

TOR

ROCK Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain, 2004

Vineyards – 95% Cimarossa – 5% Mast Vineyard

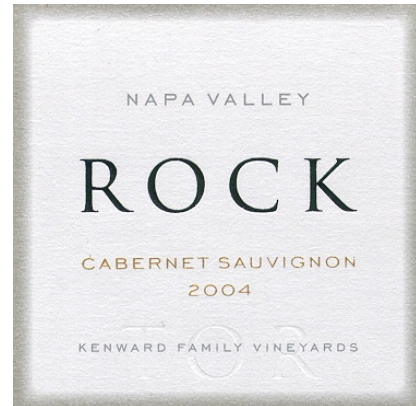
I have four photos of the Cimarossa Vineyard above my desk. In one the vineyard is blanketed in green spring grass. In another it shimmers in post harvest gold, red, and yellow leaves, the colors intensified by crisp bright azure sky. The third photo might as well be a Japanese print with its fog, gnarly black terraced vines, and darker shadows. There are no leaves on the vines. It is Winter. The last photo is also winter, but the vineyard is covered in snow – and everything around it is white, everything but the higher branches of the pines surrounding the vineyard.

Cimarossa is at 2,100 feet above the valley floor and had close to a foot of snow early 2006. Mast Vineyard is only a few hundred feet above sea level and snow turned to rain before it reached the vines. Soils, climates, facings, everything about these two vineyards is different but their broader appellation, Napa Valley. And the fact there are a lot of rocks and stones in both vineyards. Yet together they can sing, and they did in 2004. In fact is the best wine in 2004 maybe this blend. I'm not sure, but....

It is my first blend and considering TOR wines have always been single vineyard wines up to now, it went under the ROCK brand for 2004. In the future, ALL Cabernet Sauvignons (and Chardonnays) will be TOR wines. ALL Syrah will be ROCK. Sorry for the confusion in 2004. Won't happen again. So enjoy what should be the first and last ROCK Cabernet Sauvignon.

Vintage

Small crop. Dry spring, even growing season, and then September heat spikes. The latter produced challenges for all of us, but patience, experience, instincts, I feel produced superb wines. Some great. Yes, they are concentrated, but not like 2001 and 2002 – different, rounder than 2003 – fleshy and sexy...not Ruenesk, more stealth. Streamlined. We waited several weeks after the heat blast in September, and actually watched the sugars spike, then drop and hold. During this drop and hold, the flavors of the grapes started to come together, round out, and mature, with the seeds and stems. The latter were brown and mature when we harvested the grapes on October 28 and 30th.



"The superb 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain possesses a dark ruby/purple hue as well as graphite, blueberry, and cassis characteristics. Medium to full-bodied, with luscious fruit, fine opulence, sweetness, flamboyance, and a front-end loaded character, it will evolve for 10-15 years."

Rating 92-94

**By Robert M. Parker, Jr.
The Wine Advocate**

T O R

Winemaking

We made the 2004 Cimarossa very similar to the Mast, except for French oak coopers. The Cimarossa has more mountain structure and tannin, which seems to fit like a glove into 100 % Taransaud Chateau barrels. What do they say about real estate? Location, location, location, and it is true when it comes to great wines. They come from very special pieces of expensive land. When discussing winemaking my mantra echoes – minimal, minimal, minimal. In other words stay out of the way of the wine when you have extraordinary grapes. We crush early morning so the grapes are still cool. We let them sit on the stems for several days till the natural yeast starts fermentation. We monitor temperatures to maximize extraction, then rack into the best French oak barrels we can buy. Then we leave the wine alone. Our favorite French coopers for Mast are Taransaud, Quintessance, and Bel Air. Minimal, Minimal, Minimal.

The Wine/Tasting Notes

Candidly, this wine was more work than the Mast. Winemaker, Jeff Ames and I tasted this wine several times a month its first year in barrel feeling it was not complete on itself. Every year we consider blending Petite Verdot or Cabernet Franc, and only in 2002 did we select 4% Petite Verdot with the Clone 4 bottling. Since then all Cabernet made the best wine, and again in 2004 none of the “blenders” improved the Cimarossa. We were stumped until we tried various trials with percentages of Mast Cabernet. The magic number was 4% Mast 96% Cimarossa. Cimarossa at its best has a fascinating graphite note on the nose and palate. One doesn’t usually associate a minerality with California Cabernet, but this vineyard brings it on, and I love it. This blend holds preciously to this graphite note. The Mast added flesh in the middle that the wine needed, and a little of that Margeaux perfume Robert Parker found in 2004 Mast. Together they make a seductive wine, not as big as the Mast by itself, but a wine that may have more layers. Cassis (really), coffee, and a little chocolate. Decant for at least an hour before enjoying, for there is still some mountain edge to the fruit. When stuff like this comes together, it makes winemaking one of life’s greater joys. Bottled, 380 cases