



Fratelli Perata Winery 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon

The Templeton Gap area of the Paso Robles appellation offers a very fine environment for producing classic Cabernet Sauvignon. Soils are ideal, climate offers daytime temperatures with enough warmth to develop deep fruit. The nighttime temperatures range 40 to 50 degrees cooler than the daytime high temperatures, so the acid levels are preserved.

Fratelli Perata uses our estate grown grapes only. We have three hills of Cabernet, each contributing a different flavor component, each ripening at different times during the harvest season, due to differences in soil and exposure to the sun. Our harvest is therefore done over a period of weeks to obtain optimum sugar/acid ratios and best flavor.

1997 was quite a terrific vintage for Paso Robles. Generous rains in the winter ended January 31st. Warm weather commenced early, for early bud-break. And then it was warm, very warm. With an early bud-break, fruit harvested even in the beginning of September had plenty of hang time to develop flavor. With such warm daytime temperatures, the fruit was very ripe.

The primary problem with the vintage was that there was so much of a good thing! Wineries that bought fruit were ecstatic with the early ripening varieties. When the growers mentioned they had extra fruit, many wineries purchased the surplus. But then the next variety was ready to harvest, hard on the heels of juice fermenting in the vat. Soon, with only a 6 week harvest window, and a bumper crop, wineries were at capacity and beyond.

What to do? Unfortunately, some wineries resorted to shortened primary fermentations or they delayed harvest so the grapes were weeks past prime until there was room in the vats. Thus, the potential was lost on much of the later ripening varieties.

We were fortunate that we were able to beg and borrow extra fermenting capacity and put our case goods in storage to create more processing room. Fast and furious, with long hours, the harvest was finished while still taking care of the wine.

In 1997, we again hand-harvested the Cabernet for processing in lots of 1 1/2 tons. Harvest dates ranged from September 4th to 28th. Brix ranged from 23.7 to 25.1 degrees; pH of 3.42. Each lot was fermented separately for 10 to 15 days, the cap punched down by hand 4 times per day. Pressed at only 1.5 bar, which is essentially free-run, the juice was placed in oak to finish fermentation. Tonnage for this vintage averaged 2 tons per acre, so the full intensity of the vine's energy is projected to the fruit.

At Fratelli Perata, we use 30% new oak on the Cabernet, 60% of the barrels being premium French oak. The balance of the barrels are up to three years old. The wine was blended with 14% Merlot prior to bottling, itself a full-flavored wine. An initial bottling was done on 3-4-00, a second, smaller bottling on 7-29-00. Bottles are finished with a two inch cork to facilitate aging. Total production 724 cases.

The 1997 Cabernet shows a deep cherry base, with flashes of cinnamon, vanilla and oak. Balanced fruit and acid work with the tannins to create a wine that softens with age. Our Cabernets typically age 7 to 15 years.

To sum, intensity of the fruit flavors through small berry size, silky tannins typical of Paso Robles, use of top quality oak barrels for secondary fermentation and aging, relatively long barrel and bottle aging result in a complex, lingering wine, good mouth feel, classic flavors. These wines age and the patient wine-drinker is justly rewarded.