

BUTTONWOOD

Overview

A single-varietal bottling of one of the four red Bordeaux varietals planted in the estate vineyard. Its velvety tannin structure destines Buttonwood Farm Malbec to become a go-to partner for local favorite, Santa Maria Style Tri-Tip!

In the Vineyard

Malbec is one of the six allowable grapes in a “claret” blend in Bordeaux, France. However, the grape gained fame with single varietal wines produced from Argentina – but setting the record straight, we planted it as part of our Bordeaux program. This is the second vintage for Malbec in our vineyard, which was grafted in 2008 to 1.59 acres of what had been Merlot. It thrives here, loving the rocky, alluvial soil and the long growing season. One of the first red wines to ripen, Malbec is pretty easy-going from a growing perspective and is able to easily ripen a substantial yield per vine. Malbec is planted next to its Bordelaise cousin Merlot in rolling hill and valley block that marches east to west. The clusters are long with larger berries than our other Bordeaux varietals and a gorgeous indigo color on the vine.

The Vintage

While the early stages of growth started out just fine (bud break, flowering, grape set), we kept waiting for summer to arrive. Cool, cloudy conditions throughout May, June and July delayed veraison and ripening, and lingering morning fog caused pressure to keep mildew at bay due to humidity in the canopy. Just when we thought it would stay forever spring-time weather, a four day triple-digit heat spike toward the end of August brought ripening back on schedule. The canopy was perfect for Malbec, providing just enough shading and we had little dehydration during this heat spike, but those raisined clusters were removed and the rest of the crop continued on its path to optimal ripeness. It seemed hard to believe, but Malbec was ready to pick right after we finished the Sauvignon Blanc harvest, and we picked it before the 2010 October rains. We had a very enjoyable pick of 6.07 tons on October 11, 2010 with the grapes coming in at 24.0 brix. Nice!

Winemaking

Excitement abounded as we hand harvest Malbec, our first red grapes of the 2010 harvest! We de-stemmed into 1.5 ton open top fermenting bins and put those into our cold room to extract color and skin tannins prior to fermentation. The cold room was cold - 32° and the grapes were cold from the early morning pick. But lo and behold, when punching down the grapes the morning of 10/12 the wine was fermenting! This native fermentation was so strong that we removed the must from the cold room and just let it go, punching down frequently during the day to control the racing temperature. The wine was totally dry by 10/22. We drained the free run juice to French oak barrels (10% new) and then pressed the skins to neutral oak barrels. Malolactic fermentation then occurred in barrel over the winter holiday. Each barrel was individually tasted twice, and in August of 2011 a blend was decided, those barrels racked and blended and then returned to barrel to marry. 2010 Malbec was bottled in the spring of 2012. The wine is not fined, and so can be considered vegan.

Tasting Notes

This is an inky dark purple wine, very royal-looking with magenta edges. Use a large-bowl glass for this wine, which with a swirl delivers a mélange of aromas – blueberry, blackberry, bacon and cardamom spice. The dark color and the berry notes of the nose are mirrored in the taste, with more blackberry, hints of black cherry and black plums. Spicy and earthy notes mingle with the fruit – a bit of black pepper, a whisper of mint and warm, rocky Buttonwood Vineyard earth. Tannins are high-toned, persistent but velvety. The 2010 Malbec is beautifully balanced with fruit notes layering in with bright acid and dusty tannins. This wine will continue to evolve with cellaring; keep for up to 7 years.

Pairing ideas

Beef! That rib-eye on the grill, beef stroganoff, Kobe burgers. OK, portabellas for you vegetarians!

