



The Joy of Wine

While Cabernet Sauvignon may reign as the king of Napa Valley reds, Rombauer Vineyards has long been equally captivated by Merlot and its potential to make exceptional wines.

NAPA VALLEY MERLOT

ROYALTY IN ITS OWN RIGHT



SINCE 1983, WHEN WE PRODUCED OUR FIRST VINTAGE OF Merlot, our belief this noble variety deserves a place on the table of any serious wine lover has not wavered. Regardless of the whims of fad or fashion, our goal has been to produce Merlot of exceptional quality. Each vintage, we've re-examined every step from vineyard to bottle with an eye on improvement, and in 2014, we decided to make a shift with our grape sourcing to further that goal: After farming Merlot on both sides of the Carneros region for over a decade, we decided to focus exclusively on the Napa side, where the slightly warmer climate produces consistently high-quality Merlot. We are as selective as we've ever been in the sourcing of all our wines, and we believe with this change, the 2014 Napa Valley Merlot is our best expression of the variety yet.

IN THE VINEYARD

The basis of some of the world's most sought-after wines, Merlot poses challenges in the vineyard. With thinner skins, it is more sensitive to heat stress than Cabernet Sauvignon, and more susceptible to overcropping. Site selection and farming practices are critical. Our Merlot comes from the Napa side of the cool, wind-swept Carneros region, where the clay soils are similar to the vineyard compositions of France's Right Bank, home to some of the world's most revered Merlot-dominated wines, including Chateau Petrus. During the growing season in Carneros, heat rises to the north in Napa and Sonoma valleys, pulling fog and cold air in from San Pablo Bay and allowing the thin-skinned Merlot grapes to gradually develop flavor and tannin while retaining natural acidity. The climate in Napa Carneros is slightly warmer than the Sonoma side, providing more consistent ripening for Merlot that makes for deeper color and more concentrated flavors. Each vineyard block under our care is micro-farmed, with soil analysis and aerial photos produced using NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) technology guiding vineyard management decisions. Yields are restricted to further enhance fruit quality. All grapes are picked at night — cool temperatures retain cluster integrity and preserve fruit intensity — hand-sorted, and delivered to the winery.

IN THE WINERY

At the winery, Merlot receives the same attention to detail as our finest Cabernets. As each lot arrives at the winery, the fruit is sorted using an optical sorter that eliminates all but the finest berries. About a third of the wine is barrel-fermented to provide a richer, more textured palate. The remaining grapes are placed in small tanks and allowed to cold soak for 10 days to extract rich flavor and dark color. During fermentation, the wine in tank is pumped over two to three times a day using gentle peristaltic pumps (larger versions of those used to move blood during surgery). Wine fermented in barrel is rotated several times a day. As each lot goes dry, the wine is pressed from skins using a modern, hydraulic basket press that results in high-quality press wine. Our Merlot ages in 100% French oak barrels for about 17 months. Winemaker Richie Allen works with 10 different coopers each vintage and up to 20 different barrel types, as the differences in wood species, seasoning, toast and grain allow him to choose the perfect barrels for each lot. Lots are evaluated monthly; those not meeting our standards are sold as bulk wine.

AT A GLANCE

NAPA VALLEY MERLOT

Our Napa Valley Merlot is produced using the same attention to detail that characterizes our family's approach to all of its wines. Years of experimentation and refinement have gone into perfecting our Merlot, to ensuring it delivers on the promise of a serious, yet approachable wine. Beginning in the vineyard, where each block is micro-farmed and harvested, Winemaker Richie Allen produces our Napa Valley Merlot on a lot-by-lot basis, determining the best fermentation and aging technique for each block as it moves its way through the winery.



2015 NAPA VALLEY MERLOT

- Varietal composition: 78% Merlot, 18% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot
- Harvested: Sept. 13-19, 2015
- Average Brix at Harvest: 26.5
- Cooperage: Aged 17 months in French oak barrels (30% new)
- Alcohol: 14.5%
- Aromas of fresh, ripe blueberries, blackberries and boysenberry with notes of cedar, vanilla and pie crust. Medium-bodied, ripe and plush, with flavors of plums, blueberries and figs, leading to juicy red fruit. Depth and structure provide long cellaring potential.

FOOD PAIRING

Our Napa Valley Merlot is the ideal food-pairing partner, with medium body, plush tannins, silky texture and mouthwatering acidity that make it a versatile choice for many types of foods. Here are some of our favorite pairings:

- Seafood: Seared Tuna Steaks; Grilled Planked Salmon; Sautéed Scallops or Prawns
- Meat: Oven-Roasted Chicken; Chicken Cacciatore; Braised Veal Shanks; Grilled Pork Tenderloin; Beef Braciolo; Pate de Campagne
- Sauces: Meat and Mushroom Red



Wine Sauce; Roasted Garlic Herb Sauce; Dried Fruit Sauce

- Cheese: Mild Cow, Goat or Sheep Milk Cheeses

KEY POINTS

Merlot is the basis of some of the world's greatest wines.

Rombauer's grapes are sourced from outstanding estate-owned and grower-partner vineyards in the Napa side of Carneros, where the climate is ideal for high-quality Merlot.

Micro-farming approach is based on NDVI aerial photos and personal interaction with the vines.

Yields are restricted to enhance quality.

Night-harvested fruit is sorted in the vineyard by hand and again in the winery using our state-of-the-art optical sorters.

Gentle handling of thin-skinned Merlot includes a 10-day cold soak, gentle pumpovers and basket-pressing; a portion of the wine is barrel-fermented for additional depth.

The wine is aged in 100% French oak barrels for 17 months.

All lots are kept separate until blending and bottling; less-than-perfect lots are sold off as bulk wine.