



## *Fratelli Perata Winery*

### **2000 Merlot, Estate**

This is still a young wine region relative to Northern California and particularly to France and Italy. We, as grape growers, haven't quite yet determined where the very best viticultural areas are for which grape variety. However, Paso Robles now has a more than 30-year history with Merlot, and it is doing well here.

Each variety demands its own, ultimately best location: for soil, temperature, wind, and orientation to the sun. We are fortunate that Merlot has responded so favorably to our vineyard site. It is from experience with grape growing in general, with knowledge of Merlot's unique requirements, and site selection that this grape has been our bread and butter since 1990.

With our first gold medal for the 1990 Merlot, we knew we were on the right track. We try to style it in a fuller, more Cabernet, classier, first-growth French style, than most of the Merlots in California. This can be a very ordinary wine if the crops are large and if the winery is looking for a bring-to-market-early-soft-version-of-Cabernet style Merlot. This is not our style. We want to bring out the best qualities for each variety we grow.

Even though our Merlots are full-bodied, extremely long-lived, deeply flavorful wines, we have not stopped looking for ways to improve upon them. With the 2000 vintage, we introduce a new clonal selection of Merlot to blend with the grapes we planted in 1980. This comes imported just recently from Bordeaux, France. The berries are smaller; the clusters are less dense and smaller. The flavors they produce are fruitier and brighter. The color is richer. For this vintage, they add another element to make the wine more complex and interesting. We are very happy with the result.

For many years we ran test lots to find the right barrel for our Merlots. Like spices to food, they contribute unique flavors. Since our wine is put directly to oak right after fermentation, the interaction of wine and oak begins immediately. The oak becomes an integral part of the wine, not a mere whoosh over the palate that comes as when other winemakers keep the wine in tanks until the last 2 months where it is teased with oak. Our wines will age. Our wines are big. Our wines will pair well with food, not dissipate at the table.

Last fall we opened the old Merlots to pour a vertical tasting. This shows how the wines change with bottle age, as well as the differences in the vintages. The 1989 Merlot, 14 years from when it was first harvested from the vines, was spectacular. Not all Merlots can do this. This is our goal. But the wine to start has to be fruity, with the tannins and acids in balance, with oak.

We believe strongly the 2000 Merlot will be an exceptional wine. On our timeline it is young. Our different hills of Merlot were harvested from September 26<sup>th</sup> (for the young vines) to November 14<sup>th</sup>. The fruit was riper than usual, at a Brix of 24 degrees, a pH of 3.49. It was fermented in our traditional manner, pressed after 14 days into new American oak barrels. The barrels were blended prior to bottling on September 9, 2003.

The 2000 Merlot is the real deal: lots of fruit up-front, great depth and mouth-feel. Layers of mocha and oak complete the traditional cherry base. The tannins and acid are relatively strong at this point, but this is what allows the wine to age to a silky wonder.

Please don't fear to pair this young wine with foods with strong flavors. The wine won't disappear under the flavors of the food: it will marry with them and make the entire experience better. We are currently drinking this Merlot with pasta cooked with our spaghetti sauce. Choose your favorite shape of pasta, or use the sauce in lasagne. Be Italian for an evening!