

2006 Meritage

Rancho Salina Vineyard, Sonoma Valley

**50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Cabernet Franc
15% Malbec, 1% Petit Verdot**

Why Meritage: Meritage is a contraction of "merit" and "heritage". It means the wine is a Bordeaux style blend, a blending style that goes back hundreds of years and exemplifies the art of blending. Why blend? For the same reason that you don't make soup with one ingredient. It is the combination and layers of complimentary and contrasting flavors that make a great dish and a great wine. We make two styles of Meritage wine. Those labeled "Meritage" are single vineyard wines, meaning that at least 95% of the grapes in the blend are from a single vineyard. Only the best vineyards in the best vintages make the cut. We don't do them every year, just when the wine is right. The Rancho Salina Meritage is such a wine. The other Meritage we make is our barrel select DRX, cherry picked barrels from several vineyards.

The Vineyard: Dom Paino's Rancho Salina Vineyard is on Moon Mountain, in the Mayacamus range, 800 feet above the Sonoma Valley floor, just east of the town of Sonoma. This field blend, grown in rocky red volcanic soil with breezes from San Francisco Bay moderating the warm days, exemplifies the mountain top terroir that is part of the Sonoma Valley Appellation. Dom planted the vineyard about 25 years ago and is passionate about growing grapes. His dedication shows in this wine.

The vintage: 2006 was a gentle vintage, typical of even numbered years in Sonoma. The weather was ideal, with a long dry summer and fall. The '06 wines are well structured, elegant and less aggressive than the '05s. These qualities are ideal for Meritage blends, which are all about elegance in the glass.

The winemaking: The grapes were hand picked early in the morning, and triple sorted at the winery, leaving only perfect berries in the opened top stainless fermenters. Each lot was fermented separately, beginning on indigenous yeast, followed by pure strain inoculation with yeast strains specially selected for each varietal. Extended maceration of 18 days was used on the Cabernet Franc. As is typical with our Meritage wines, the lots were aged separately for two years before blending. The best tasting 20 of 45 barrels were selected for this blend, which was done by taste and then went back into our favorite barrels for another year.

Tasting notes: The color is so dark it is hard to see the red. The wine is brilliant with good legs. The nose is restrained, until it is open awhile, when it starts to evoke chocolate and blackberries. The taste follows this lead. The ample share of Cabernet Franc takes the flavors to the top of the palate, like dark chocolate. The tannins are soft and dulcet. Berry flavors dominate with hints of cedar, leather, and tobacco, laced with chocolate. You sense no bite or heat. The finish is long and elegant.

Combined pick: 18 tons, October 21 to 23, 2006.

Brix: Average 23.9° to 26.4°. Total barrel aged: 34 months

Unfined. Cross flow filtered before bottling, sterile bottled, Velcorin free.

SO₂ at bottling 22 ppm, at release less than 12 ppm.

Bottled 485 cases, August, 2009; Released August, 2011.

Alcohol 15.9%, Residual sugar 0.01%. T.A. 6.1g/L, pH 3.7

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Taste the Passion

