

CHÂTEAU DES CHARMES 2005 HARVEST REPORT

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 2005

Grape Variety: Merlot

Vineyard Block: St. David's Bench Vineyard, west of the Château

Sub-appellation: St. David's Bench

Weather Conditions: Cloudy and warm, humid 29°C; thunderstorms rolled in for evening

Yield: tonnes per acre

Brix: 24.5°

ph: 3.36

Total Acidity: 7.5

Field Notes:

Yesterday and today we handpicked the first of our Bordeaux varietals, Merlot. This often is the signal that the harvest is starting to wind down.

Merlot has gained popularity as a fruit-forward, low tannin but full-bodied red thanks to California wine producers. In Niagara, because we are a cool climate viticultural area, our Merlots tend to have good balancing acidity, structure and tend not to be as fruit-driven. In wine regions around the world Merlot can be bottled as a single variety or as a blend. At Château des Charmes we do both. The best Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc grapes from the St. David's Bench Vineyard remain as single varietal, single vineyard bottlings. Our philosophy with the Paul Bosc Estate Vineyard, by contrast, is to use the same varieties to produce our flagship Bordeaux-style blend 'Equuleus'. More on this spectacular wine when we pick those grapes.

In the vineyard, Merlot is the least hardy of the three Bordeaux varieties we have planted. It is quite cold sensitive and thin-skinned therefore is generally the first Bordeaux varietal to be picked each year. This is probably why it remains one of the more rare varieties planted around the world, despite its popularity.

The images below show (#1) the bunches in a bin ready to be loaded onto a tractor (#2) for transport to the winery. The grapes in the small yellow bins are then transferred into the large white bins so the fruit can be put into the destemmer/crusher (#3). From there, the crushed grapes and juice (called free run juice) is transferred to a stainless steel tank to be fermented. During fermentation, the skins are left in the tank so the red pigment from the underside of the skins colours the juice as it ferments into wine. This is how red wine becomes red. Once fermentation is complete, the must (young wine, skins and spent yeasts) is transferred to the press. The next step is to move the young wine to our underground cellar where it is aged in French oak barrels. The wine will remain in barrel for 6-12 months depending on the wine being made and how well it is developing. The St. David's Bench Vineyard Merlot tends to remain in barrel for about 10 months. Paul Sr. will make the determination when to bottle the wine. Once bottled, we hold the wine for several years while it integrates and harmonizes so when we release it, it will be ready to drink.



1. Just-picked Merlot bunches.



2. Bins of Merlot on their way to the winery.



3. Merlot being transferred into the destemmer-crusher.

As always, please feel free to email me directly if you have any suggestions or questions. Watch for many more postings as the harvest continues.

Michèle Bosc

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