



## FROG'S LEAP

### 2021 MERLOT RUTHERFORD NAPA VALLEY

#### A BRIEF HISTORY

A part of the Frog's Leap family since 1990, Merlot is one of the most complex and difficult wines that we make—and also one of the most rewarding. The Rutherford district of Napa Valley is home to about 25 different soil types, and these soils have mixed and morphed over the eons to paint a picture that resembles a kaleidoscope. Merlot thrives only on a very narrow slice of these soils. It needs lots of clay in the soil—what old-timers call “cold feet”—but the clay can't be too heavy, or it would delay ripening too much. If the soil is too weak, the fruit won't ripen; if too fertile, the vines become overly vigorous, shading the fruit and leading to unbalanced flavors. The grape requires a great deal of care in site selection and fine-tuning during the growing season to come to optimal ripeness, and our dry farming and organic practices play a key role in this.

No less care is required in the winery, where the variety is often miscast as a “baby Cab.” If one pushes the extraction too hard or overwhelms the wine with lots of new oak, it quickly gets anonymous, charmless, and disjointed. On the other hand, if one is too gentle with the winemaking—the “baby Pinot” approach—then the resulting wine can feel narrow and undeveloped, having never been allowed enough room to reach its potential. However, when we get this Goldilocks variety just right, it is very hard to beat—red fruit flavors, plums, and sage with an endless, supple texture. There is nothing quite like great Merlot.

#### ABOUT THE WINE

The drought conditions in 2021 affected all of our varieties, but none more so than Merlot, both for better and for worse. Our dry-farmed vines compensated for the moisture deficit by growing smaller canopies, smaller bunches and smaller grapes, giving us our lowest yield of Merlot ever—just 1.5 tons per acre, or 23 hl/ha. This in turn has given us our lowest production of Merlot since we began working with the grape in 1990. However, if you're reading this, you're one of the lucky ones holding a bottle of our best Merlot so far. “Best” is a term that I don't like to use very often, but the 2021 Merlot is worthy of the title. Dark-fruited, layered, and powerful, the '21 carries incredible density and fullness of flavor, while remaining balanced and retaining the supple, seamless texture that makes great Merlot so appealing. If you crack a bottle soon, please give it some air. I expect the wine will continue to evolve over the next 25 years, and will endure well beyond that. RW



#### THE VINES

100% Certified organic and dry farmed. The soils in the Merlot block at Red Barn have a relatively shallow layer of loam and gravel on top, with deep layers of clay below, the remnants of the outer edge of an ancient alluvial fan. The Merlot soils at Williams-Rossi are younger (geologically), and are primarily clay with very little loam. The Merlot soils at Truchard are clay deposits set on steep hills, derived from the uplifted fluvial shale and sandstone that are characteristic of Carneros.

#### THE BLEND

98% Merlot  
2% Cabernet Sauvignon  
62% Red Barn vineyard, Rutherford, 24% Williams-Rossi vineyard, Rutherford, 14% Truchard vineyard, Carneros

#### WINEMAKERS

John Williams  
Rory Williams  
Pablo Polanco

#### STATISTICS

harvested: September 1 (Williams-Rossi vineyard), 18 - 25 (Red Barn vineyard) and 29 (Truchard vineyard)  
harvest chemistry: 23.9° brix, 6.5 g/L, 3.53 pH  
final chemistry: 13.4% alcohol, 6.1g/L total acidity, 3.58 pH, 0.03% residual sugar  
bottled June 6 2023 1,962 cases produced

#### VINEYARDIST

Frank Leeds

BALANCE, RESTRAINT AND DEEP RESPECT FOR THE NATURAL EXPRESSION OF THE VINE