



Napa Valley

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NEW ESTATE VINEYARD, TECHNOLOGY HIGHLIGHT HARVEST 2016 Winery's international intern program also reaches 15-year milestone

ST. HELENA, NAPA VALLEY, Calif., November 4, 2016 — Rombauer Vineyards' 37th harvest saw an early start and high-quality crop, but those weren't the only highlights: The venerable St. Helena winery marked its first harvest from its newest estate vineyard, tested drone technology and celebrated the 15th year of its successful international intern program.

"It was an eventful harvest for many reasons," noted Director of Viticulture and Winemaking Richie Allen. "We had an early start and an early finish, and all indications are it's another high-quality year."

Harvest began August 18 with Sauvignon Blanc picked in Napa Valley. The last grapes — Portuguese varieties (Tinta Cão, Alvarelhão, Touriga Nacional and Souzão) from Rombauer's El Dorado Vineyard in the Sierra Foothills — came in October 11. Yields were close to normal across the board, although berry size varied some by vineyard, Allen said.

On September 14, the first fruit was harvested from [Davitto Ranch in Carneros](#). The 180-acre Chardonnay vineyard, planted in three phases from 2014 to 2016, is one of the Rombauer family's newest vineyards. Purchased by Koerner Rombauer in 2013, the property had formerly served as pastureland for cattle and fruit orchards. The cool Carneros climate and the property's varied topography — with its sloping hillsides and flatland, Haire clay loam soil and prolific Artesian well — make it ideal for Chardonnay. The vineyard's first harvest "gave us super-high-quality fruit with slightly higher-than-expected yields," Allen said.

For Rombauer's established vineyards, a cool August slowed ripening, which meant heat spikes in September brought on simultaneous ripening for more vineyards than normal. "Instead of an orderly pass from AVA to AVA, harvest became a mad dash, with fruit coming in from all over all at once," Allen said. "The challenge was picking fast enough to get the grapes into the winery at the optimal time."

Pioneering drone technology was the key to keeping ahead of the ripening timeline. Working with Renteria Vineyard Management, Rombauer was able to deploy GPS-enabled drones to produce NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) aerial photos at crucial points. "This allowed us to have up-to-the-minute information as we made our picking decisions," Allen said. "We could send a drone out for a



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final look, then use a GPS to mark precisely the sections of the vineyard we want picked in the coming day or two.”

Rombauer’s 20-acre Atlas Peak Vineyard, for example, was picked in 5 passes over a 10-day period guided by NDVI data collected by drones. Since 2004, Rombauer has used the combination of NDVI and feet on the ground to micro-farm its vineyards, informing decisions such as pruning, canopy management and irrigation, in addition to harvest picks. Drones enable this process to occur more quickly and frequently.

The 2016 harvest saw a group of 11 interns from 8 countries — Germany, the Republic of Georgia, South Africa, Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Greece and Chile. Five of the interns had been through Rombauer’s program in past years and were eager to return. Rombauer’s intern program is respected as one of the U.S. wine industry’s most visible examples of international cooperation. Since 2002, the winery has worked with CAEP (Communicating for Agricultural Exchange Program). In 2015, Deputy Assistant Secretary Robin Lerner of the U.S. State Department, who reports to Secretary of State John Kerry, came to the winery to meet the interns and see the mechanics of the program firsthand.

Richie Allen and Associate Winemaker Luke Clayton originally came to Rombauer through the program and take pride in ensuring the interns have a memorable experience. “Whether it’s the breakfast burritos, which are always a favorite, or the intricacies of our techniques and equipment, we ensure each group of interns leaves Rombauer with a thorough understanding of how we make our wines,” Allen said. “We hope we open their eyes to new experiences as they learn about making wine in California. We find that they educate us also, teaching us about their cultures and the winemaking techniques that are practiced in their countries,” he added.

About Rombauer Vineyards: Rombauer Vineyards was founded in 1980 in St. Helena by Koerner and Joan Rombauer, who built their three-level winery into a hillside to take advantage of the natural cooling influences. Caves were added to the property in the 1990s, and today, state-of-the-art equipment includes three optical sorters, basket presses and peristaltic pumps, which ensure gentle handling of the wine every step of the way. The winery has one of the largest red wine barrel fermentation programs in Napa Valley. Rombauer owns and sustainably farms 350 acres of vineyards in St. Helena, Carneros, Atlas Peak, Calistoga and the Sierra Foothills.

Koerner Rombauer’s great-aunt Irma Rombauer was the author of the landmark cookbook *The Joy of Cooking*. The winery’s current nationally distributed wines are 2015 Carneros Chardonnay, 2013 Carneros Merlot, 2014 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013 Diamond Selection Cabernet Sauvignon and 2014 Rombauer Zinfandel. Rombauer also produces Sauvignon Blanc; single-vineyard Chardonnays, Cabernets and Zinfandels; and dessert wines that are available only through the winery.

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