



CHATEAU MONTELENA

ESTABLISHED 1882

2021 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

Notes from the Winemaker, Matt Crafton

INTRODUCTION

What is a *food-friendly* wine? The term is bandied about to the point it's become intentionally vague and is used more for hollow advertising than as a meaningful characteristic. Moreover, it connotes that some wines are inherently food-unfriendly. And maybe that's true. But, for our purpose, Robert Mondavi's belief in wine that harmonizes with food is what sets the standard. Classical wines like Montelena complement food not only in flavor, but in tying one to the land and the individuals who work it. So yes, it is about flavor and it is about elevating the experience. But it's bigger than that: food-friendly wine should bring together people, the place and the future.

VINTAGE WEATHER

A warm, dry spring led to early budbreak and the risk of frost. Thankfully, the weather remained mild and the growing season leaped forward with the first significant heat arriving in May. Bloom was punctuated by very warm temperatures, which reduced fruit set and the overall size of the crop. Despite the low yields, what remained was excellent. As harvest approached, temperatures remained in the low to mid-90s, exactly what's needed to ripen Cabernet Sauvignon at the end of the season.

NOSE

The density and richness of this wine are teased right from the start. Pomegranate, plum and dried blackberry lead a lavish charge of ripe, dark fruit. In the midst, there's a hint of barrel toast, first as charcoal and then as fresh wood. The aromas remain elevated, with potpourri and black pepper initially, and then concluding with fig jam and cherry tobacco.

PALATE

This Cabernet has all of the markers of a great Montelena wine. The palate is bursting with a dynamic and seemingly haphazard array of fruit, acid and tannin, all tied together with fresh mint and graphite. Rest assured, all of these elements will settle into place over time. There's a beautiful, almost velvety, softness from the Merlot that rounds off most of the coarse edges and lends refinement. Best of all, this wine is approachable now but will build complexity with time in glass.

FINISH

The baking spices really come into focus here along with notes of earth and toasted almond. The tannins are chalky, rather than angular, and roasted hazelnut complements the fresh raspberry and black tea. This is truly an elegant, restrained, food-friendly wine.

Technical Information

HARVEST DATES

September 6 – October 1

ALCOHOL

14.1%

BLEND

89% Cabernet Sauvignon
10% Merlot
1% Cabernet Franc

BARREL AGING

16 months in French and Eastern European oak, 26% new

BOTTLING DATE

April 2023

WINEMAKER

Matt Crafton



CHATEAU MONTELENA

ESTABLISHED 1882

2021 Napa Valley Chardonnay

Notes from the Winemaker, Matt Crafton

INTRODUCTION

Time is the critical element in Montelena wines. It's the opposite of "best practices" in agriculture and the standardized, proverbial focus on being lean and efficient. Luxury embodies time. It's in the nature of vineyard expression over the course of an entire year, or the expression of site over the decades. A wine's maturation in barrel is delineated as a function of time, despite its inherent complexity. This, in turn, is reflected in the patience of discovery: the anticipation of a wine's future development in bottle. Most importantly, it's the time taken to savor a glass—and the moment—when it's finally opened to be enjoyed and shared.

VINTAGE WEATHER

A warm start to spring pushed the vines out of dormancy two weeks ahead of average and the mild weather pattern persisted through May. The light crop, coupled with ample sunshine and minimal fog through summer, accelerated ripening further and bolstered the robust flavors of the vintage. Harvest began slightly ahead of average and progressed methodically. Although yields in the vineyard were low, we're very pleased with the quality of the resulting wines.

NOSE

The aromatic diversity here is breathtaking. The wine cleanly and discreetly checks off all of the boxes of a great vintage. Orange blossom? Yes. Green apple? Plentiful. White peach? Absolutely. In warm years, the wines can occasionally lean too tropical in aroma, but that isn't the case here. The floral notes of chamomile and honeysuckle moderate the grandeur of the fruit but also slowly subside to unveil lemon balm, cinnamon and mint.

PALATE

The parade of bright, zesty fruit continues on the palate, but it's just the beginning. The wine's texture and energy are on full display, brimming with minerality, lemon curd and crème brûlée. The delicate balance between the spine of acidity and the breadth of flavor is both dynamic and fluid. The ripe melon notes are particularly captivating, lending freshness and richness. While there are some soft barrel undertones magnified by a subtle chalkiness, it will take some time before this additional layer matches the surrounding opulence.

FINISH

The finish initially leans exotic and tropical, first as banana and then as starfruit before slowly yielding to D'Anjou pear and baking spice. Again, the texture here is beautifully integrated but still developing. For now, it's easy enough to enjoy the candied citrus, vanilla and marzipan.

Technical Information

HARVEST DATES

August 17–September 7

ALCOHOL

13.7%

BLEND

100% Chardonnay

BARREL AGING

10 months in French oak

BOTTLING DATE

August 12–18, 2022

WINEMAKER

Matt Crafton



CHATEAU MONTELENA

ESTABLISHED 1882

2021 Estate Zinfandel

Notes from the Winemaker, Matt Crafton

INTRODUCTION

For something to appear effortless, an incredible amount of effort has to be expended. It's paradoxical, but accurate. This is just as true in winemaking as it is in life, be it an intricately choreographed ballet or a perfectly-timed pass from the quarterback. To the untrained eye, both appear completely natural, which only heightens our sense of awe. What we don't see are the hours, months, and years of grit, vicious preparation, and focus. There's nothing "hands-off" about accomplishment. At Montelena, the brilliant transparency so evident in our wines is the product of astonishing effort, not merely getting out of the way. True simplicity isn't that simple.

VINTAGE WEATHER

An early spring and plenty of warmth woke the vines up early. Despite the lack of winter rain, the dry-farmed vines thrived as the summer heat arrived. By June, it was clear that the vintage would be light on volume, as small clusters with fewer than normal berries had set. This is actually an advantage for Zinfandel, as the sun-exposed berries ripened in unison, which is always the goal. Harvest was methodical and predictable allowing for the development of complex flavors and textures.

NOSE

The wine opens with fresh cherries, black pepper and tea leaves. It's perfume-like and intoxicating. The varietal character is quite evident right now: forest floor, briar and roasted mushroom. That earthiness, which is part of the sense of place, is an excellent counterpoint to the dynamic fresh fruit, which leans red at first but quickly transitions to dark and dried aromas over time.

PALATE

Bright, candy-like fruit on the palate layers into refined but slightly-angular tannin adding tension and chewiness. Far from being fully-refined, this wine still has some edges, which add spiciness and hint at its future development. The acid beautifully cuts through the tension, imparting the freshness and liveliness one would expect from a young Montelena Zinfandel. That acid should recede and integrate over time, bolstering complexity and helping to maintain food-friendliness.

FINISH

The wine closes with dark chocolate and mint. The tannins here are leathery and there's a hint of graphite from the barrel toast. Above all, it's mouthwatering, teasing with grape candy and kirsch.

Technical Information

HARVEST DATES

September 9 – September 18

ALCOHOL

14.3%

BLEND

100% Zinfandel/Primitivo

BARREL AGING

16 months in French and American oak, 18% new

BOTTLING DATE

March 2023

WINEMAKER

Matt Crafton