

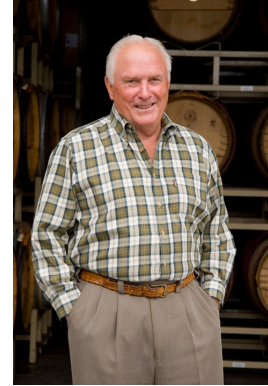
DUCKHORN VINEYARDS



History



Co-founded by Dan and Margaret Duckhorn in 1976, Duckhorn Vineyards has spent almost forty years establishing itself as one of North America's premier producers of Napa Valley wines. From its modest inaugural vintage of 800 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon and 800 cases of Merlot in 1978 to its addition of Sauvignon Blanc in 1982, Duckhorn Vineyards has crafted a tradition of quality and excellence that continues today.



Fundamental to this tradition was the early, pioneering decision by Duckhorn Vineyards to focus on the production of Merlot. Though many Napa Valley wineries were using Merlot as a blending grape in the late seventies, few were exploring the potential of this varietal as a stand-alone wine. A great fan of Merlot since traveling to St. Emilion and Pomerol, Dan Duckhorn felt that this elegant varietal was underappreciated in North America. "I liked the softness, the seductiveness, the color," says Dan, "the fact that it went with a lot of different foods; it wasn't so bold, didn't need to age so long, and it had this velvety texture to it. It seemed to me to be a wonderful wine to just enjoy. I became enchanted with Merlot."

Dan also believed that the American palate was undergoing a gradual but dramatic shift, moving away from jug producers toward quality varietal wine. This conviction made the timing perfect for the introduction of Duckhorn Vineyards' Napa Valley Merlot.

The quality of Duckhorn Vineyards wines has always been based on a commitment to selecting the finest fruit. Whether carefully sourcing grapes from top sites in the Napa Valley or committing itself to establishing a world-class estate vineyard program, the winery was built on the belief that great wines begin in the vineyard. At Duckhorn Vineyards this has always meant an emphasis on site and terroir. Beginning in 1988, hand-selected Napa Valley properties were purchased for the estate vineyard program, guaranteeing a consistent source of high quality fruit, year after year.



Today, the winery's seven estate vineyards are located in alluvial fans of the Napa Valley and on the coveted slopes of Howell Mountain. The shallow and rocky alluvial soil drains easily, forcing the vines to send roots deep in search of water. The rocks retain the day's heat, bringing relief to the vines during cold spring mornings and foggy summer nights. Because of its topography, soils, and climate, Howell Mountain has distinctly different grape-growing conditions than the valley floor. Often during summer months, the maritime fog seeping into the Napa Valley below will not reach the mountaintop, giving Howell Mountain

more sunlight and moderate temperatures. As a result, winemaker Renee Ary has numerous vineyard blocks to choose from, each offering markedly different flavor profiles.

Dedicated to making classic wines that reflect the unique character and quality of the vineyards, Renee strives to understand the needs and opportunities presented by each specific terroir and microclimate. By approaching each vineyard block individually, Renee's goal is to harvest when the flavors have reached their peak and the tannins are at their softest. Grapes are hand-picked and hand-sorted prior to crushing. In addition, the winery is able to pick the grapes in a timelier manner, even harvesting some vineyard sites several times, selecting only the ripe fruit with each pass through the vineyard. Through estate ownership, Duckhorn Vineyards enjoys greater control over both yields and crop quality.



In the winery, Renee applies an artisan's approach to winemaking, blending from almost 200 distinctive lots using taste and instinct, not formula. Wines are barrel-aged separately by vineyard lot, utilizing an extensive barrel program that sources 25 different types of oak from 13 separate cooperages. The majority of the barrels are made from French oak in the Bordeaux Chateau style. These barrels breathe easier, encouraging the wines to develop. Duckhorn also employs many water-bent barrels, a process which removes harsh tannins from the wood, bringing about toasty, caramelized flavors. The resulting wines combine accents from a comprehensive barrel program with grapes from diverse smaller appellations within the broader Napa Valley, including Howell Mountain, Carneros, Yountville, Rutherford and St. Helena.

For nearly three decades, the commitment to crafting wines of distinction has remained at the heart of the Duckhorn Vineyards philosophy. As its Napa Valley estate properties continue to mature under Renee's stewardship, the winery will continue creating world-class wines from exceptional vineyards.