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Report #54: The Wines of Mount Veeder

Introduction



View from the Lagier Meredith Vineyard

The largest of five mountain AVAs in Napa Valley, Mount Veeder is located along the cool southern ridges of the Mayacamas Mountains that run between Napa Valley and Sonoma County. Its 25 square miles of rare natural beauty and diversity have attracted a small contingent of independent spirits, rugged individualist farmers with true passion to produce outstanding wines. Indeed, over the past 175 years, winegrowers of this majestic region have demonstrated unique determination to farm this mountain landscape where many had thought growing conditions were too difficult. Today, Mount Veeder is the source of some of Napa Valley's finest wines, and they are getting better and better as producers learn the secrets of crafting wine in this unique region.

In this, our 54th report, we focus on Mount Veeder and its wines. We begin with a brief history of the region examining the role played by early German settlers and the many talented growers and winemakers who followed. In the sections that follow we examine the geography, soils and climatic conditions that contribute to the unique character of the wines. In particular we identify the steep hillside slopes, exposures and microclimates that characterize the vineyard parcels of Mount Veeder.

The pioneers of Mount Veeder experimented with a wide variety of grapes such as Riesling, Zinfandel, Chardonnay,

In this Issue

Introduction	1
Acknowledgements	2
History.....	3
Geography, Soils and Climate.....	5
The Mount Veeder Vineyard	6
Wines and Winemaking.....	10
Summary	11
Winery Profiles & Tasting Notes	13
Annex: Mount Veeder Appellation Map	22

Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. However, it was Cabernet Sauvignon that became king, and today 65 percent of all plantings on Mount Veeder are of Cabernet Sauvignon. As we will point out later in the report, the hillside Cabernet Sauvignon of Mount Veeder is different from that of the Napa valley floor in terms of flavor, density, and overall richness.

Despite being the largest AVA in Napa Valley, Mount Veeder produces less than 2 percent of all its wines. However, Mount Veeder's terroir and wines are unique. Fruit ripens slower than on the valley floor. Yields are usually well below three tons per acre on average, and the berries are small and intensely flavored. The wines often reveal a minerality and earthiness different from deeper alluvial soils. Flavors are generally quite ripe, spicy and concen-

Introduction

Continued from page 1

trated with well-defined fruit character. Mount Veeder wines have a firm tannic structure and are age-worthy, often showing their best with a few years' cellaring. Over the years producers have developed ways of balancing acidity and softening the tannins while retaining the unique structure of Mount Veeder wines.

In the final section of the report we provide profiles of the major producers and tasting notes of their wines. Looking to the future, there is little doubt that the wines of Mount Veeder will grow in popularity among informed wine consumers. The Mount Veeder Appellation Council will also continue to attract both new consumers and investors along with new and improved methods of production that will contribute to the quality of these magnificent wines.

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Mike Potashnik and Don Winkler

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Issue 3	Grenache Wines
Issue 4	Syrah
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Issue 8	The Wines of Ribera del Duero
Issue 9	Champagne
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Issue 12	California Petite Sirah - Syrah Update
Issue 13	The Wines of Rioja: Classical and New Wave
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Issue 14	The World of Sparkling Wines and Champagne
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Special Report	The Wines of Montefalco
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Issue 47	Special Report: The Best of Tuscany
Issue 48	The Wines of Los Carneros
Issue 49	Special Report: The Best of Spain
Issue 50	The Wines of Chablis
Issue 51	Special Report: The Best Indigenous Wines of Sicily
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