

T O R

ROCK Syrah Napa Valley 2004

Vineyard

In the late 1990s, I was inspired by several Syrahs grown on the slopes of Mt. Veeder in Napa Valley. Personally, I am an advocate of cooler terroir and sparse, restrictive soil for growing high quality Syrahs. Mt. Veeder has both.

In 2004 we worked with two Mt. Veeder vineyards. One was at the top of Wall Road on a high ridge overlooking the San Francisco Bay. We picked the top three rows of "Bald Mountain Vineyard" planted to Clone #1. The other, Syrah Noir Clone, was further south and mid-mountain, yet very steep and rockier, the soils tufa or volcanic ash based. Both vineyards were restrictive, yet very different from each other. The yields averaged three tons, each block farmed for balance and optimum ripeness. The altitude of these vineyard blocks helped mitigate the warm vintage in 2004.

Vintage

If 2004 is remembered for one defining characteristic, it would be the heat spell mid-September. Most vineyards in warmer areas were ready to pick, those in cooler areas were close. Three factors saved the harvest and in many cases made an excellent vintage: The right crop load, patience and the correct amount of drip irrigation, preventing too much dehydration. If all three were not in place, growers picked before flavor maturity matched sugars. Holding on through the heat into the cooling trend allowed the flavors to catch up and gave us wonderful flavors, verve, and personality.

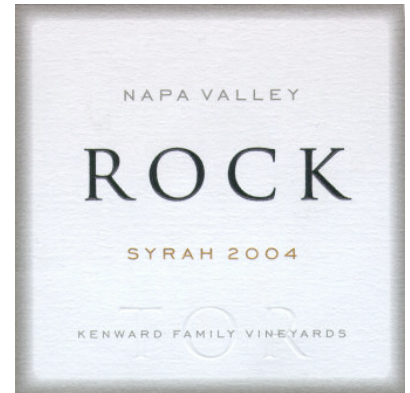
Winemaking

Our first and primary decision is to partner with vineyards that promote small crops, great color, and fruit extraction. As with all our wines, we pick first light and the grapes are at the winery early to mid morning. Syrah is a lot of work. It requires grape sorting to remove excess dehydrated grapes and an experienced winemaker to determine stem retention percentages. Each specific vineyard and vintage dictates what percentage of clusters we choose to ferment with stems. Given that we have only one vintage or crush a year, we try two or three combinations from zero to 100% whole cluster and bottle only our favorite.

After fermentation, the wine is pressed direct to small French Burgundy barrels. I'm not at the point where I think 100% new barrels make the best wine. This wine was aged 21 months in small French oak barrels before bottling. Primary and secondary fermentations are both "wild", or completed using what micro-flora is naturally promoted on each vineyard site.

The Wine

Unlike any Syrah we've produced to-date, black and blue fruits dominate the nose. There is much less savage, leather, and wilder notes and more fruit based with some licorice and chocolate. Very dark, glass staining color. On the palate it is a bit of a roller-coaster ride. Big fruit based entry, firm tannins that give way to fruit, going back and forth, giving the wine a very long "finish". How will it age? My sense is that it has legs and will get even better the next five years.



"...aromas of bacon fat intermixed with blackberry, licorice, pepper, and a hint of roasted coffee. Opulent and rich, it is a gorgeous Syrah..."

*Rating 90-92
Robert M. Parker, Jr.
The Wine Advocate
December 26, 2006*