



FROG'S LEAP

2019 CABERNET SAUVIGNON WILLIAMS ROSSI

RUTHERFORD NAPA VALLEY

WINEMAKER NOTE FROM RORY WILLIAMS

A BRIEF HISTORY

Over the years, we've spoken at length about our farming practices: our early adoption and advocacy for organic farming, our dogged insistence on dry farming all our grapes, and the attention to detail that those practices require of us. These practices are designed to encourage and emphasize the natural differences of soil, water, climate, and microflora that make each vine different from the next, and give rise to idiosyncrasies in wines from different sections of a vineyard. At Frog's Leap, our effort always extends toward making wine honestly, where a given vintage of wine is always true to its time on the vine and the place where it was grown.

It was with this philosophy that we approached a new wine, the Williams Rossi Cabernet Sauvignon. In 1995, we were introduced to siblings Louise and Ray Rossi and their historic Rossi ranch, situated at the northern end of the famed western bench in Rutherford. By 1997, we were helping Ray farm the ranch, taking all the fruit from the vineyard. In 2007, Frog's Leap acquired the ranch and began to plant vines in areas that had long lain fallow and replant diseased blocks. Rossi is a complicated ranch with a kaleidoscope of different soils—ancient rivulets of heavy sand and gravel streak east-west though rich gravelly-clay loams, marked by almost imperceptible changes in elevation. While heavy pure clay dominates the westernmost area, a little to the north that clay mixes with gravel to create our best Merlot ground. In other words, the stage was set for a ranch whose wines could speak to the heart of our core purpose of cherishing the different and the idiosyncratic, if we were willing to make the effort. The Williams Rossi Cabernet Sauvignon is the culmination of that effort.

When making a reserve-style wine, a winemaker will usually look to select his or her "best" barrels in the blend. For my dad and me, the basis for that selection is made in the vineyard. Each year, our eyes are focused on how the vines planted in each soil type are adapting to the conditions posed by the vintage, and we head into harvest with that knowledge. When sampling, we select areas of the ranch—largely defined by specific areas of soil—that are exceptionally delicious that year, and ferment them separately. These mini-fermentations, usually so small that they are done in individual barrels, are then selected down to the best barrels after the wines are complete. The specific blend will change from year-to-year as different areas respond to vintage conditions, giving a wine whose character is wholly rooted in the connection that our family has to our home here in Rutherford.



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



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ABOUT THE WINE

2019 was a very warm and bounteous year, which required careful management of both the canopy (to protect the fruit from excess heat) and of crop load, which was excessive early in the season. While the Rossi vineyard overall reached about 4.4 tons per acre of yield in 2019 (~62 hl/ha) in the Cabernet, the selections for the Williams Rossi came exclusively from the lowest-vigor and lowest-yielding areas, which came out at a relatively measly 2.5 tons per acre (~35 hl/ha). 2019 was a great year for these areas of the vineyard, which are generally higher in gravel content than surrounding areas, making the berries and clusters smaller, with thicker skins. The Franc was especially outrageous this year. All blocks were spontaneously fermented in small lots, either in barrel or in stainless steel, then aged for 32 months in 100% new French oak barrels. ML was spontaneous. Veterans of Frog's Leap Cabernet will note the high new oak usage in this wine—it's my experience that these lots are those that are most amenable to new oak, which are able to use the oak to amplify their natural distinctiveness, rather than diminishing their character with overtly oaky flavors.

The finished wine is packed with warm blackberry and raspberry fruit and black licorice, with a black pepper and mineral edge to the fruit that adds edge. Sitting on top of the fruit is a strong herbal-floral streak that adds lift to the fruit and sets the stage for the dusty, balanced tannins and bright acidity. I love the harmony in this wine, which balances the warm, generous year with proper structure and length.

THE BLEND

All vineyard blocks are from the Williams Rossi Vineyard, on the northern end of the Rutherford bench.

- 57% Cabernet Sauvignon, South Creek block (SE corner gravel bar) - 12 barrels
Planted 2008 in very gravelly loam, Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 20th & Sep. 23rd. Four barrels were fermented in barrel, the remainder in stainless steel.
- 14% Cabernet Sauvignon, North Creek block (N gravel patch) – 3 barrels
Planted 2008 in clay loam with heavy gravel topsoil, Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 24th. Barrel-fermented.
- 9% Cabernet Sauvignon, "Hilltop" block (S gravel bar) – 2 barrels
Planted 2010 in gravelly loam, Clone 4 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 23rd. Barrel-fermented.
- 9% Cabernet Sauvignon, Front South block (center gravel patch) – 2 barrels
Planted 2008 in clay and gravelly loam. Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested on Oct. 2nd and fermented as a small lot in concrete.
- 5% Cabernet Franc (northern low-vigor area) – 1 barrel
Planted 2010 in clay loam with gravel topsoil (esp. on the north side). Petrus clone on St. George. Harvested Sep. 23rd. Barrel-fermented.
- 3% Cabernet Sauvignon, Front North block (southern low-vigor area) – ½ barrel
Planted 2012 in very gravelly loam. Clone 4 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 25th and fermented as a small lot in concrete.
- 3% Cabernet Sauvignon, "Throne" block (NW gravel rise) – ½ barrel
Planted 2009 in a mix of clay loam (east area) and gravelly loam (west area). Clone 7 on St. George. Harvested Sep. 25th and fermented as a small lot in concrete.



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ABOUT THE SOILS

South Creek

This block has the highest percentage of very gravelly soil on the entire ranch, and a large section of the block hosts relatively low-vigor vines with tiny bunches and small berries. We made an initial pass to grab the absolute weakest section (which was most at risk from a heat wave), and then followed up with another pass a few days later to grab surrounding vines (we picked the rest of the block at a later date). South Creek always has an exotic streak to its fruit.

North Creek

This block is largely on clay loam, but a small patch on the north side takes this clay and overlays it with a gravel streak that gives it a different character from the rest of the block. Powerful tannin from the clay marries with black fruit and balance from the gravel. North Creek doesn't always work, but when it does, it's quite special.

Hilltop

A similar story accompanies the gravel bar in Hilltop block, which is narrower than its cousin in South Creek. Hilltop is our cheeky name for a block that sits at the center of the ranch, near enough, and sports an average elevation an astounding 2 feet higher than the rest of the ranch (wait...why aren't you astounded?). Hilltop brings a lot of high-tone herbal-floral character to the blend.

Front South

Always one of the last blocks to pick at Rossi, Front South has a small rise in the center of it that has a higher percentage of gravel, where the vines and berries get smaller than elsewhere. Always very high in acidity, its fruit character nevertheless trends toward very ripe plums and exotic fruit.

Cab Franc

The only instance of this variety on the ranch, this block sits between our Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blocks. The northern end of the block ripens faster than the rest of the block, and we often pick it separately. In 2019 this barrel fermentation was outrageous, with intense, high-tone red fruit married with a very strong streak of dried herbs and spice. One barrel was enough.

Front North and Throne

These two blocks were crushed together in equal portions, reflecting the very small areas from which they were selected. Both sections are high in gravel, with small berries that add intense fruit and floral characteristics to the blend.



STATISTICS

harvest chemistry: 25.1 ° brix 6.6 g/L total acidity, 3.47 pH
final chemistry: 14.5% alcohol, 6.4 g/L total acidity, 3.61 pH,
0.01% residual sugar
bottled July 28th 2022

510 cases produced, from 21 barrels

WINEMAKERS

John Williams
Rory Williams
Pablo Polanco

VINEYARDIST

Frank Leeds

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