



## **Fratelli Perata 1998 Merlot, Estate**

Paso Robles is a relatively young wine region, with the exception of Zinfandel. In the early 1970's, grape growers experimented with Merlot plantings. These grapes were much sought after by North Coast wineries for its exceptional Merlot fruit. This vineyard is located ½ mile south of our Fratelli Perata location, on a hill of the same elevation. So with Andre Tchelistcheff recommending Bordeaux varietals in the area, and wonderful Merlot within a stone's throw, our vineyard plans included Merlot.

Our vineyard's on hillside, rocky soil, with great sun exposure, benefiting from an air corridor from the Pacific Ocean 25 miles to the west, with temperatures warm during the day, but at 20m beginning to cool 40 degrees at night. The winemaker's Italian heritage teaches him to train his vines to produce no more than 2 tons/acre, and who recognizes, before it was popular, that stressing the grapevine produces more intense wines, and who will not make a wimpy Merlot.

Here's a Merlot, when entered at the Los Angeles County Fair, Pomona, was thought to be a Petrus, and resulted in a personal visit from one of the Fair's judges (vintage 1990, our first wine ever entered in competition, a gold).

And now on to **1998 Merlot**. This was a tricky year, certainly a test not only for the grape grower, but also the winemaker. Since moving to Paso Robles in 1978, only one year was the temperatures so cool and the rain so late, 1979.

Many grape growers were faced with a crop that just did not ripen easily. Again, the most severely harmed were vines that had too much fruit hanging; the plant just didn't have the temperatures required to ripen that much fruit. Mildew and botrytis became an issue. With too much humidity the threat of mildew was common throughout the region. So many hands were wrung and brows wrinkled trying to out-think and out-guess Mother Nature.

Coming from a farm family, Gino realized that there are whims of nature, and that every year is unique. You just have to work with what is happening. As a result of the cool season, and word of an impending new rainstorm, many growers decided to begin harvest. Certainly the grapes were not quite ready, but they were harvested to prevent loss of the entire crop.

Gino is a patient man: wait for the optimum harvest time. Some years it may not come. But there is no pride having your name on a bottle of wine you yourself would not drink. So he waited. It did not rain, it warmed: a last period of warming weather moved the ripeness to a point where harvest would be a welcome event, not just a necessary event.

So the numbers of the juice in 1998 were not the extravagant, huge ones of 1997. With this vintage we find the elegance of the grape, the subtle melodies of fruit with barrel, as opposed to the loud jam session of 1997.

Harvest began October 22<sup>nd</sup>, ending on the 31<sup>st</sup>. As with all years, since we are on hills, we do not harvest the entire crop in one day. The highest, ripest, hills are picked before the lower sections. The average Brix was 23.0, pH 3.53, TA .623 g/100ml. The juice was fermented with Bordeaux yeast for 11-12 days, with the cap punched down by hand 4 times/day for maximum contact between juice and skin. When pressed to barrels, pressure of only 1.2 bar was applied for the very lightest of pressings.

The wine finished fermenting in barrel, racked to clean barrels and aged for a total of 28 months before bottling in February 2001. As a natural product, unfiltered and unfinned prior to bottling, it will throw some sediment. We find this a satisfactory trade off to maintain the fullest flavors of the harvest.

At this point in its life, the acid and tannin of a young, big wine are beginning to soften. The fruit of strawberry and mocha, mixed with oak is beginning to come to the front.

This is a big Merlot, another that can be drunk now or laid down confidently for 5 more years while the tannins silken. It follows in our tradition of crafting Fratelli Perata wines to have a big mouth feel, with the depth to stand up to serving it with your best meals. Enjoy this Merlot with virtually any dish that uses Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. A traditional favorite at this Holiday time of year is fiadone.