



Fratelli Perata Winery

1999 SANGIOVESE, ESTATE

Working at a winery, it is not easy to develop a very favorite variety of wine, especially when there are so many good ones to choose from. But after a few years of doing this, when the day is over, we each find ourselves gravitating towards a particular sipping-before-dinner wine. This may not be as true for Gino as for the rest of us, because he considers the wines to be his children. He looks for the good in each of them, and works equally hard to make each the best it can be. But for Carol, who entered the wine culture through marriage to Gino, the Sangiovese calls.

Italy has a 1,000-year history making Sangiovese, or known better by the regional name of Chianti. There are hundreds of different clones of Sangiovese, vines that fall under the Sangiovese umbrella, but are slightly different viticulturally. Italy knows the temperament of this vine. It can be over-cropped and be very ordinary. It can be highly acidic. It can also be richly complex, with an abundance of fruit. It really starts in the vineyard, and is up to the winery to determine what style of Sangiovese to produce.

California doesn't have a long history with this grape. Atlas Peak was one of the firsts. As with any trend in the wine industry, there is a period of letting the other guy test the water, then everyone planting until the market is saturated. The real danger with the "I'll do it because everyone else is doing it" mentality is that the wine can move from up and coming to being downright ordinary, simply because the winery doesn't know 1) what is classically done 2) what can possibly be done. If you're just on a bandwagon, playing along, don't expect the music to be sweet. The off-notes may turn your audience away.

Luckily, being of Italian descent, Gino knows Sangiovese. Our first vintage was 1992. Over time, Gino has determined that following traditional Italian methods produces the best wine. Classico Chianti in Italy is required to meet certain standards. We use those same standards here by barrel aging the wine 4 ½ years and ensuring the grapes reach ripeness (at least 12% alcohol). We go further by bottling 100% Sangiovese.

The vines are pruned to produce 2 tons/acre of fruit, so the un-irrigated vines fully ripen the clusters. Those clusters are thinned by 1/3 at veraison, when the sugars are 12-13 degrees Brix. The 1999 Sangiovese was harvested on October 27th, with a Brix of 23.5, pH at 3.5. Due to the long, dry year and the long hanging time on the vine, the fruit was fully ripe with mature flavors. But, alas, the tonnage was very low. After primary fermentation, the new wine is pumped to older, neutral flavored oak barrels.

Flavors are predominantly strawberry. The barrel age has toned down the sprightly tannins and acid, allowing the undercurrent of cedar to emerge. It was bottled Valentine's Day, 2004. Extremely limited production. Drink now, or age three to five years, or longer. This is a classy Sangiovese, produced without gimmicks or chemistry, relying instead on the gifts of Nature and the art of the winemaker.