



2007 STAR LANE MERLOT HAPPY CANYON OF SANTA BARBARA

VINEYARD NOTES

Star Lane Vineyard, located at the far eastern end of the Santa Ynez Valley, is both the warmest and the highest elevation vineyard in the new "Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara" appellation. Backing up to the lower slopes of the San Rafael Mountains which loom high above the ranch, Star Lane features a unique range of weathered sand, gravel and alluvial cobbles over a clay/loam subsoil. With both excellent drainage and good water holding capacity in the subsoil, a small section of sandy clay-based soil to the west of the creek on the canyon floor has proved to be an ideal site for or closely spaced Merlot blocks. Clones 181 and 314 are planted at 8' x 3' spacing (1836 vines per acre) on 101-14 rootstock. Yields in the two sections of Merlot from which this wine is made were a meager 1.8 tons per acre—less than ideal, but nicely balanced given the dry nature of the vintage. A modified deficit irrigation technique specific to the Merlot helped reduce berry size and promoted earlier ripening. Additional fruit came from one block of Cabernet Franc planted along the western ridgeline of the vineyard and three rows of Cabernet Sauvignon directly adjacent to the Merlot.

VINTAGE NOTES

Drought-level rainfall and severe winter freezes during the December holidays started the growing season in an atypical fashion. Many young shoots were stunted due to the freezes and only began to show acceptable vigor when we plowed under our "green manure" cover crop consisting of oats, bell beans, vetch and peas in late spring. Conditions during bloom time were ideal, with moderate temperatures and an absence of our normal winds, and completed in less than a week. Meanwhile, set was erratic from shoot to shoot, with some shoots setting as many as three clusters while others set none. In spite of low winter rainfall, weather during the growing season was generally cool and we

irrigated very little, only 2 to 5 gallons per vine for the entire season. Veraison was very even and weather during harvest was warm and steady. We harvested a slightly below average Merlot crop load at a leisurely pace from late September through mid October.

WINEMAKING NOTES

Further work with our post-destemmer berry sorting system allowed us to remove all raisins and green material from the fruit in addition to imperfections that were missed on the hand-sorting table. We are finding that many of the green, vegetal flavors that have typically plagued California Merlot are being replaced by exciting tobacco and black olive notes. Likewise, ongoing experimentation with co-fermentation, including both the Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon portions of the blend directly in the fermenter with the Merlot, brings a tremendous sense of harmony and balance to the wine.

Each fermenter is filled with sorted, destemmed and only lightly crushed fruit. Three to five days of cold soak is followed by a moderately warm fermentation with native yeast only. At the end of active fermentation, the must is heated to 95° Fahrenheit for three days to extract every last bit of color, flavor and phenolic material that the grapes have to offer. Free run wine is moved to barrel "dirty," meaning that much of the fermentation lees are kept in contact with the wine and an uninoculated malolactic fermentation typically finishes in the late spring following harvest. The wine is racked from its lees in early August when the final blend is made and is returned to barrel for an additional 14 months. After 24 months in 50% new French oak and a light fining with fresh egg whites, the 2007 Star Lane Merlot was bottled unfiltered.

TASTING NOTES

The 2007 Star Lane Merlot seems to be yet another major step forward in our Bordeaux varietal program. A notoriously difficult grape to grow, Merlot has found a true home in the gravelly clay soils of our vineyard's western bench and the vines are producing increasingly exciting fruit with each successive vintage. In the winery, an effort to identify the true character of the variety at Star Lane is yielding wines of stunning balance, marked by subtle olive and tobacco notes in addition to plummy and black cherry fruit of our previous effort. Refined tannins and vibrant acidity suggest both near term consumption and ageing for up to 7 years.

FINISHED WINE

Composition: 87% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Cabernet Sauvignon
Alcohol: 15.1%
TA: 4.5 g/L
pH: 3.85

STAR LANE
VINEYARD

P.O. Box 217, Santa Ynez, CA 93460
Phone (805) 736-0757 * Fax (805) 688-0596

www.starlanevineyard.com