



FRATELLI PERATA 1996 MERLOT

The Templeton Gap area of the Paso Robles, California grape growing region seems particularly blessed for producing premium Merlot grapes. One of the oldest Merlot vineyards of the viticultural region was established here in the early 1970's.

VINEYARDS

Fratelli Perata is located just 25 miles from the Pacific Coast. The natural ocean air corridor brings cooling breezes to our vineyard in the early afternoon. Since inland temperatures during the grape growing season often range from 92 to 100 degrees, this early, cooling air prevents the grapes from "cooking" all day long. Thus the grapes receive enough warmth to develop mature, full fruit flavors, but are cooled early and long enough to maintain natural acidity for good balance.

The 1996 vintage was almost perfect: enough, but not too much, rainfall early on, and definitely warm throughout growing season. The grapes were harvested October 9, 1996 with a Brix of 24.25 and a pH of 3.5. Long primary fermentation was used to extract full flavor and color. Lightly pressed to avoid any bitterness, the wine was barrelled in 30% new oak, (French and American) and the balance in 2-4 year old barrels.

The wine was bottled in August of 1998. We are certainly pleased with this vintage, reminding us of the fabulous 1990 (our first gold medal). We used the best grade of cork, 2", to bottle this wine. It will age and develop for 5-7 years easily.

WINE

Since the grapevines of Fratelli Perata are not irrigated, variations from vintage to vintage are more pronounced than in computer-blended wines. The 1995 vintage shows a long, lingering finish of wines from Northern California. It is the result of a very wet and cooler growing season than Paso Robles usually encounters. The flavors are not as fruit forward, but it is big, full-bodied wine, delightfully complex.

The 1997 Merlot derives from an entirely different growing season. The rains stopped January 31, 1997. From thence forward, temperatures were warmly constant throughout the spring and summer. This caused the vines to set a large crop, and thus we worried that 1997 would be a large crop, diluted vintage. However, due to the consistently warm temperature, all the grape clusters ripened to perfection, early and all at once. Harvest was two weeks early and condensed to six frantic weeks as compared to a nine or ten week harvest of normal years. The grapes were very ripe, with huge fruit flavors.

This Merlot was barrel fermented in 30% new French Chateau oak barrels. This magnum, a barrel sample, was bottled February 13, 1999. As delicious as it is now, it is but a hint of the great wine that will develop in the bottle. Patience is a virtue; dipping into a case over the years to test the vintage is the best fun.