



## **Fratelli Perata 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon Riserva, Estate**

The Cabernet Sauvignon at Fratelli Perata reflects the passion of the brothers for their wine. Joe particularly loves Cabernet, and believes we could just make Cabernet and everyone would be happy. Cabernet lets the winemaker work with an explosion of fruit that also has a strong core of tannin and acid. Then that is combined with just the right selection of oak barrels to make the finished wine even more exciting.

With our Paso Robles location, the great microclimate of our vineyard, Cabernet Sauvignon has been a most gratifying wine to produce, and to drink! As with all our fruit, the vines are pruned to produce a very small crop, less than 2 tons/acre, with 1 ½ tons/acre common. They are harvested late, watching for good sugar and balance. They are tough, not harmed by early rains like Zinfandel. They don't produce much juice, as the berries are very, very small. This gives us the huge flavors, since the skin/pulp ratio is so high with our fruit.

One of the early points of contention about Cabernet in Paso Robles was tannin in the wines. Some people said that they were too soft, not of the quality allowing the wines to age. Thanks to UC Davis, that has been squelched industry wide. And thanks to the 1988-on Cabernets we have produced, we have proof in the bottle.

Our Cabernets are produced with this thought: make the wine big. It will be fruity, balanced, treated with kid gloves, it will age well, it will be classic Cabernet, and it will be big.

The 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon Riserva is our latest pride and joy. These grapes come from that infamous 6-week interval where all the grapes in Paso Robles were harvested in record time. Priorities played a great role this year, and we were helped that our grapes were on hillsides, with many different varieties, or they may have all been ready the same week. Mother Nature, please don't do that again.

Apparently, none of our wines suffered from this, although we did end up borrowing a new French oak barrel from Chuck Pettigrew (late of Meridian Vineyards). There were no extra barrels, tanks, nor any other container available in California that season.

The Riserva program is the most handcrafted of all our wines, which are entirely handcrafted. We harvested the 1997 grapes on September 10, with a Brix of 25.25, a pH of 3.41 and a TA of .782 g/100ml. These were from the hill behind the winery, which is the rockiest, lowest production part of the vineyard. The juice was fermented in 1 ½ ton fermenters, the pomace punched down by hand 4 times a day. It was pressed to barrels after 12 days, using very light pressure, 1.2 bar. (The crop was so abundant in 1997, that had we pressed to industry standards, we would have run out of barrel space quickly and had those barrels filled with bitter flavors, which come as the pressure increases.)

The new wine was put into new Chateau French oak barrels. After buying French oak since the beginning of the winery, we were fortunate to find this particular cooper who graciously ships a few of his barrels to California. Located near Mouton Rothschild, he doesn't need to sell us his barrels; we are lucky he does. This cooper is able to coax very smooth, sweet, vanilla flavors from his oak. A combination of oak sourcing, aging of the extra thin split boards, and toasting technique, we find these barrels to be the Lexus, Rolls Royce of the industry.

The new Cabernet finishes fermenting in this new French oak, and is aged for 33 months before bottling. Only the match of great fruit with great oak would allow this much barrel age to produce a great wine. Without the stature of the fruit, after 3 years, most wines would taste only of oak. Our newly bottled Cabernet has a good deal of that smooth oak. Remember, this is the 1997 vintage with fruit galore, and with bottle age they marry together to perfection. The tannins in each contribute to the aging potential and complexity.

This wine has a long, long finish. At this age, it is still best with dark chocolate or prime rib, the really big flavors