

## Spring-Summer 2005

### **TRIALS, TRIALS & MORE TRIALS AND THE RETURN OF THE "MAILBOX" ?!**

We have just concluded our blending trials for the 2003 red wines. The trials are the blind tastings of barrel samples of all the different lots of red wines from the '03 vintage. The objective being to determine the final forms that the various bottlings will have. Last year the '02 vintage practically assembled itself, but this year at the beginning of the trials the task seemed like a big puzzle with nothing but sky pieces.

Granted part of the problem when we started the trials at the beginning of March was that we had just received our best review from Robert Parker in our history for the '02 reds. He even boldly declared the 2002 Mernet Reserve as the best wine in our entire history! No pressure following that! But despite the enormous expectations on we went.

The first thing that we try to assess in the trials is whether or not there are wines worthy of the "reserve" designation. I was pretty sure that the '03 vintage had a "reserve" cabernet in it but beyond that it was still all sky pieces. Immediately we determined that clone 15 would be the basis for the "reserve" cabernet but it seemingly took weeks to massage the final blend into place.

Next came Mernet and or Merlot "reserve." One potential problem for us with the '03 vintage was that we had very little merlot from the Carneros vineyard. This wine is primarily used for blending. It goes into almost every red wine we make and has played an especially important role every vintage in the "Mernet." But Carneros and almost all of Napa with the exception of Spring Mountain District had terrible weather during set in the spring of '03 and thus had drastically reduced crop amounts. Conversely Spring Mountain had flowering and set a week later than the rest of the valley and by then the weather had cleared and we had a successful set and eventually a record crop in the fall!

Again all sky pieces! We were close but stuck short of a happy conclusion for either the 'Mernet' or the Merlot. It wasn't until we resorted to some ancient Bordelaise trickery that the 'lower bowl' merlot emerged as an absolutely stunning embodiment of the purest, most voluptuous, merlot, that I have ever seen! Two birds with one stone. Our first single vineyard reserve merlot since the now legendary "Mailbox" Merlot from the '97 vintage! And to boot the lower bowl matched equally with the estate clone four cabernet will make our first 100% estate 'Mernet.'

Cue the parting of the clouds and the bursting rays of the just in time sunshine! All the pieces now are falling together. The sun has quite literally arrived just in time. The bees are buzzing, the vines are flowering, and Mother Nature appears ready to take us for another wild ride!

Cheers to summer!

--MICHAEL KEENAN