on sedimentary soils of sandstone, shale and clay. We are on steep slopes, so cover crops are the rule. Soil health is crucial. We have learned that our soils are healthier when we use no amendments or herbicides. We do use some compost and fish emulsion, but less is more. We tolerate diversity in the vineyard, clean around the vine base and try to use less sulfur. The vineyard sits at 1,400 to 2,100 feet with multiple exposures and many steep slopes. Most vines are planted to 4x6.5 feet spacing and average 10 to 15 years old. We have too many different clones and rootstocks to count. The vineyard is cane-pruned, four to 12 buds per vine. We irrigate and are organic but not certified. Although we use VSP, too much sun can be a problem, so we tend to leave leaves and laterals for shade. We don’t permit cluster on cluster and will also do a post-veraison fruit drop. Production is usually 1 to 2 tons per acre.

“Harvest is determined largely by observing the vine throughout the growing season. I like to see some yellowing of basal leaves and some dimpling on a portion of the fruit. We’ll select berry samples and crush them, putting

the juice in a glass. We evaluate color, aromas, taste and how quickly the juice settles out to help determine when to pick. The key is to catch the fruit in ripeness before aromas begin to fade.

“Fruit is hand-picked, field-sorted and destemmed using no rollers. We add 50 to 75 ppm SO₂ and pump to tanks, giving us partial whole berries. Fruit typically sits three to five days at 68° F until native yeast fermentation begins. We add no acid but will add yeast nutrients as needed. Fermentations are carried out in mostly closed-top tanks sized between 1,500 and 5,000 gallons. We pump-over with air twice daily (50 percent volume) during active fermentation and punch-down smaller lots. Fermentation temps run in the mid-80 degree range, (peaking between 85° F to 89° F), and fermentation typically lasts 10 to 16 days.

“We press depending on taste, usually around dryness. We settle in tank for one day and wait for dryness to inoculate with malolactic and rack to barrels. We use 100 percent French oak with 60 percent new oak. We top barrels monthly but more often in winter. We rack post-malolactic in spring to blend and before the next harvest. We will rack if we fine the wine and rack to bottle. I like to play with reduction and Brettanomyces too, but Brett is hard to control. This wine was aged in barrel for 20 months, got an egg white fining (three eggs per barrel) and was not filtered at bottling. Cain Five receives two years of bottle age before release.”

Tasting Notes

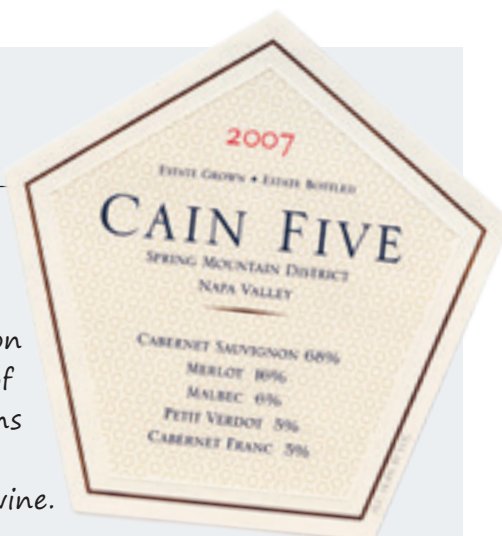
Howell: *I pick up some green herbal character, maybe a little bay leaf and red, not black fruit. It is fairly supple on entry with a moderate level of tannins. There are fine tannins that give a mouth-watering texture. It is not a powerful wine. I really like the texture.*

Tebb: *There is predominant red fruit like raspberry and strawberry. It is more fruit-focused and elegant. It is nicely balanced with a hint of mint or anise on the entry along with some savory herbs. There is nice length with supple and soft tannins. It is balanced with a little bit of everything.*

Janzen: *I like this wine. It tastes just like Spring Mountain to me. There is a nice, piney, bright red fruit, but it is not overpowering—it’s more representative of Spring Mountain. This wine really blossoms with time in the glass.*

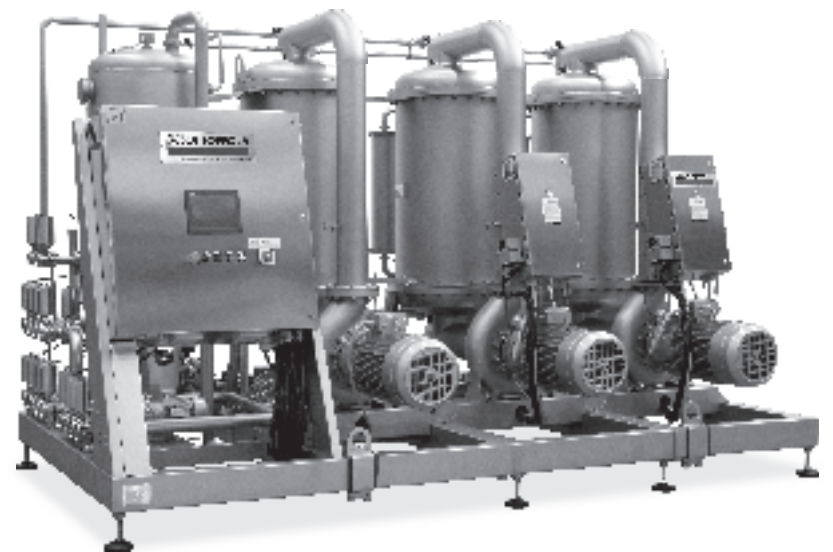
Naravane: *Very complex nose. I get some herbal, leafy aromatics. This is a more elegant, finessed style than the Craig. There is still plenty of ripe fruit, but that earthy-toned minerality comes out with some of the minty, herbaceousness on the back end. I like this wine quite a bit; it is really well done.*

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OLAF BECKMANN

The north-facing slope below La Piedra yields the defining Cabernet Sauvignon which forms the core of the Cain Five.

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Camarda: *I think this is a stylish wine. More differentiated in flavors and the middle. There is no sense of it being monolithic, which I sometimes get from Napa wines. It is shaped by the winemaking. I'd love to see where it goes in a few years.*

Orr: *I get some green pepper character. It is earthy, like potting soil. It seems Old World, not typically Napa style. In the mouth it does have finesse. There is a nice long finish. It is very drinkable now.*

Nicolas: *There is a lot of spice, which you expect as a wine ages. It is a very firm wine with good attack and good grip, especially for a wine with a little age. There is some astringency, but that will carry for several more years. Great follow through on the finish. I'd like to try this in a few more years.*

Holloway: *With this age, it has taken on more candied flavors. You see more of the drying tannic structure of Napa. It has a lot of spicy elegance. It is rich and flavorful and carries the tannin well.*

Asseo: *In the nose there is this herbal, kind of meat character, but mostly red fruit. The attack is kind of soft, but there is nice volume and flesh with big tannins. I like the texture, and it has a beautiful long finish.*



Bacio Divino Cellars

2006 Bacio Divino 15% Alc. \$80

**70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Sangiovese, 9% Merlot,
3% Syrah, 3% Petite Sirah**

Kyle Janzen is the son of Bacio Divino Cellars owner and founder **Claus Janzen**. Over the last three harvest seasons, Kyle has been studying all aspects of winemaking under the guiding wing of consulting winemaker **Kirk Venge**, while also taking on the role of national sales manager. Janzen's schedule follows the rhythm of the winery: harvest, crush, blending, bottling. Ever proud of his family's accomplishments in the Napa Valley, he has quickly become the "new face" of the winery.

According to Janzen:

"We are using common varieties to make something special. We want to make a Super Tuscan style blend with Californian sensibilities. We want a wine that has balance, fruit, complexity and longevity that can be enjoyed at a good meal.

"Our blend for Bacio Divino is profile-based. We not only blend varieties, but locations as well. We select fruit from excellent vineyards and try to diversify the various terroirs for the blend. The key elements for this wine are Cabernet Sauvignon and Sangiovese. We use Cabernet from **Andy Beckstoffer** and from our home ranch. This gives us fleshy, lush fruit from the valley floor along with a leaner character from the mountain fruit. The Sangiovese lends a bright strawberry character along with great acidity. Merlot fills the middle and softens the tannins while Syrah and Petite Sirah add some spice and earthy complexity.

"While we use grapes from several different vineyards and have a myriad of soil types, exposures, clones and rootstocks, most of our vines are planted using 5x7 foot spacing. All are farmed traditionally and sustainably. We shoot-thin at 18 inches, and we cluster-thin to cane gauge and lengthen post-veraison. All vineyards are drip-irrigated. We average between 2 and 3 tons per acre, depending on site and varietal.

"We pick determined on flavor maturity and the look and feel of the vineyards when we walk through them. The grapes will talk to you if you look and listen. We prefer well-ripened fruit, usually in the 27° to 28° Brix range. We pay close attention to weather forecasts. We field-sort while picking grapes. At the winery we destem and sort again but never crush. We'll add 35 to 45 ppm SO₂. Based on the varietal and harvest temperatures, we'll use a three- to seven-day cold soak at 55° F. During the cold soak, we wet the cap once a day.

"We never add acid but will add yeast nutrients as needed. All of our fermentations are carried out by native yeast. We use both punch-downs and pump-overs with a screen two times a day (1/3 volume). We delestage twice during the post-lag phase. Starting at 5° Brix, we pump-over once a



Kyle Janzen

day, trying to maintain as reductive a state as possible. We ferment in the 90° F to 95° F range, keeping it above 85° F throughout. Our Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot get 35 to 45 days of extended maceration. Sangiovese gets no extended maceration and fewer pump-overs.

"We keep free run juice and press juice separate but will blend them later, depending on taste. We do not inoculate for malolactic, preferring that it goes naturally in our barrels. We use 85 percent French barrels, and 85 percent of our barrels for this wine are new. We try to maintain a reductive environment for aging, racking just twice in the life of the wine unless wine health demands more. The first racking is at 14 months when we assemble the blend. The second is at bottling. We age Bacio Divino for 28 months before bottling. We bottle unfiltered and bottle-age for six months before release."

Tasting Notes

Janzen: *I get some wild berry fruit. There is a little dustiness with bottle age and from the Cabernet. There is a nice bright cherry on the palate with good acidity from the Sangiovese. There are good tannins from the mountain grapes and Syrah and Petite Sirah. The wild cherry comes through the nose onto the palate. There is a brightness on entry while maintaining a femininity and elegance.*

Howell: *It has a delicate, sweet entry but not high alcohol. There is a delicate mid-palate. The whole wine is delicate and fresh. I pick up a bit of cola along with hints of cumin and garlic that I like.*

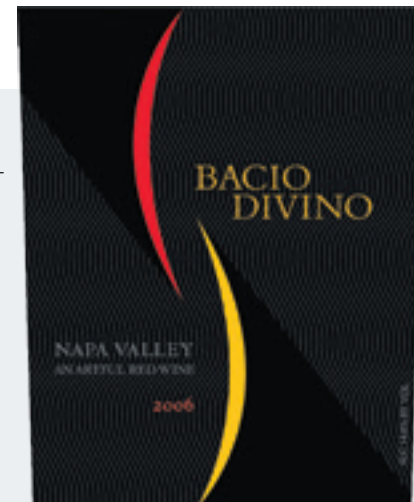
Tebb: *I get a lot of complexity from tar and soy and earthiness, but in a good way. There is a nice rich earthy spice. There is a floral characteristic that I find really interesting. Fruit is there, but there are other complexities on the palate as well. It all works together to make a seamless wine.*

Nicolas: *I get hints of oxidation in the nose, but there is a lot of action going on. It is like a lighter Super Tuscan but still has strength. There is good acidity and sharp tannins with light body. This would go great with a piece of meat.*

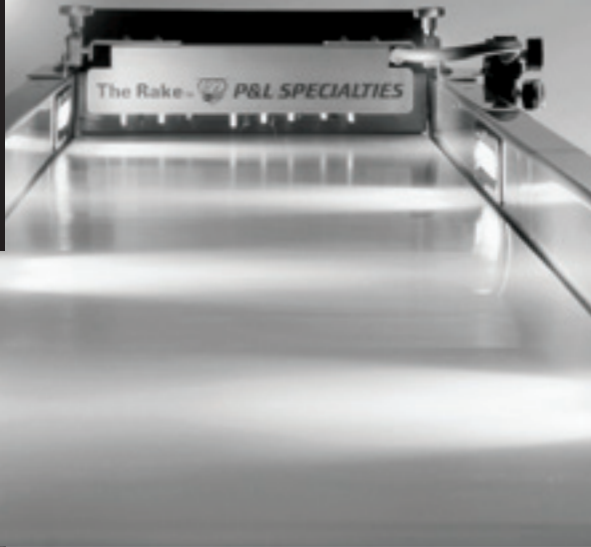
Asseo: *I like it very much. The nose is floral, very clean and elegant. It has a riper style with complexity. The attack is nice with good volume. It is very elegant with good definition. I love the beautiful texture. There is enough flesh to handle the big tannins.*

Holloway: *A very interesting blend. I pick up more red fruit character, probably from the Sangiovese. It's an interesting approach. It is holding up well and shows nice aged character. It is more youthful than I had expected.*

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Camarda: *It seems fairly alcoholic to me. It is aggressive wine. There is fruit in the nose, but it is not distinctive. It is on the riper side. I get the sense they were waiting to pick this fruit.*

Naravane: *This is a very ripe, dark-fruited wine. There is lots of vanilla, lots of new oak. It is very New World in style. It still has some tightness to it. I think it still needs some more time to come around and express itself.*

Orr: *It is ripe with sweet oak. I find the finish a bit hot. It is a little astringent and bitter in the middle. There is a fleshiness with cherry and some tobacco.*

L'Aventure

2010 L'Aventure Estate Cuvée 15.7% Alc. \$85

42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Syrah, 16% Petit Verdot

Stephan Asseo, owner and winemaker at L'Aventure, began making wine in 1982, following his education at **L'Ecole Oenologique de Macon**, Burgundy, France, when he established **Domaine Courteillac** in Bordeaux. He and his family later purchased **Chateau Fleur Cardinal** and **Chateau Robin** in the Cotes de Castillon, Bordeaux. Over the next 15 years, Asseo gained a reputation as a maverick vigneron partly based on his true desire to be more innovative than **AOC** law would allow. In 1996, he went on a quest for a great terroir, finally settling on the unique terroir of west side Paso Robles, where Asseo began his adventure, "L'Aventure."



Stephan Asseo, owner and winemaker, dropping fruit in Michael's Block



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According to Asseo:

“I want to make a wine that will not be a copy of anything else but something that will be my best representation of my terroir and my personal taste. I want a blend of great complexity that still pairs well with food. I try to make wine that I like to drink.”

“I have a 58-acre vineyard. The soil types are 60 percent Gazos Lopez siliceous and 40 percent Calado-line calcareous—that means mostly limestone. Vineyard elevations are 1,100 to 1,400 feet. The slopes are very steep with the exposures every which way. The vineyard needs drip irrigation, and I work a lot on improving the soil. I compost, use the Sunflower device under the vines and rip alternate rows to a depth of 2 feet. The vineyard is 70 percent biodynamic and 30 percent organic. I see that different blocks within my vineyard lend different expressions to the wine. So my blend begins in the vineyard.”

“Our Cabernet Sauvignon is clone 15 and 337. Petit Verdot is clone 400 and 02. We have five different Syrah clones. These clones are planted to six different rootstocks, including 420A, 110R, 1103P and 3309C. The vines are densely planted: 2,100 vines per acre. The vines struggle to succeed here. Our yield for Cabernet and Petit Verdot is 1.5 to 2 tons per acre. The Syrah does a little better with 2 to 2.5 tons per acre. I use a low cordon with a high canopy because sunburn is a real problem. There is little top soil, so we use no cover crop nor do we use herbicide. We don’t pull leaves either. Sometimes we even leave suckers to help shade the fruit zone. We will drop fruit to control the yield and balance the fruit on the vine.”



“To determine when to harvest, I start with a basic analysis of Brix, TA and pH. The second step is tasting the fruit, checking the seeds and considering the influence of the particular vintage. We harvest early in the morning and double-sort, starting with clusters and then sorting berries. We destem with widespread rollers, which gives us a mix of berries. We add 30 to 50 ppm SO₂.”

“I will cold soak Syrah from four to 14 days and Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot from four to seven days. During cold soak, I keep the top wet. About 80 to 90 percent of my

lots ferment separately, but I will co-ferment different blocks of the same variety. We never add acid but will use yeast nutrients as necessary. I’ll warm up the must to start fermentation and use native yeast 90 percent of the time. We pump-over twice a day to begin fermentation, increase to three to four times a day at peak and then pump-over just once every two days post-fermentation. Fermentation temperatures differ by variety. Cabernet and Petit Verdot max around 82° F while Syrah is cooler at 76° F to 78° F.

“We drain fermenters when the wine is dry, keeping free run separate from press juice. The wine rests in a tank overnight where malolactic starter is added. From there we rack to 100 percent new, lightly toasted French oak barrels. The wine ages 14 to 16 months. We will rack to blend usually in March or April. We rack again to bottle. We use no filtration at bottling. I wish I could do more, but the wine only receives two months of bottle age before release.”

Tasting Notes

Asseo: The fruit is ripe with some blond toast. There is black fruit with some red fruit as well, and the nose is very deep. It is a big wine, full-bodied with lots of flesh. It is a ripe, rich wine with good natural acid and nice ripe tannins. It has a lot of fruit and a very long finish. I think the wine is very well-integrated.

Holloway: Being a 2010, it is taking a bit longer to open up. There is wild blackberry fruit that comes from the Petit Verdot. It is big, rich, round, full and very dark.

Nicolas: Very interesting wine. It is very rich with an aroma of coulis of blackberries. There are all kinds of wild berry aromas from the forest. It is very rich on the palate with very firm tannins with some astringency. It will age elegantly. It is a great representation of Paso Robles.

Tebb: This is big, concentrated and plush with lots of black fruit and black plum. There are some slate or gravel aromas from the rock that give the wine some spice and a nice gaminess in a brambly sort of way. It is big and rich on the palate with a complex entry full of intense blueberry and blackberry. It is concentrated with sweet spice. Gorgeous wine. Hard to believe it is 100 percent new oak because it is so well-integrated into the wine.



ESTATE CUVÉE

Janzen: I love this wine and style. There is a touch of VA that blows off. To me this is purple fruit, not black or red but purple. It is awesome with chunky tannins that really work. It has a gooey density. As it opens, you get clove, cinnamon and oatmeal notes that are pretty. It is very fat on the palate.

Howell: It is super dark and intense with dried plums. It is pine-scented with a touch of bitterness and spiciness that makes me think of cough syrup. There are really nice, fleshy parts of this wine. It is an intense wine.

Naravane: This thing is a beast. Very, very full-bodied wine, again, with the impression of residual sugar in the back of the wine. I get some black pepper character from Syrah but without that interesting gamey character. It is all dark, dark fruit. Stylistically I prefer drier styled wine. It is big, kind of a Mr. Olympia style of wine. It is a monster.

Camarda: This is a good example of a liquor-type of wine. Wine for me needs to have a beginning, a middle and an end. The way this alcohol sets up in the mouth dominates the wine, and the wine’s sweetness comes from the alcohol. If you want to wow people, then just hit them. This wine is well-made, but it is not for me.

Orr: This is a very extracted style. There is lots of ripe fruit here along with some of that Syrah funkiness in the aroma. It is syrupy and sappy, very full-bodied and powerful. There is quite a bit of oak. I think “liquor” is right on here.

Data Sheet



WINERY	Cain Vineyard & Winery	Robert Craig Winery	Bacio Divino Cellars
Wine Alc. \$\$	2007 Cain Five 14.4% Alc. \$100	2009 Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon 14.8% Alc. \$80	2006 Bacio Divino Red Blend 14.4% Alc. \$100
Location	Spring Mountain District	Howell Mountain, Napa Valley	Napa Valley
Blend	68% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Merlot, 6% Malbec, 5% Petit Verdot, 5% Cabernet Franc	88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot, 4% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc	70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Sangiovese, 9% Merlot 2% Syrah, 2% Petite Sirah
Winemaker	Chris Howell	Stephen Tebb	Kirk Venge
Goal	The vineyard dictates the style presenting generally fresh "green" aromas with refined tannins. Blend is predicated on complexity, balance and finish with mouth-feel and texture key elements.	Classic style that expresses the vineyard. Big, ageable Cabernet that displays balance and nuance.	A Tuscan style blend with California sensibilities. Looking for balance, fruit, complexity, longevity and simple enjoyment with food.
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Sandstone, shale, clay	Volcanic	Varies
Elevation	1,400 to 2,100 feet	2,300 feet	Sea level to 2,400 feet
Vine Spacing	Mainly 4x6.5 feet	8x7 feet	Various, mainly 5x7 feet
Exposure	Many	South by southwest	Various
Clones	Too many to count	Clone 7	Various
Irrigation or Dry-Farmed	Usually irrigated	Drip irrigation	Irrigation
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Organic (not certified)	Traditional	Sustainable traditional
Production	1 to 2 tons per acre	1.8 tons per acre	2 to 3 tons per acre
Vineyard Practices	Cane pruning, 4 to 12 buds per vine with no spurs. Leave leaves and laterals. Remove cluster on cluster. Same person prunes same vines year after year	Cane and cordon prune, weed control, mowing, suckering, mildew control, trellis wire adjustment, leaf removal, cluster thinning and crop adjustment as needed	Shoot thin at 18 inches, cluster thin to cane gauge and length post veraison
WINEMAKING DATA			
Cold Soak	3 to 5 days at 65° F to 68° F	Up to 5 days at 55 degrees	3 to 7 days, time and temp varietal dependent
SO₂	50 to 70 ppm	50 ppm at must pump	35 to 45 ppm
Crush Format	Destem with no sorting, partial whole berry	Destem and berry sort	Destem and sort, never crush
Acid Additions	None	At first pump-over if needed	Never
Yeast	Native	D254 and F-15	Native
Fermentation Temp.	77° F to 85° F	85° F max	85° F to 95° F
Punchdown Methods	Pump-over twice daily (50% volume) small lots punch-down	Pump-over once a day during cold soak, twice daily at beginning and end of fermentation, three times daily at peak	Both PD and PO with tub and screen 2x daily (1/3 volume.) Delestage post lag phase. Once a day at 5 brix, no air.
Oak Program	100% French, 50 to 60% new	French Bordeaux export 70% new	85% French, 15% American, 85% new
Barrel Aging	20 months	18 months	27 months
Racking	Four in year one, two in year two	Post ml and at summer blending	Two rackings (more if necessary)
Filtration	No, 3 egg white fining/barrel	No	Never
Bottle Age	2 years	18 months	6 months

Data Sheet



WINERY	RN Estate Vineyard	Justin Vineyard & Winery	L'Aventure
Wine Alc. \$\$	2009 Cuvée de Trois Cépages 14.3% Alc. \$55	2009 Isosceles 15.5% Alc. \$62	2010 L'Aventure Estate Cuvée 15.7% Alc. \$85
Location	Paso Robles	Paso Robles	Paso Robles
Blend	67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 6% Merlot	94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Cabernet Franc, 3% Merlot	42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Syrah, 16% Petit Verdot
Winemaker Goal	Roger Nicolas A red Bordeaux style blend with the finesse and elegance of the Left Bank in Haut Medoc with extreme importance given to complementing food.	Scott Shirley Modeled after Medoc Bordeaux and made to drink well early but continue to improve with age.	Stephan Asseo To make a wine that is not a copy of something, that best represents my terroir and personal taste.
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Sandy clay loam with good drainage	Calcareous	60% Gazos Lopez siliceous, 40% Calado-line calcareous
Elevation	1,000 feet	900 feet	1,100 to 1,400 feet
Vine Spacing	9x6 feet	8x4 feet	6.5x3 feet = 2,100 vines per acre
Exposure	West facing	Northeast by southeast	Various
Clones	Cabernet Sauvignon 337, Cabernet Franc 4, Merlot 3	Cabernet Sauvignon 7, 337	Cabernet Sauvignon 15, 337, Petite Verdot 400, 02, five different Syrah clones
Irrigation or Dry-Farmed	Drip irrigation	Some dry-farmed, some drip	Drip irrigation
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Traditional with little spraying	Sustainable	70% biodynamic, 30% organic
Production	2 to 3.5 tons per acre	Less than 3 tons per acre	1.5 to 2.5 tons per acre
Vineyard Practices	Balance fruit w/canopy, pull leaves on cool side, sprawl on warmer side, adjust catch wires during extreme temperature	Regular sampling, analysis for Brix, TA and pH, but all picking decisions ultimately based on taste	Leave laterals and suckers, but drop fruit to control yield and maturity of fruit as well
WINEMAKING DATA			
Cold Soak	3 to 4 days	24 hours at 58° F	Syrah 4 to 14 days, Petit Verdot 4 to 7 days
SO₂	20 to 50 ppm	45 ppm at crusher	30 to 40 ppm
Crush Format	Pre-sort in vineyard, destem, sort out raisins and shot berries	Destem and berry sort with no crushing	Double sort, destem, lightly crush
Acid Additions	Very rarely	Added with yeast	Never
Yeast	D254	D254 and Uvaferm for reds	Native
Fermentation Temp.	85° F to 90° F	85° F to 88° F	Cabernet and Petit Verdot 82° F Syrah 76° F to 78° F
Punchdown Methods	1 1/2 ton fermenters, punch-down twice daily, 3 to 4 times at peak	Pneumatage and pump-over twice a day with sprinklers or open hose	Once daily during cold soak, 2PO at beginning of ferm, increasing to 3 or 4 daily at peak, every other day after fermentation
Oak Program	100% French, 40% new	100% French, 64% new	100% new French oak
Barrel Aging	20 months	24 months	14 to 16 months
Racking	Once mid-summer, once to bottle	As needed, usually once at blending, again at bottling	One for blending, one for bottling
Filtration	Never	No	No
Bottle Age	3 to 9 months	5 months	2 months (unfortunately)

Data Sheet



WINERY	Andrew Will Winery	Rasa Vineyards	Baer Winery
Wine Alc. \$\$	2009 Two Blondes Vineyard Red Wine 14.5% Alc. \$52	2009 In Order to Form a More Perfect Union 15.2 Alc. \$95	2010 Ursa 14.5% Alc. \$40
Location	Yakima Valley	Columbia Valley	Columbia Valley
Blend	38% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Cabernet Franc, 31% Merlot	41% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 23% Cabernet Franc	42% Merlot, 41% Cabernet Franc, 10% Malbec, 7% Cabernet Sauvignon
Winemaker	Chris Camarda	Billo Navarene	Erica Orr
Goal	Balance is the main idea, other than that I simply want to see what the vineyard has to offer.	An elegant, complex style that in the context of vintage emphasizes structural elements over ripeness of fruit.	Create a wine that is delicious, appealing and well balanced with a silky, mouth-watering finish.
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	12 inches loam over caliche layer	Various	Fractured rock with very fine sandy loam
Elevation	1,100 feet	Various	1,400-1,500 feet
Vine Spacing	3x6 feet	6x9, 6x8 feet	8x5 feet
Exposure	Southwest	Various	Southern
Clones	Merlot 181, Cabernet Sauvignon 191, Cabernet Franc CB	Various	Merlot 348 and 3, Cab Franc 1, Cab Sauv 2 and 6, Malbec 4
Irrigation or Dry-Farmed	Micro-mist irrigation system	Irrigated	Irrigated
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Sustainable	Sustainable traditional	Salmon-safe traditional
Production	3.5 tons per acre	2 to 3 tons per acre	2 to 4 tons per acre
Vineyard Practices	Shoot thin in summer, fruit thin pre-harvest	Varies by vineyard and varietal	Varies by varietal
WINEMAKING DATA			
Cold Soak	3 days	5 to 8 days at 55° F	Store fruit overnight about 60° F
SO₂	60 ppm	35 ppm at crusher	40 ppm at crusher
Crush Format	Destem and sort	Aggressive sorting, destem and crush	Destem directly to fermenting bins after overnight storage
Acid Additions	None	0.5 g/L on certain lots prior to primary fermentation	Add acid on day 3 if necessary
Yeast	Indigenous	Native if possible. If not, then D254 or RP15	D254 with some D80 and D21
Fermentation Temp.	86° F maximum	75° F to 85° F	Cab Sauv and Cab Franc 88° F to 90° F, Merlot mid-90s
Punchdown Methods	Pulsair pneumatage	Punch-down 3 times daily	Punch-down only once daily till cap forms, twice daily after cap forms, three times daily between 14° to 8° Brix, then twice daily back to once daily
Oak Program	100% French, 25 to 40 % new	100% French oak, 60% new	100% French oak, 75 % new
Barrel Aging	20 months	24 months	19 months
Racking	4 rackings	4 rackings or as needed	3 times: after ml, for blend, for bottling
Filtration	None	Cross-flow prior to bottling	Unfiltered
Bottle Age	6 to 12 months	8 months	9 months

Justin Vineyards & Winery

2009 Isosceles 15.5% Alc. \$62

94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Cabernet Franc, 3% Merlot

Fred Holloway is vice president, director of production and winemaking for Justin Vineyards & Winery. He received his enology degree from **Fresno State University** and worked in everything from boutique wineries to some of the largest in the state. He collaborated to produce the **Artisan** series for **Jess Jackson** before returning to the Central Coast in 1999 as winemaker for **Cambria Estate Winery**. He moved to Justin in June of 2003.



VP, director of production and winemaking Fred Holloway

According to Holloway:

“Isosceles is fashioned after red blends in the Medoc area of Bordeaux. We want the wine to represent what Paso Robles offers by generating a wine that drinks well upon release but will continue to improve with proper cellaring.

“Our vineyards have calcareous soil with northeast/southeast row orientation. Vines are planted to 8x4 feet spacing at elevations around 900 feet. We use a wide variety of clones, different rootstocks, along with own-rooted vines, an array of farming methods, from sustainable to organic to biodynamic, and will both irrigate and dry-farm. Our theory in the vineyard is to farm each vine. If a plant needs help, then we give it. Each year is different. Some years we green drop, some we will red drop.

“During harvest, I walk the vineyards to taste the fruit and determine picking dates. Regular sampling and analysis provide TA, pH and sugars, but all picking decisions are based on taste. Fruit in Paso Robles is long to ripen, so we usually get brown seeds along with dark skins and soft tannins. Grapes are harvested and then stored in a cold room for 24 hours at 58° F. We destem without crushing and berry-sort on an oscillating table. We add 45 ppm SO₂ at the destemmer.

“We inoculate with D 254 and Uvaferm 43 and ferment in a variety of tanks, including cement, open-top and closed-top tanks. We pneumotage with a Pulsair system, or pump-over twice a day with sprinklers or hoses. Fermentation peaks at 85° F to 88° F. Fermentations will last 10 to 12 days, and we usually leave the wine on the skins for a total of 21 days. We separate free run and press fractions before inoculating with malolactic bacteria and going to barrel, where we use 45 percent new French oak. Malolactic is carried out in heated rooms. We top barrels every two weeks and stir the lees. After malolactic, we top and stir monthly. We make our blends the following April or May and rack to 100 percent new French oak, topping monthly. The wine barrel ages for 24 months. It is bottled without filtering and receives five months bottle aging before release.”

Tasting Notes

Holloway: This 2009 is very expressive with great spice characteristics. There is some smoke with a coffee note. Paso has rich, full wines with enough acid to be food-friendly. There are no tricks going on here. The wine is dry, rich, round and full with spiced elegance from the Cab Franc and a bit of cherry from the Merlot and some spiced elegance from 100 percent new French oak.

Asseo: The color has evolved a bit. The nose is ripe and oaky with leather and camphor. There is a bit of sweetness for me, but in the end there is still enough acidity. It is a sexy, delicate wine that is easy to approach.

Nicolas: This is a very elegant wine. In the nose I get some cocoa from the generous wood. The mid-palate is really rich and very expressive of the Left Bank of Bordeaux. The wine is greatly balanced with acidity. There is a bit of astringent tannin that contributes to a great finish. It is really great wine and should age beautifully.

Howell: It is medium-dark and showing some evolution with a yellow rim to it. There is clove and cinnamon in the nose and maybe some camphor. It's sweet but oaky as well with some bitterness. It's easy flowing wine, finishing with some bitter drying notes and a bit warm.

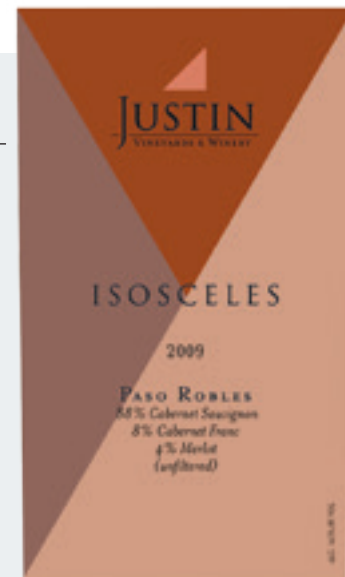
Tebb: The tannins are ripe, round and juicy. I get some raisin, some Amarone involvement. The spice of the oak seems to outweigh the spice of the fruit. It has classic Central Coast characteristics, a sort of confectioner's sugar flavor. It's rich and supple but lacks some depth.

Janzen: I pick up a lot of barrel influence as well. There is almost a fruit cake characteristic of fruit and baking spice. There is good fruit on entry, some impact there, but it is a little disjointed between the front end and the finish. Overall it is nice wine.

Camarda: This wine has a bit more going for it than the RN Estate, but again it shows that sweetness that for me is not something I care for. These Paso wines seem sweeter than all of the Napa wines.

Naravane: This is very ripe and jammy, almost pruney. It finishes a bit sweet. It is very big. The alcohol is just massive. It is not my style of wine, but I would expect it is hugely popular.

Orr: There is sweet, ripe fruit here with some interesting beefy character. I get cherry with some cocoa. It is oaky, but the oak is integrated.



RN Estate Vineyard

2009 Cuvée des Trois Cépages 14.3% Alc. \$55

67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 16% Merlot

Roger Nicolas grew up in Brittany, France. He landed in New York City at the age of 20 and worked in some of the most prestigious restaurants in the United States, including **La Grenouille** in New York City, **The Lodge** at Pebble Beach and **L'Etoile** in San Francisco. He ran his own restaurants, **La Potiniere** and the **Home Hill Country Inn**, in New Hampshire. A passionate wine lover, he decided to leave the restaurant business for the wine business. He found land in Paso Robles and released his first RN Estate Vineyard wine in 2005.

According to Nicolas:

"I am trying to produce a red Bordeaux-style blend with the finesse and elegance of the Left Bank in the Haut Medoc area. I look for full rounded tannins and insist my wines go well with food. My vineyards are planted on sandy, clay loam with good drainage at about 1,000 feet. I have a west-facing exposure with terraced rows and 9x6 foot spacing for the vines. This wine uses clone 337 for Cabernet Sauvignon, clone 4 for the Cabernet Franc and clone 3 Merlot.

"Crop size varies on vintage. Because I want balanced, food-friendly wines, I start in the vineyard by focusing on the balance of canopy to fruit. I like to pull leaves on the cooler side, allow the warmer side some sprawl, and I adjust the catch wires during extreme temperatures. I watch weather closely and will water before a heat wave.

"Although I do analysis, picking is decided by taste and looking at the vines. I want the skins to lose astringency. I like brown seeds that crunch when you bite them, and I like to see some yellowing of the leaves. We pick early in the morning into half-ton bins, sorting as we go by leaving those vines that are behind or not looking right. At the winery, we destem and then sort again to remove raisins and shot berries. I add the seeds back into the must along with 20 to 50 ppm SO₂.

"We usually cold soak three to four days before inoculating with D 254 yeast. All fermentations occur in 1 ½ ton bins. We punch-down two times a day, increasing to three to five times daily during peak fermentation when temperatures range between 82° F to 90° F. Fermentations last 12 to 14 days. We press in a basket press, leaving the seeds out of the mix. We blend free run and press juice together. I find the lightest, most delicate juice comes toward the end of pressing. We press directly to barrel for native malolactic. I use 100 percent French oak with 40 percent new. We top every two to three months; and when malolactic is finished, we add 40 to 50 ppm SO₂. The wine ages 20 months in barrel with one racking at blending time and another to bottle. The wine is unfinned and unfiltered and receives three to nine months bottle age before release."



Tasting Notes

Nicolas: *I am satisfied with the color. It is the color of a Bordeaux wine. In the nose it is still young. I get a licorice perfume from the Cab Franc. There is some cassis, which I look for. The wine tastes strong, but it is solid in the mid-palate with a lengthy finish and good acidity. This is not overly extracted. I try to keep it as delicate as possible. It should go for another seven years.*

Asseo: *I don't like the nose. There is some metallic sense there, but I very much like the wine. It is more commercial. It is kind of elegant but not full-bodied. It is medium bodied, but the wine is very well-balanced between fruit and oak. The oak brings complexity, but the wine is still dominated by fruit. It is not a blockbuster, but it is good to drink.*

Holloway: *I find a real elegance to the wine with good acid structure and a lot of sweet characteristics, which give it a nice, round carry with a lot of spice and elegance. I think the spiciness comes from the Cab Franc, the soft, sweetness from Merlot, and the good structure comes from the Cabernet Sauvignon.*

Orr: *I get sweet, ripe fruit, kind of a cherry lozenge, with more cooked fruit. It is a bit hot with nice acidity, and I like the finish. It seems clean and has some of that lift that I look for. It is pretty wine.*

Camarda: *It is a really modern kind of wine. It is sweet with undifferentiated fruit character that is overpowered by the sense of sweetness that the wine has. I don't care for this.*

Naravane: *Stylistically, I don't prefer the wine. What I like about it is that I can clearly taste the various elements and grape varieties. It is a very, very ripe style of wine. I think there is some residual sugar, which I don't like in reds at all, but I think there is a market for wines like this. To me, this in no way resembles Bordeaux.*

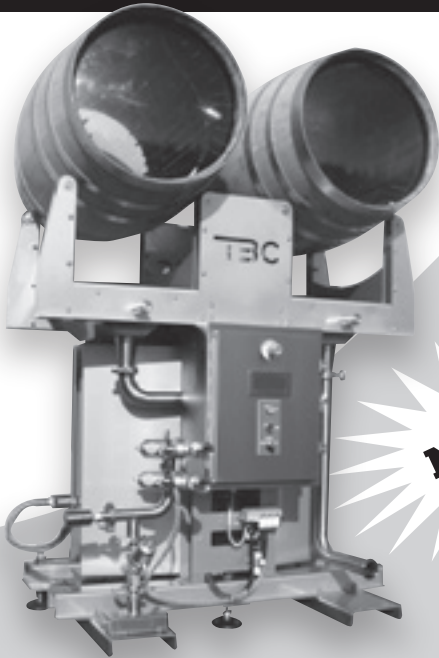
Janzen: *This is similar to the Isosceles. It is lighter texturally without any bitter or sour elements. It is nice, mild, elegantly styled wine.*

Howell: *Visually, you can see that this is shockingly light in the context of the other wines. It leads you to believe that the wine is slightly dilute. It has easy entry, maybe a little flat, lacking in acid.*

Tebb: *The barrels here are more successfully integrated into the fruit than the Justin. There is a bit of herbal component to this one, a kind of tomato and flower. It is light-bodied and kind of simple, but I don't see any flaws.*



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Andrew Will Winery

2009 Two Blondes Vineyard Red Wine 14.5% Alc. \$52

38% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Cabernet Franc, 31% Merlot

Chris Camarda, the owner and winemaker of Andrew Will Winery, grew up in Seattle and went to the **University of Washington**. After nearly 20 years in the restaurant business, he started the winery in 1989, naming it after his son Will and nephew Andrew. He started with single varietals but became convinced that blended varietals best expressed what Washington had to offer. Named one of the 50 most influential winemakers in the world by *Wine & Spirits Magazine*, he says, “There aren’t any great regions without great vineyards.”

According to Camarda:

“My goal is to expose the vineyard. Balance is the main idea, so I try to avoid the homogenous style of high alcohol and wood. The Two Blondes Vineyard



Owner and winemaker Chris Camarda

sits at 1,100 feet with a southwest facing. The soil is silky, shallow loam over Caliche sedimentary rock. All of the vines are own-rooted and planted to 3x6 foot spacing. Our Cabernet is mostly clone 191 with some clone 4. Merlot is 181 with some 248.

“We have worked hard with compost where needed in the vineyard to help the soil, but irrigation is still mandatory. We now use a micro-mist system. I’m not

a big fan of making my vines suffer, so we aim for moderate growth and crop, about 3.5 tons per acre. We found cane pruning led to uneven growth, so we have switched to cordon. Two Blondes is sustainably farmed. We shoot-thin in summer, trying to keep 4 inches between shoots. We bunch-thin when necessary. We test for pH and TA and taste regularly, but we know the history of the vineyard quite well, and that informs the picking decision.

“The grapes are picked early and then trucked overnight to our winery on Vashon Island, usually arriving at temperatures in the 60° F to 63° F range. We destem and sort only, relying on the pump to do some minimal crushing, and we add 60 ppm SO₂. Fermentations are carried out by indigenous yeast and take two to three days to get started. The wine ferments in 900- to 3,000-gallon tanks. We use a **Pulsair** machine to pneumatage the must by injecting air into the tank and creating a sort of volcanic mixing of the cap. Maximum fermentation temperature is 86° F.

“We usually press at dryness, separating the free run and press fractions. Press juice is usually fully developed but not as fat as free run. We go through natural malolactic in barrel. Our barrels are 100 percent French oak with 25 to 40 percent new. We age for 20 months and rack four times over that time period. Wine is bottled without filtration and receives six months to one year of bottle age before release.”

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Tasting Notes

Camarda: The aromatics are always the best on Two Blondes, especially when it is young. It has a lot of complexity with that herbal and savory quality that adds to almost cassis-like overtones in the fruit. It is very soft, especially in the middle. It is medium-bodied with full flavor, but structurally they are not huge. That is not the virtue of this vineyard. The virtue is in the balance and complexity that the fruit offers.

Naravane: I like the wine quite a bit. It has a really nice structure, and the fruit is not over-ripe. I also get cassis notes with hints of blackberry. It has great refreshing acidity that cleanses the palate. There is a touch of VA that only adds to the complexity. It is well-balanced, almost Old World Bordeaux in style.

Orr: The nose has pretty black cherry and blackberries along with floral qualities. I love the savory aspect of black olives and leather. It has fresh acidity. It is soft, elegant wine.

Howell: This wine is beautifully integrated. It is not a big wine. It is not massively extracted. There is a bit of evolution to the color. The tannins are surprisingly soft. It is not a heavy wine. It is nicely balanced and finishes with fruit sweetness. I'm usually not generous to Washington state wines, but I like it.

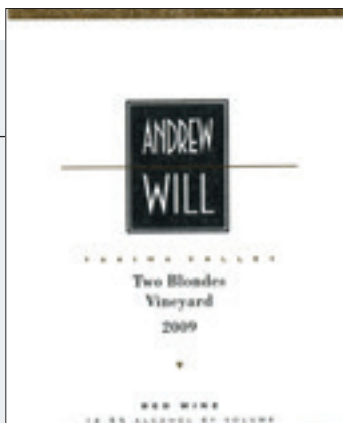
Tebb: I like it as well. Everything is integrated between the oak and the fruit, like a pleasant bottle of red Bordeaux. There is some sweet plum and currant along with some dill and dried fruit. The overall palate structure is a bit simple, with lighter body but with acid present. For its age, it seems a bit tired. I would expect it to be more vibrant.

Janzen: Initially, aromatically I got some ocean character and dill as well. In the palate, I thought it was exceptionally well-balanced. There were nice elements of fruit that were fully integrated with the other parts of the wine. I could finish a bottle of that.

Asseo: I'm not crazy about the nose. For me, there is smell of the ocean at low tide. In the mouth I like the balance of the wine. It is not very powerful, but everything is well-integrated. I am very impressed by the finish, which is very, very long. It is nice. You don't finish with tannin. You finish with fruit.

Nicolas: Very interesting with a delicate nose of dark berries. I like the acidity very much and find the wine subtle and elegant. I like it very much and think it will age beautifully.

Holloway: For a 2009 it seems a bit old. I get more black licorice. It has an elegant nose, but it is also kind of funky. It is rich and full with some drying tannins.



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Baer Winery

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**42% Merlot, 41% Cabernet Franc, 10% Malbec,
7% Cabernet Sauvignon**

Erica Orr is the winemaker at Baer Winery. She has a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from **UC Berkeley** and a master's degree in enology from UC Davis. She has worked in California, France and Australia at prestigious wineries like **Corison, Cain, Rudd, Yering Station** and **Domaine Dujac**. Current consulting clients include **Mark Ryan Winery, Guardian Cellars, Sparkman Cellars** and **William Church Winery**.

According to Orr:

“Our goal is to craft a wine that is delicious, appealing and well-balanced. I look for fresh fruit quality of cherry and berries as well as a savory character of culinary herbs. We want a wine that is integrated with the barrel and broad in the mouth with appropriate structure. We want the finish to be mouth-watering and silky.

“All of the grapes in Ursa come from **Stillwater Creek Vineyard** in Royal City, Washington. Vines are planted in 8x5 spacing in fine, sandy loam over fractured rock. It has a southern exposure and 1,400 to 1,500 feet elevation. Merlot clones are 348 and 3, Cabernet Franc is clone 1, Cabernet Sauvignon clone 2 and 6, Malbec is clone 4. All of the vines are own-rooted, and the vineyard is traditionally, sustainably farmed and deemed ‘salmon-safe.’ We shoot-position, remove laterals and cluster-thin, ending with 2 to 4 tons per acre, depending on variety and vintage. We work closely with the grower to determine when to pick. I taste berry samples throughout the season, but basically we base the picking decision on the absence of unripe flavors, and we keep a careful eye on the weather. We have a long history of data to compare to, and we test for Brix, TA and pH. Grapes get picked early in the day, are delivered to the winery and stored overnight at cellar temperature.

“We pick day one and crush day two when we destem directly to open-top bins for fermentation. We add 40 ppm SO₂ at the crusher. In the morning of the third day I run a juice panel, and we inoculate with D 254 (and some D 80 or D 21) and make any necessary acid adjustments in the afternoon. We almost always have to use supplements due to low nitrogen, so we correct to 250 mg/L YAN. We use punch-downs exclusively for the cap management: once a day until a cap forms, twice a day down to about 14° Brix, three times a day down to 8° Brix, then two times a day until we hit zero or negative Brix. After that, we’ll punch-down once a day just to keep the cap wet until pressing. We like to ferment Cabernet Sauvignon and Cab Franc between 88° F to 90° F while we let Merlot climb to the mid-90s. During fermentation, we deliver medical grade air through a sparging stone to stimulate the yeast.

“I like to keep the wine on the skins until Brix goes negative. We will press to tank, keeping free run and press juice separate. We settle overnight and then rack off gross lees into barrel. When wine is completely dry (0.2), we inoculate for malolactic with CH-16. After ML, we’ll add sulfur in barrel. Baer uses 100 percent French oak barrels, and this Ursa had 75 percent new oak. The wine spent 19 months in barrel and was racked three times over that time. The wine is bottled unfiltered and gets about nine months of bottle age before release.”



Winemaker Erica Orr

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Tasting Notes



Orr: There are aromatics of a mix of fresh fruit, not cooked or jammy, but fresh. There is black cherry, plum, violets and some cocoa with a savory quality of thyme or sage, which is a trademark of Ursa. There is a lot of structure that I think is appropriate. The finish is "lifted," which means the aftertaste is refreshing and mouth-watering.

Camarda: It has a compressed fruit quality with a dense middle. It is very interesting wine, and I like the mouth-feel a lot. Right now, it is a bit abrupt at the end, but that should resolve itself with some time. Nice, fun wine.

Naravane: In the aromatics I get that beautiful, violet floral character. The palate has a lovely, ripe texture full of black plum that is very fruit-forward in style for me. There is a lot of vanilla with savory oak on the back. The finish drops off a little bit, but there is a hint of bitterness in the aftertaste.

Tebb: I get rich aromatic elements with more rock, wet slate and a hint of gamey complexity on a good level. There is both black and red fruit. It is really chewy with complex tannins and full-bodied. I like the wine. It has a deep, ripe core.

Janzen: It is very giving aromatically. There are elements of fruit along with baking spices, like cinnamon and things of that nature. It is well-balanced although not as balanced as the Andrew Will.

Howell: The wine is very dark. It has a sweet entry with slightly hard tannins that give a shorter finish. It's a monolithic wine.

Asseo: I love the nose. It is vibrant with spice but not too much. The attack is very elegant, and I love the texture. It is complex and very silky, but it is missing a bit of flesh in the mouth. Everything else is beautiful, but I think a bit more volume would make it great.

Nicolas: I like the weight of the wine. The nose shows a lot of oak, but the mid-palate is very lean so I see this as a food wine. I like it. It is not as rich as the Rasa. It reminds me of the Right Bank of Bordeaux. It has nice balance and good acidity and should be a beautiful food wine.

Holloway: To me this is very forward with the Cab Franc which gives it spice. I think some of the softness and elegance comes from the Merlot. It is very approachable for a 2010. There is a lot of spice in the nose, but it is not supported in the mid-palate. It might get some more depth and density with some more age but seems a bit disjointed at this point.

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Rasa Vineyards

2009 Rasa Vineyards In Order to Form a More Perfect Union 15.2% Alc. \$95

41% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 23% Cabernet Franc

Billo Naravane and his brother Pinto formed Rasa Vineyards in 2007. Avid wine collectors and oenophiles, they had spent close to 20 years in the lucrative computer industry, satisfying family expectations. Pinto serves as managing partner while Billo acts as winemaker. Billo finished his M.S. in viticulture and enology at UC Davis in 2008 and is currently an adjunct professor of viticulture at **Washington State University**.

According to Naravane:

“We are after an elegant, complex style that, in the context of vintage, emphasizes structural elements over ripeness of fruit. We are French-centric in our tastes, especially when it comes to structure. We will plant our first 5 acres this year but currently source all of our fruit. We traveled all over Washington, tasting wines made from various vineyards, and we selected four different vineyards to use for this Bordeaux blend because each offered some special quality. All of the vineyards are farmed traditionally and sustainably, with vines planted to their own rootstocks. There are various clones, soil types and elevations, but most of the vines are planted to 6x9 foot or 6x8 foot spacing.

“We determine when to pick by taste. We are looking for changes in the tannic character and browning of the seeds. We watch the TA. When we are close, we pick berry samples, crush them and taste the juice and do analysis. We try to pick in the morning and receive the grapes on the same day. We use some whole cluster, up to 15 percent. We do aggressive sorting, destem and lightly crush the grapes, usually ending up with about 20 percent whole berry. We add 25 to 35 ppm SO₂.

“We cold soak at 55° F for five to nine days, depending on variety, tasting the must regularly looking for problems. We prefer native yeast fermentations; but if we need to, we will aggressively inoculate, usually with D 254 or RP 15. We'll make occasional acid additions, as needed, along with nutrient additions. We punch-down twice daily during cold soak and three times daily during active fermentation. Maximum temperatures for Cab Franc and Syrah are 75° F to 77° F, Merlot is 80° F to 82° F, and Cabernet Sauvignon can go up to 85° F. We try to retain aromatics while building mouth-feel and balance.

“We press according to tannin levels, which we judge by taste. We look for soft tannins and will sometimes press as high as 9° Brix. Other times we will go completely dry and through some extended maceration. We combine free run and press but only go to one bar when pressing. Wine settles overnight in tank and then goes to barrel to finish primary fermentation. When dry, we will inoculate for malolactic in barrel. We use 100 percent French oak with 20 to 60 percent new, but percentages of new oak vary according to varietal.



Winemaker Billo Naravane

“This wine was aged 28 months, and we taste every month. Some barrels are racked while others are not, but on average the wine is racked four times. We taste all of the lots individually and then blend three different times, refining the blend each time until we finish with what we want. The wine is cross-flow filtered before bottling and receives eight months of bottle-aging before release.”



Tasting Notes

Naravane: I get a nice, fruity core of cassis and black cherry. There is a bit of leafy herbaceousness, kind of a minty note on the finish of the wine, which to me is a hallmark of cool-climate Cabernet. The wine has great structure with seductive tannins. There is a fair amount of tannin, but it gives a silky mouth-feel. The oak is well-integrated into the wine. It doesn't jump out at me, but I know that it is there. I get a bit of espresso, dark chocolate on the back of the wine. The finish lingers nicely.

Orr: There is sweet smelling, ripe fruit on the nose with black raspberry, plum and cherry along with a savory note. The wine is powerful and concentrated. There are some tannins, but the wine is well-balanced. The feeling in the mouth is plush with a smooth and silky finish.

Camarda: It is a four-square structure kind of wine. The fruit qualities are a little bit recessive, but there and pure. It's a wine I'd like to look at in a few more years. It has medium body with lots of fruit. While it is accessible now, it should become more complex over time.

Janzen: I really enjoy the nose of this wine. There is a lot going on, a lot of different elements, but all working together. There are hints of vegetable but sweetness as well. It flows very well. Texturally, it is a bit lighter than the Baer, but flavor-wise it is balanced with good acidity.

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Howell: *This has medium density and is not as evolved as the Andrew Will in color, but it is a very pretty ruby shade. It has a sweet, easy flow that is nicely balanced. This wine shows a beautiful use of the barrel. The barrel is showing but in a nice way. The finish is more on the barrel than the fruit, but it is an even-keeled wine. I find it good but not particularly interesting.*

Tebb: *There is a heavy oak element that backs up some of the aromatic character of blackberry and blueberry fruit. There is a sweet complexity. The wine is opulent on the palate, velvety, concentrated and long. There is a laser beam focus with an amazing complexity on the palate that slowly builds and builds. There are some dry tannins in the middle that could be an issue later on.*

Holloway: *This shows off more fruit character to me with blueberries and a bit of soda effervescence, not CO₂ but a brightness to the nose. The play on Cab Franc provides spice without being green. It carries good weight with a nice mid-palate and good finish.*

Asseo: *The nose is a bit closed, but there is nice maceration, but it is not too expressive. In the mouth, it keeps coming and coming and coming. Right now it is a bit reserved, but I think you have a bigger potential for this wine with time. It is elegant and balanced with minerality in the mouth. I think it will have the longest longevity of this flight.*

Nicolas: *I think this is a beautiful blend that almost combines characteristics of Napa and Paso. I get nice blueberry and darker berries in the nose. It is full and well-balanced with good acidity. I think this is going to be a great wine. I like the leanness. It is dark but elegant, not pasty in the mouth. I like this clean finish.*

Summary

Previous Varietal Focus articles have focused on a single varietal. Foremost in the discussions was how terroir influenced winemaking decisions and how stylistic decisions about winemaking affected vineyard practices. Winemakers used a variety of methods in their vineyards to coax the best possible fruit to fit their particular winemaking style. They also used varying techniques in the winery to produce the exact style of wine they desired.

With each additional Varietal Focus, it is becoming clearer that winemakers make exactly the wine they want to make. They search out the type of geology and climate that they think gives them the best chance to produce that wine. They select rootstocks and clones that help control yields and flavors. They have the technical savvy in the winery to overcome most vintage obstacles, and they adapt their aging, filtering and bottling regimens to attain their goals.

This study of red wine blends has exposed some interesting elements and brought into focus how important style decisions are. Given the ability to select whatever varieties from whichever vineyards they like, winemakers are all over the map. Whether blending grapes from a single vineyard or constructing a wine using fruit from multiple sites, winemakers have a clear picture of the wine they intend to make, and invariably they succeed in making it.

The ability to produce wines in Paso Robles that exhibit fully ripe flavors, an unctuous sweetness in the mouth and soft subtle tannins thrills the winemakers in that region. It defines who they are, what the region produces and the style of wine they like. Yet those very attributes are what winemakers in other regions don't like. They find the fruit too ripe, the alcohol too high and the wines too sweet.

While styles among winemakers may vary, in both Washington state and the Napa Valley, the wines are a bit less ripe, with slightly lower alcohols and more tannic grip. These winemakers delight in the interplay between complex fruit flavors and the weight and structure of the tannins. Winemakers from Paso Robles often find the tannins in these wines too astringent and feel it is unnecessary to wait for them to soften.

More than making a single varietal, which often entails paying respect to historical models, red wine blends allow winemakers to joyfully tinker with multiple elements to produce something unique, something exclusively their own. Try as they might to produce inimitable wine, factors like terroir, tasting experience and local style have a tremendous influence on winemakers. It may be that the personal taste preferences of winemakers are as important as terroir or winemaking technique in determining the style of the finished wine. [WBM](#)

