

LABARGE

2012 Syrah

Site:

Two blocks of Syrah are planted on the top shelf, or “tenderloin,” of the vineyard. They are gently south facing on a bluff that drops steeply to the Santa Ynez River.

While the Sta. Rita Hills is generally known for Pinot noir and Chardonnay, there are a couple of plantings of Syrah. It is a bit risky planting Syrah in the western coastal region, but with the proper care of the vines, extraordinary results can be achieved.

Syrah is a fairly vigorous vine and its trademark is its tendency towards downwards growth. This is contrary to our vertical shoot positioning for our trellis system. Therefore, we use branch locks and wires to ensure that all of the shoots are trained individually and upward to allow for the greatest sunlight and airflow through the fruit zone. We then perform a *vendange verte* at the appropriate time to ensure that berry size remains small and that we have a balance crop load. At harvest, this results in ripe fruit with good acidity and tannin structure before it starts to dimple or raisin.

I believe some of the most exciting wines coming out of California at the moment are Syrah. However, in my opinion, there is one constant in these great wines - cool coastal sites. These climates lend themselves perfectly to Syrah where they can be rich, ripe and pure while still maintaining freshness, tension and the ability to age. Just because Syrah can be grown anywhere doesn't mean that it should. I have extremely high hopes for the future of Syrah at our vineyard.

Cellar:

2012 was in ideal year of growing conditions for our first Syrah harvest. We had a healthy canopy and cut back our clusters so all that was retained was one cluster per shoot. This way each cluster has its own space to get adequate airflow and sunlight to get as much consistent ripening as possible within each cluster. The canopy management must be precise in order to get the optimum sunlight in to the fruit zone. I think this is the most overlooked item that growers must deal with in the vineyard.

Once the fruit is in the fermenters, the Syrah can be treated a bit differently than the temperamental Pinot noir. Typically, it needs a bit more oxygen in order to have the yeasts multiplying and happy. Therefore, I will give the Syrah more air through a *delestage* by gravity or by a gentle shoveling technique where I run the juice over top of the cap. My goal is to treat the must with a light touch and a delicate hand. Syrah from our site is ripe, tannic, and beautifully colored. I love the smell of fermenting Syrah, especially the range of aromas from cherry twizzlers to green peppercorn that wallow in the winery in October.

A significant percentage of whole clusters are retained for the fermentations. A properly ripe stem from sound fruit is a beautiful thing and can add so much aromatically and texturally to the wine. Syrah grapes are so fruity and dark that keeping the clusters whole can really round out the wine and add other dimensions that could have been lost if destemmed.

30 Months in Barrel - 40% New Oak - 50% Whole Cluster - PH 3.68 - Alc 14.5%