

2002 Dashe Cellars Potter Valley Merlot

HISTORY

If ever a California vineyard could produce Merlot that had the floral aromatics, the wonderful intensity and density, and the velvety texture of a wine made in, say, Pomerol or St. Emilion, the Iron Oak vineyard in Potter Valley is just that vineyard. Our 2002 Merlot from Iron Oak vineyard has solidified our belief that this is one of the best Merlot vineyards in the region. We believe that the quality of the red-rock soil, the elevation of the vineyard (which is high in the mountains of Mendocino county where Potter Valley is located), and the expertise of Bill Domenichelli, a great grape-grower, all work to make an superb Merlot.

The quality of the wine is all the more surprising to us because we are not big fans of California Merlots. But when we saw the quality of the grapes on these vines, and tasted the complexity and intensity of the fruit, we couldn't refuse to make this wine. The vines are just beautiful: perfectly manicured rows of vines sporting a small crop of tiny, jet-black grapes. We agreed to make the wine when I saw that the crop levels were pruned to tiny levels—between 2 and 3 tons per acre—just to ensure the quality of the grapes. When I tasted the berries, I knew that they could make a merlot that was more reminiscent of the elegant wines I tasted in Bordeaux than a typical California merlot. And since Anne had made merlot-based wines in St. Emilion it was the perfect opportunity to show off her winemaking skills.

PRODUCTION

We fermented the wine in small vats, pumping the wine over the skins twice a day to extract flavor and color. The fermentation was conducted using a Bordeaux yeast strain specifically designed to increase complexity and intensity of merlot grapes. We aged the wine in French oak barrels, and maintained the use of new oak at about 20 percent. During our blending trials we decided to add 10 percent of Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon to add structure, tannin, and a note of chocolate and coffee to the nose. The wine is unfinned and received minimal handling on its way to the bottle.

The wine with its velvety complexity complements a wide range of foods. The nose is perfumed with black cherry, chocolate, vanilla, lavender, and a hint of French oak. In the mouth, the fruit contains classic elements of black cherry, cassis, chocolate, and vanilla. The texture of the wine is simply seductive, with the intensity of the fruit balanced by a velvety, luscious mid-palate. The balance of the wine is ideal, with a lovely firm acidity balancing the sweetness of the fruit, and a long, elegant finish of fruit and sweet chalky tannins. The flavors last for minutes after swallowing, showing the complexity and structure of a great food wine. This merlot should improve for at least eight years and will last for many years after.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Varietals: 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon

Appellation: Potter Valley
Mendocino County

Alcohol: 14.3 % by vol.

Time in oak: 14 months

Oak: 100% French; 18% new

Production: 550 cases, 750mL

Release date: February 1, 2005

Suggested retail price: \$26.00 bottle

Optimum time for consumption: 2005-2016

TASTING NOTES

Aromas: Lavender, black cherries, raspberries, chocolate, spice and dried herbs, vanilla.

Taste: Wonderfully complex and balanced fruit, raspberries, cherries, plums, with firm acidity, notes of earth and herbs of Provence spice, sweet velvety midpalette of chocolate and vanilla, finishing with long, sweet, complex cherry kirsh fruit.