

T O R

TOR Noble Rot 2008

20% Sauvignon Blanc, Gamble Ranch, Yountville, Napa Valley
80% Semillon, Knights Valley Vineyard, Knights Valley
Release Date: December 2010
Harvest Sugar averaged 35.4 Brix
Residual Sugar 12.5 Brix
Two barrels produced



The story of Noble Rot

First off you have to ask—why, why and why? This is arguably one of the hardest wines in the world to make, as well as one of the most labor intensive and expensive to produce. It is a gamble from the beginning to the end—requiring perfect weather conditions that allow the “Noble Rot” to occur in the vineyard—to very experienced winemaking to craft the finished product. Some of you may remember our 2006 vintage; conditions in 2007 were not present for us to make it that year.

My answer to the “whys?”—taste the wine. Our Noble Rot is made on the model of Château d’Yquem. These are unbelievably sweet and unctuous wines that push all the buttons on anyone’s palate. We are brazen enough to say that our Noble Rot can share the d’Yquem stage in every way. It is made in the vineyard. The varietals are Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc, all hand-picked, barrel-fermented, then aged in small barrels. We were only able to make 2 barrels in 2008.

So what is “Noble Rot”? It is the perfect attack on wine grapes by the benevolent “botrytis cinerea.” If the weather is not perfect, this botrytis turns less than perfect, and is impossible to harvest the grapes. It is not uncommon for a whole year’s crop to be left hanging—if the weather does not encourage good botrytis. If perfect, the grapes have to be picked by hand, often grape by grape to reach the high levels of sugar—for us in 2008, 35.4 brix.

Botrytis spores are in many vineyards as part of the micro flora, always present. But can prey on ripe grapes when the weather turns humid and warm near harvest. Grapes in a cluster then can be punctured by hundreds of botrytis spores, which can lead to severe water loss, dehydration, and sugar concentration. Acids along with sugars are metabolized, glycerol magnified, flavors intensified in combinations not possible without botrytis. In the end the cluster looks like soft raisin covered with a brown fuzzy blanket—requiring the vintner to often pick berry by berry to select the right grapes.

Noble Rot—French translation “pourriture noble”. ROT is TOR spelled backwards, or read in a mirror, or through a beautiful bottle of luscious, sweet nectar. It is magic in a bottle.