



VARIETAL & VINEYARD: This Syrah comes from both our benchland vineyard and our recently planted vines located on the winery property. While the 6-acre benchland block has been the mainstay of our Syrah program through 2001, the new vineyards feature the much heralded Northern Rhone clones 174, 877, 383 and 470, planted on low-vigor rootstock. All of our vineyards are located in the Dry Creek Valley.

VINTAGE: Like many of our previously released 2004 wines, this Syrah shows the ripe side of this varietal. Sunny and warm conditions from mid-August to mid-September caused rapid sugar development and a considerable amount of shrivel in our Syrah grapes. As such, we harvested all of our Syrah from 9/10 through 9/16, which is about 1 to 2 weeks earlier than normal. By then the skins were soft and seeds were brown, but we had to sort out many completely dried bunches—the price we paid for waiting for physiological ripeness. Picking Syrah at this stage results in added aromatics and flavors. It also helps to avoid green tannins that can occur at lower stages of ripeness.

WINEMAKING: The grapes were cold soaked for 5 days in a variety of small open-top and closed-top stainless steel tanks before fermentation began with indigenous yeast. The wine was aggressively aerated during fermentation with pump-overs being done twice daily through a sump and screen. Contrary to the past two vintages, we decided not to blend Grenache in the final blend, because the Syrah had plenty of lush, forward fruit on its own. We aged our 2004 Syrah in only French Oak, 30% new, for 14 months. It was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.

STYLE/DESCRIPTION: This 2004 Syrah has me thinking of a cleaner more sophisticated version of our 1997 Syrah, which makes sense, since that was another early harvest. This full-bodied, dark Syrah has a sweet core of blackberry/cassis fruit (classic 2004) along with our signature smoky, spicy complexity. It has excellent depth, richness and balance. The tannins in this wine will allow it to age for 5 to 7 years, though the lush fruit might convince you to eschew patience, and enjoy it much sooner. So be it.

Mick

Harvested: 9/10/04 to 9/16/04
Total acidity: 0.69g/100ml
pH: 3.85
Oak aging: 14 months; French barrels, 30% new

Blend: 100% Syrah
Alcohol: 14.8%
Bottled: 12/6/05
Cases Produced: 1,500