

2003 Dashe Cellars

Big River Vineyard Zinfandel

HISTORY

We don't know why the zinfandel vines at the Big River Ranch—just a few miles south-east of the town of Healdsburg—produce such inky-black, concentrated wines, but we certainly recognized from the start that this vineyard was sure to produce one of our very best zinfandels. These head-trained vines on the rocky, red, steep slopes consistently produce a huge wine: thick, flavorful, and seductively rich. By combining this zinfandel with a small amount of petite syrah from vines on the same ranch, we were able to create a small amount of a wine that we feel is one of our most stylish and balanced, as well as mouth-filling, creations.

PRODUCTION

The vintage of 2003 was one of the warmest on record, which pushed the ripeness of the grapes to produce a very fruit-forward, lush, thick wine which exhibits the classic blackberry and chocolate flavors that are characteristic of Alexander Valley zinfandel. We harvested the grapes in late September, trucking the grapes to the winery in ½ ton picking bins, and then sorting the grapes on a conveyor belt on the way to the crusher. The crushed grapes were then fermented in small stainless-steel tanks using only the natural yeast population on the surface of the grapes (rather than commercial dried yeasts) to conduct the fermentation. Our tanks are outfitted with custom-made stainless-steel grids that hold the grape skins below the surface of the fermenting juice, to extract maximum flavor, color, and complexity from the grapes.

During fermentation we pump the fermenting juice twice a day over the cap of skins, to assist in the extraction of flavor components. The temperature was allowed to get quite warm—above 90° F—to aid in the extraction of color and flavor. At dryness, the wine was gently pressed in a membrane press and pumped to traditional 60-gallon oak barrels.

The wine was aged for 12 months in French oak barrels, with about 20% of the wine aged in new French oak. Every three months we racked the wine out of barrel to clarify the wine and aid in its development. As the wine aged, it deepened in color and developed a complexity and firm structure that we believe will help the wine improve with up to eight years of bottle age.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Varietals: 98% Zinfandel, 2% Petite Syrah
Appellation: Alexander Valley
Sonoma County
Alcohol: 14.8% by vol.
Time in oak: 12 months
Oak: French; 20% new

Production: 361 cases, 750mL
Release date: September 1, 2005
Sugg. retail price: \$28.00 bottle, 750mL

Optimum time for consumption: 2006-2012

TASTING NOTES

Color: Purple black
Aroma: Chocolate and coffee, blackberry jam, clove and licorice, lavender and violets.
Taste: A blast of sweet blackberry fruit mixed with chocolate, clove and pepper spice, with a velvety texture. Very full-bodied with round chalky tannins, long sweet finish of blackberry and chocolate.