



Age of vines: 32 years

Appellation: Napa Valley

Sub-Appellation: Spring Mountain District

Farming: dry-farmed mountain vineyard

Varietal Content: Cabernet Sauvignon 82%, Merlot 10% & Cabernet franc 8%

Fermentation: 100% barrel fermented

Time in oak: 22 months in new American oak barrels

Alcohol: 13.8%, Unfined and unfiltered

Cases produced: 2302 cases

Winemakers & Winegrowers: Charles Smith & Stuart Smith



WINEMAKER NOTES

Looking for that old fashioned Napa Valley kick-ass Cabernet

Sauvignon, but without all those harsh tannins? Here it is. On the palate it is big, smooth, full and has a velvety mouthfeel. Combine that with a very dark, purplish and very deep ruby-black red color. The aroma is just as intriguing, with briary and black cherry aromas, distinct suggestions of crushed violets and lavender and underneath it all are the elegant notes of dark chocolate. If you are getting the idea that we like this wine – you bet we do! Here is a hedonist's wine, begging for that grilled steak. See it, smell it and taste it – it's consistent from beginning to end, as great wine should be. Enjoy!

At Smith-Madrone our goal is to make artisanal wines which are distinctive and are an expression of both the vintage and us, as vintners, but above all else, are wines which bring pleasure to the senses. Every year our wine is made from the same vineyards, pruned by the same people in the same way, cultivated in exactly the same manner and harvested at similar levels of maturity, yet Mother Nature stamps each vintage with a unique set of flavors, senses and character. Vintage dating is a celebration of that uniqueness and diversity.

November 28, 2007, San Francisco Chronicle's Top 100 Wines by Jon Bonne

The Smith brothers continue to find that fine line between the older, restrained style of Napa Cab and big, lusty doses of fruit that now seem de rigueur. What defines their current release are stand-up Spring Mountain tannins that give structure to a rich palate of black fruit, with scents of tobacco and licorice. It's a wine that will take time to evolve, but that's a sign of a Cab worth holding on to. For all the talk of California Cabernet becoming a beast fueled by blackberry jam and overt alcohol, we found several ageless examples of how the state still makes some of the world's finest Cabernets. If there's a complaint, it's that price tags are generally stratospheric. But even there, Napa Valley's Spring Mountain District was a hero; Smith-Madrone offered **world-class** Cabernet for \$40.

August 8, 2007, New York Times ("The Pour" blog) by Eric Asimov

I was really impressed with the cabernet sauvignon, which is made in a way that emphasizes taut structure and liveliness over soft amorphous fruit. The 1999 was superb – dense and slightly tannic with violet and mineral aromas and long lingering flavors. These are cabernets that will age well, though they're delicious now, too. I also especially like the '01 and '03. The cabernets are unfinned and unfiltered, and are aged in all new American oak barrels.... All told, the cabernets were balanced, and though the Smith-Madrone operation shouts "Rustic!" as surely as the Smiths could use shaves, **the wines are elegant in a way that you rarely see in Napa cabernets anymore.**

January 17, 2008, Dan Berger's Vintage Experiences: The Weekly Wine Commentary

Exceptional: Lean, classic Napa Valley herb/dust and cherry aroma, with a structure I haven't seen in years: Great to age! Or try now with aeration and a steak. A superb look back to an era when many Cabs showed structure. Not for those who want plushness.

September 7, 2007, San Francisco Chronicle, by Jon Bonné

Good luck finding folks whose Cabernet has less alcohol than their Chardonnay, but the Smith brothers can do it, crafting traditional wines from their mountaintop perch above St. Helena. At just 13.8% percent alcohol, this bottling hinges on a basketful of dried herbs and tobacco notes, **as mountain wine as it gets.** It melds a luscious black fruit nose, lifted minerality from the dense volcanic soils, with licorice and blackberry. Sweet fruit comes to the fore, but standup steep-slope tannins are right there behind, proof that time will do well by this bottle. The richness never goes away, thought, and the great balance portends an impressive life for this wine.

Fall 2008, Restaurant News by Ronn Wiegand

Category: Cabernet Expensive. **Very good quality!** Complex in character, full bodied, lightly oaky, and long and tannic on the finish. It tastes of spicy oak, cedar, tobacco, aniseed, and black currant. [2009-2011] ***+

Fall 2008, Chow.com blog by Daniel Duane

Terroir is the foundation of a house; vintage is the house itself. Stu Smith was 22 years old in 1970, the year he walked through a Douglas-fir forest that had been a vineyard back in the

1880s. Abandoned during Prohibition, the land was densely wooded, but Smith could see redwood grape stakes shoved over sideways by the two-foot trunks of trees. Anyway, one thing led to another and Smith-Madrone has become a venerable name in California Cabernet, and Stu's opinions have taken on the tone I hear from a lot of the good winemakers these days: "We frankly have been making wines to our taste ever since. We don't really make wines for judges, and we don't make wines for wine critics. We make wines we think are relatively classically structured and have elegance and balance and complexity. We think it's our job to get the vintage into the glass of wine, to provide something unique. I like to say that terroir is like the foundation of a house—it's the same every year—but vintage is the house you actually build on that structure, and in some years there's very little change, but in others it's as different as a Frank Gehry or a Queen Anne Victorian." Why do I care? Because I had a sample of his 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon recently, and the wine brought me immense satisfaction: Every sip was a little journey, enriching and interesting and yet well balanced and not at all challenging. I thought it was fabulous. **It's a deep and lovely wine, rich and interesting and balanced, and transporting if you're in the right mood. Everything I want out of a Cabernet.**

January 2009, Vinography blog by Alder Yarrow

Dark ruby in color, this wine has a beautiful nose of plum, chocolate, and heady cedar aromas. In the mouth it is soft and silky on the tongue, with a surprising lightness for Napa Cabernet -- a bruiser this is most certainly not. The core flavors are black cherry and chocolate, and they dance, juicy on the tongue thanks to great acidity and faint, powdery tannins that simply play a background note to the overall bright quality of the wine. Incredibly easy to drink (a whole bottle).

There are more legends, stories, fairytales, and fables than anyone could count which all involve some guy up on a mountainside somewhere. Sometimes a hermit, sometimes a wizard, sometimes a troll -- sometimes just an old man who went to sleep under a tree for a long, long time. No matter what the story, there's always something a little different about the guy on the mountain, something that is both scary and alluring at the same time. Stu Smith might be living out yet another version of one of these tales. The fact that Stu sports a big gray and white beard under a wizened and kindly face helps to reinforce the possibility that he might belong in some ancient tale. His start as a winemaker certainly sounds like it belongs in a storybook somewhere: a lone hiker in the early Seventies, stomping through the forests on the mountainside above St. Helena discovers the remains of ancient vineyards and is struck then and there by inspiration. In deciding to purchase that long forgotten parcel of land, and turn it again into a vineyard, **Smith began a thirty-five year odyssey as a pioneer, an iconoclast, and what looks to be a permanent fixture on Napa's Spring Mountain.** The venture, begun in 1973 with money from family and friends, is now one of the most established, and perhaps most under-appreciated wineries in the Spring Mountain District. Perhaps it was inspiration from the 19th century vintners whose traces could still be seen on the land, or perhaps it is the only way Smith could ever have operated, but the winery operates very much on the model of small European cellars. From the small volume of low yield fruit that is hand harvested each year, to barrel fermentation in small lots, Smith Madrone wines are **hand-crafted from start to finish.**

February 13, 2008, San Diego Union-Tribune, Robert Whitley

Rating: 91. This wine has been historically underrated, lost in the attention heaped on more expensive and trendy Napa Valley cabs. Could be because **it's truly a mountain cab**, crafted from vineyards on the cooler side of the Valley and thus slightly more austere in its youth than the flashier, jammier wines from the eastern hills above the valley floor. This vintage shows excellent depth and structure, complex dark-fruited aromas with a touch of earthiness, and fine tannins.

January 4, 2008, Frederick Koeppel's blog BiggerThanYourHead

Sometimes it feels as if I have been condemned to a Circle of Hell, a mild circle certainly, compared to the more ingenious and punitive arrangements further down, but still one in which I am enjoined eternally to taste millions of Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay wines that all seem alike. The cabernets feature heaps of toasty new oak, super-ripe fruit, cushiony textures and alcohol levels of 14.5 to 15.2 percent; the chardonnays feature heaps of toasty new oak, super-ripe fruit, cushiony textures and alcohol levels of 14.5 to 15.2 percent. Such wines are professionally-made, well-intentioned and boring. Wait, this is no mythical Circle of Hell; this is my life! Then there are the cabernets and chardonnays of Smith-Madrone. Now when I say that Smith-Madrone makes wines that purists could love, I don't mean snobs or elitists or geeks or nerds; **by "purists" I mean consumers who favor wines that focus on fruit and structure, that allow us to taste and feel where the wine came from and where it's going, what it's made of and how it sustains itself.** That is the kind of wine that Smith-Madrone makes. This is a great, old-fashioned mountain-side cabernet, deep, rich and spicy, a construct of sinew and muscle and bone. Bright cassis and black cherry flavors are permeated by dusty, leathery tannins, briery, brambly elements and profound earthy and mineral qualities. The wine aged 22 months in American oak barrels, yet it didn't come out of that process with any bitterness or austerity — American oak has to be used carefully — but absorbed that wood for a firm, supportive structure to which keen acid lends vibrancy. Despite its size and seriousness, however, the wine is a sensualist's delight for its delicious black fruit (with a hint of cedar and wild berry), for its lacy etching of lavender and bittersweet chocolate, for its **impeccable balance between elegance and power.** You could drink a bottle tonight with a medium rare strip steak, hot and crusty from the grill, or let it age through 2013 to '15. The alcohol level, by the way, is only 13.8 percent. I rate the wine Excellent.