

SPOTTSWOODE

Harvest 2020

Spottswood Estate Cabernet Sauvignon

By Aron Weinkauff, Winemaker

THE 2020 GROWING season at our historic Spottswood Estate Vineyard in Napa Valley's St. Helena appellation produced a stunning wine with lovely varietal purity, classic Spottswood floral notes, and an impeccable balance between richness and energy. Despite 2020 being one of the most demanding vintages in our long history, due to the pandemic and wildfires, the result exceeded all of our expectations. We attribute this to our exacting attention to detail in both the vineyard and the winery.

The growing season began with a very dry winter that extended into early 2020, resulting in dry soils and water deficits during budbreak, which began on April 2. This was followed by bloom on May 18, as well as a welcome 1.5 inches of rain in May, which provided a short reprieve for the vines. While we historically don't irrigate in the spring, 2020 put us in the unusual position of having weak cane growth and needing to irrigate once bloom was complete. Our dilemma was whether to use our finite water resources to irrigate early or wait until later. As soon as bloom was complete, we chose to apply highly targeted irrigation in select blocks to encourage more growth. Overall, while 2020 was quite hot, measuring 4,026 in growing degree days for the entire year (one of our highest totals ever for St. Helena), the heat was relatively constant throughout summer, with very few radical heat spikes until Labor Day, when temperatures reached 116 degrees, giving many of the grapes one last big push toward ripeness. Knowing that this was coming, we proactively irrigated before the heat spike, and used our normal shade cloth practices. The vines weathered the worst of the heat – showing the resiliency and health of our estate vineyard, which has benefited from more than 35 years of organic farming.

We tend to pick our grapes earlier than many in order to ensure balance and freshness in our wines. Thus we fortuitously began picking our estate Cabernet Sauvignon on September 15 and finished harvesting on September 26 – the day before the start of the Glass Fire. Overall, the grapes were picked between 23.0 and 24.5 degrees Brix. While our yields were down by 25% to 30% due to the small berries and clusters resulting from the drought conditions, the quality and concentration of the fruit at harvest was excellent.

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Though timely picking spared us any impact from the Glass Fire, we were mindful of potential issues from the LNU Complex Fire, which burned in parts of eastern Napa County from August into early October. To ensure quality, we sent samples of every lot of wine for smoke analysis over the course of the wine's production and élevage to labs in both Australia and British Columbia. No significant levels of any smoke compounds (free or bound) were found. We also did extensive sensory testing, including comparing the 2020 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon to several previous vintages, which provided further assurance that the wine is free from smoke. In fact, the young wine – though fresh and raw – shows phenomenal clarity and purity, with a gorgeous structure, supple velvety tannins, and beautiful length and persistence of flavors.

In assessing our 2020 Spottswoode Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, we are reminded of the adage that the mark of a great winery is not what it achieves in a perfect vintage, but what it achieves in the most challenging growing seasons. By this or any other measure, we are thrilled by the quality of our 2020 Spottswoode Estate Cabernet Sauvignon. Though we may want to forget the trials and tribulations of that unique growing season, our 2020 Spottswoode Estate Cabernet Sauvignon is a wine worth remembering.

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