



FROG'S LEAP

2019 MERLOT
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 Merlot. 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. Right next to the Merlot, a small bump in the percentage of gravel creates the right conditions for Cabernet Franc. 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 Merlot 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 often 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 warm, abundant vintage with ideal growing conditions that laid the groundwork for a particularly meaty rendition of the Williams Rossi Merlot. Warmth all throughout harvest accentuated all that was massive and open-knit about our Merlot at Rossi, and thus it was that the more typically conservative old vines in North Creek, fermented in small concrete tanks, provided the best balance between harmonious complexity and the full-throated vintage conditions. A solid wall of cherries, fresh plums and dusty perfume sets the tone for the 2019 and gives lift to the dense, very long palate—more tannic than usual in 2019, but also with a solid streak of natural acidity to strengthen its bones and prevent it from getting monolithic. A touch of barrel-fermented Cab Franc adds a dose of wildness and herbal lift, accentuating the dusty earth of the Merlot. This wine is going to last many, many years, and I encourage you to give it a little air to let it unfold.

THE BLEND

94% Merlot, North Creek old vines, Williams Rossi Vineyard, Rutherford
Planted 1991 in silty clay, Inglenook clone on St. George. Harvested Sept. 20

6% Cabernet Franc, Williams Rossi Vineyard, Rutherford
Planted 2010 in clay loam, Petrus clone on St. George. Harvested Sept. 23

THE VINES

100% Certified organic and dry farmed.

STATISTICS

harvested: September 20 & September 23

harvest chemistry: 24.3° brix 6.6 g/L total acidity, 3.47 pH

final chemistry: 14.1% alcohol, 6.58 g/L total acidity, 3.56 pH, 0.03% RS

bottled July 28 2022

493 cases produced from 20 barrels

WINEMAKERS

John Williams

Rory Williams

Pablo Polanco

VINEYARDIST

Frank Leeds

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