

SHANE

CRAFTED IN SEBASTOPOL, CA

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In 2003, when I returned from the Northern Rhône to Sonoma County, I was determined to find vineyards that would allow me to express the nuance and beauty of the Northern Rhône syrah I had become accustomed to drinking.

I knew California's terrior would create fruit-forward wines, but what I sought was more complexity. I found my solution in Bennett Valley. This release highlights the results.

Sonoma County is renowned for its diverse micro-climates and Bennett Valley has emerged as a new frontier in Sonoma County's landscape. Its cool winds, dense fog, and varied expositions make Bennett Valley ideal for advocates of cool-climate syrah. Essentially, Bennett Valley is a tunnel for wind and fog; the surrounding peaks of Taylor Mountain, Sonoma Mountain, and Bennett Mountain create Bennett Valley's cool-climate vortex. This geographic composition, and its placement at the head of the Petaluma Wind Gap, meld together to create Bennett Valley's enviable balance of sun drenched days and cool evenings.

However, a great site alone does not create great wine. Farming is the key to harnessing a vineyard's energy and coaxing its unique flavors. Fortunately, the Bennett Valley growers' ethos embraces this concept. They hold precise farming practices in highest regard; and nowhere in Bennett Valley are these practices more evident than in the Judge and Jemrose vineyards.

The Judge and Jemrose vineyards present bountiful opportunities. I am grateful to work with these fantastic sites run by two impressive families. Joe and Gail Judge and Gloria and Jim Mack are among the vanguard of Bennett Valley growers, and both families are artfully guided by cutting-edge vineyard manager Chris Bowland. Wines from their vineyards exhibit all that California syrah can achieve. Syrahs from Bennett Valley blend fruit and spice together like no other appellation in the state.





THE WINES



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JUDGE VINEYARDS, 2008 SYRAH

BENNETT VALLEY
120 CASES PRODUCED

Nestled in the southwestern corner of Bennett Valley, the Judge Vineyard gently slopes toward the valley floor off of the fortuitously named Grange Road. The cobbled rows sit almost equidistant from Taylor and Sonoma Mountains and direct your gaze toward Bennett Mountain. The fog and wind reach the Judge vineyard early and often; however, its exposition and touch of elevation allow it to absorb maximum sunlight. The stones littering the rows are reminiscent of the Northern Rhône.

The vineyard produces a large-framed and exuberant Syrah. Planted to the Estrella River, 174, and 877 clones the Judge Vineyard harnesses California power and accents Northern Rhône grace. Each clone is represented in equal parts in our premier Judge syrah. The stylish 877 packs in the fruit elements; the formidable Estrella River provides structure and depth; and the 174 clone accentuates the mid-palate and infuses the wine with spice components.

Fermented with one hundred percent whole-cluster, aged in forty percent new French oak for ten months, and bottled without fining or filtration, the Judge packs serious intensity but still maintains balance and purity.

MY NOTES

You experience an immediate attack of kirsch, blackberries, blueberries, lavender, and crème de cassis. This is an effusive wine. The initial fruit flavors are surrounded by cocoa, creosote, anise, nicoise olives, and baking spices. The whole-cluster barely makes a dent in the aromatics. It unfurls into a muscular and brawny wine. Structure abounds and verve emanates. The wine saturates the mid-palate and releases graphite, dried herb, and savory aspects. Enjoy from release to 2018.

JEMROSE VINEYARD, 2008 SYRAH

BENNETT VALLEY
70 CASES PRODUCED

A beacon in the southeastern corner of Bennett Valley, the Jemrose vineyard rises above the valley floor with precision. Its undulating slopes, craggy vineyard rows, and manicured vines are impressive. The northern exposure and wind swept slopes moderate its intensity. The vineyard is planted to several clones, but we source only the 174 and 470. The 174 (spice and structure) is the yin; the 470 (fruit and depth) is the yang.

This is our third vintage of the Jemrose Vineyard syrah. It has the gras of the 2006 bottling and the structure of the 2007 version. Over the past three vintages, I have found that the Jemrose vineyard works very well with whole-cluster fermentation. The tannins, however, can be rustic in their youth and therefore the Jemrose wines are built for aging.

Fermented with one hundred percent whole-cluster, aged in thirty-three percent new French oak for ten months, and bottled without fining or filtration, the Jemrose is a vibrant and graceful wine. It channels Cornas and delivers the depth of a focused New World syrah.

MY NOTES

A mélange of fruit and spice flows from the glass. Heady white pepper mingles with boysenberry, plum, blueberries, and dark chocolate. Accents of tobacco leaf, violets, and bacon fat mesh with cassis, mint, and green peppercorns. The wine imbues the site. There is freshness and brightness in the glass. This is a California Syrah with a Northern Rhône bent. Asian spices, chewy tannins, and subtle brown sugar hints finish the wine. Enjoy from 2011 to 2020.