

DAILY CHRONICLE

Uncorked: Winemaker's Adaptation a great blend at a great price

BY JAMES NOKES



Patience is a trait Jeff Owens has used in a vineyard redevelopment plan.

But, it's not something the Adaptation winemaker counts on his consumers to exercise with his Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

Rather, Owens has achieved a hard-to-come-by trifecta in higher end Napa Cabernet; complexity, affordability and drinkability upon release. Adaptation 2012 (\$54) has beautiful cranberry, clove and ripe cherry aromas. There's vanilla, toasty oak and fresh raspberry and currant flavors. The long finish has tannins eager to frame the whole experience.

While waiting to reap the rewards for the vineyard redevelopment, Adaptation is a great blend at a great price and it's ready to be enjoyed right now.

Winemaker spotlight

While rain has fallen at a pace California hasn't seen in years this winter, Owens continues to see a familiar trend with Adaptation's upcoming vintages. As Owens revisits the 2015 and 2016 vintages in the cellar, he noted they are "back-to-back whammies" in terms of quality.

"The 2016 is off the charts," Owen said. "It's early, but we are very hopeful. It's off to a great start. It's a baby version of the 2013. Not quite as massive. But with great extraction and color."

The quality of both vintages is very high, but Owens said he wished more of the 2015 existed. Yields were down 35 percent. Final racking for the 2016 vintage and bottling is a few months away. The 2016 yield is done with primary and malolactic fermentation and the first blends are being crafted. That is something Owens wants to get locked in as soon as possible to give the wines the "time to marry."

Fruit from the backside of Howell Mountain provides Adaptation with its tannin, inky color and structure. It's the scaffold which Owens has used to further build the enticing details of Adaptation. He rounded out the final blend with Cabernet from the Valley Floor and Merlot from the Oak Knoll District.

Usage of the different vineyard sites and varieties is different than the PlumpJack Group estate wines, which include the namesake winery, Cade and Odette. They tell the story of a specific site. While it's a challenge to keep Adaptation at a reasonable price, the key has been the development of long-term relationships with growers.

"Adaptation is a broader expression of the Napa Valley AVA," Owens said. "We take the bits and pieces that work well together. It's a contrast to the estate wines. All the components in Adaptation are complex yet approachable. It's a wine that can sing out of the gate, but also reward those that want to lay it down for a little bit."

Wine 101

Soil pits dotted the Odette property.

The soil types on the north side of the Stag's Leap property were tested to select varietal clones that would thrive. New drain tiles were installed to make sure water exits in a timely fashion and the vineyard row direction was changed to true north-south to provide greater sun exposure and more sunburn protection.

Bordeaux varietals of Cabernet, Petit Verdot, Cabernet, Merlot, Malbec and Cab Franc were planted. While most of the vineyard is gravelly loam soils, the Merlot will thrive in the "sliver of clay" Owens said makes up the middle of the vineyards.

Unlike Adaptation, which offers instant gratification, the first crop should come online in about four years. Owens anticipated the vineyard to hit its prime in about eight years. He's excited about the project, but it's like building the perfect house and waiting to move in for eight years.

There's plenty of Adaptation vintages to be enjoyed between now and then.