



## **Fratelli Perata 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon**

The Templeton Gap area of the Paso Robles appellation offers a very fine environment for producing classic Cabernet Sauvignon. Soils are ideal; climate offers daytime temperatures with enough warmth to develop deep fruit flavors. The nighttime temperatures range 40 to 50 degrees cooler than the daytime high temperatures, so the acid levels are preserved.

Fratelli Perata uses our estate grown grapes only. We have three hills of Cabernet, each contributing a different flavor component, each ripening at different times during the harvest season, due to differences in soil and exposure to the sun. Our harvest is therefore done over a period of weeks to obtain optimum sugar/acid ratios and best flavor. In 1998, it was especially important to have complete control over the fruit.

1998 as not a typical growing season in Paso Robles. It was the coolest and wettest year we had seen since 1979. There were showers until mid-June, cool weather consistently, El Nino indeed. This did ensure that, as usual, we did not irrigate the grapevines. On the contrary, our vines responded by growing a bigger canopy of leaves than ever. Especially for the northern part of the vineyard, this meant pulling leaves to expose the grape clusters to the sun. This hill has a terrific southern exposure. In each year, it receives moisture from the fallow ground farther up the hill from where the vines start. It is always the last hill to be harvested, with the biggest berries in the clusters. We are always assured of 2 tons/acre from this piece. So viticultural practices were important well into the growing season due to the extra rainfall.

Also important was Gino's decision to postpone harvest of the Cabernet until the fruit was ripe. Some in the industry have derided this vintage, but they are tasting wines from fruit that was harvested before the late Fall warming period, and released months earlier than ours. Vineyards with too large a crop and nervous owners harvested before this extra ripening period, with the result of low sugars, unripe tasting fruit. Gino comes from a farm family, where patience is a resource. He waited until the optimum harvest time, rather than harvest substandard fruit. The wine with his name on it has to be something he is proud of, not just a widget to be sold.

By being one of the last vineyards harvested in 1998, the Cabernet grapes came in with an exceptional level of flavor. Harvest began October 24<sup>th</sup> and finished November 16<sup>th</sup>. The average Brix was 23.0, pH 3.56, TA .603 g/100ml, with tartaric acid used to balance the acidity on 2 lots. The crushed grapes minus stems were placed in fermenting bins holding 1 ½ tons. Bordeaux yeast was added to each lot. The pomace was punched down 4 times each day by hand. After fermenting on the skins for 14 days, the wine was gently pressed into oak barrels. Pressure of only 1.2 bar was used, assuring no bitterness in the new wine.

This Cabernet was put into a combination of 20% new oak, with 2/3 of those being French. The balance was put into barrels that were up to five years old. This gave this fruitier wine just enough oak to lend flavor and tannin, but not enough to be overpowering. New barrels impart the greatest amount of oak, with barrels more than three years old becoming neutral. Old barrels will still help intensify the wine by transpiration through the staves, so they are better than using stainless steel.

Prior to bottling, the Cabernet was blended with 6% Merlot to broaden the flavors. Bottling was April, 2001. Total production 933 cases. Release date March, 2002.

This Cabernet shows a classic Cabernet Sauvignon nose: cherry, spicy cinnamon, nutmeg tempered by hints of vanilla, all wrapped up in a soft oak cloak. At its release, it is apparent that it will yet develop in the bottle as the tannins soften.

This wine will pair nicely with the usual meaty entrees, but for more fun, try it with the Cranberry Biscotti we serve during the Zinfandel Festival. The dried cranberries bring out that element in this fruity Cabernet. So now you can have Cabernet for dinner and for dessert too.