

Hawkes Wines, Alexander Valley Merlot

- Estate wine with a cult-like following from one of Alexander Valley's pioneering grower families
 - Intensity, balance and structure reflect its Right-Bank-like soil
 - Bright and intense, cherry-driven fruit, with undertones of baking spice

The Producer

Based on Alexander Valley, Hawkes is a pioneering winegrowing family that started their own label about 10 years ago. The family's spirited and independent culture is reflected in their approach to winemaking—using instinct (not instrument) to make wines with character that express their rocky hillside vineyards. Hawkes' small production, French-influenced wines have developed a cult-like following, leaving just a tiny amount for distribution outside the winery's club.

One of the first to plant Cabernet in the Alexander Valley back in 1971, the Hawkes family has been an important grower supplying many of the producers that made Sonoma famous—Verite, Cardinale and Grgich Hills among many others.

In 2002, founder Steve Hawkes' son Jake began bottling wine to capture their own vision of their vineyards. Jake grew up on the family's vineyards and always had a keen sense for the land. He picked up winemaking quickly without any formal education, preferring to make wines naturally and using his own senses as a guide. Jake is a classic vigneron who likes to "grow good fruit and stay out of the way." Fermentations are in small, open-top containers, punch-downs always done by hand, and wines are bottled without fining or filtration.

The estate vineyards, which extend from Chalk Hill to Knight's Valley in Alexander Valley, are planted on sparsely soiled hillsides, yielding small amounts of intense fruit that Hawkes is famous for.

The Home Ranch Vineyard, located in the southern part of Alexander Valley, takes the shape of a small valley bordered by a forest of Douglas Fir and oak, and a tributary of the Russian River. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are planted in the thin chalky soils of the hills, while Chardonnay is grown in the richer soils of the foothills below. The Home Ranch's unique geography, together with minimal irrigation and a program of aggressive thinning in the Spring, produces densely flavored berries.

The Red Winery Road Vineyard, planted to Cabernet and Merlot, runs from the floor of the Alexander Valley, up to the base of the Mayacamas Mountains. Matching the field's unusually varied soils with the right rootstock has become something of an obsession as they seek the most authentic expression of the site.

The newest vineyard, planted on Chalk Hill Road in 1996, is named the Pyramid for the extremely sharp, often terraced hills on which it grows. Only 18 acres of the 120 acre site are planted, all in Cabernet Sauvignon. Limiting cultivation to such a small area guarantees ideal conditions for farming and leaves the vast majority of the ranch as wild land.

The Wine

"Every vintage of Merlot we have produced since the inaugural 2002 has come from the same small block of fruit on our Red Winery Vineyard, originally planted by my parents in 1973. The soil at the Red Winery is a jigsaw of various types, and the section where the Merlot grows is mostly clay. It has long been my theory that this dirt, which is similar to the soil found on Bordeaux's Right Bank, is largely responsible for the subtle power of our Merlot — the fruit is bright and intense, cherry-driven, with undertones of baking spice and enough acid and tannin to hold the wine together for years of aging. Drink now through 2020."



Region: Sonoma

Appellation: Alexander Valley

Vineyards: Red Winery Vineyard

Soil: Clay and shale

Varietals: Merlot, 343, 347

Vinification: Destemmed; no extended maceration, Pasteur red

Ageing: 100% French oak barrels, 25% new, 30 months

Production: 180 cases