



Petite Syrah

(North Coast - Ramsay Winery)

Tasting Notes

In 1979 there were very few vineyards planted in the area now called Carneros. Most insiders thought the climate and soil conditions were too extreme for quality grape growing. With no natural barriers to protect it, Carneros receives the full brunt of stiff tidal winds blowing in from San Pablo Bay (the upper half of San Francisco Bay), dropping afternoon temperatures far below those in Napa Valley a few miles north. Heavy fog frequently accompanies the wind, blocking essential sunlight and lowering temperatures even further.

Formed during the ice ages by the receding waters of San Pablo Bay, Carneros soils tend to be dense, shallow and high in clay. Water is scarce, and what little there is reeks of sulfur. Despite the odds, a handful of daring souls had attempted to cultivate wine grapes in Carneros between its homesteading in 1836 and 1942, when Louis M. Martini purchased 200 acres of Carneros property. A few vineyards were planted over the next four decades, but the region went mostly unnoticed until the 1980s. With these harsh conditions in mind, Kent Rasmussen planted his first six acres of Carneros Pinot Noir in 1979. He added two acres in 1981 and two more in 1986.

Before long the region gained prominence as word spread about the up-and-coming producers of Carneros, with Kent at the top. A quarter century later he has established an international reputation for growing and producing distinguished Pinot Noir, and Carneros is now considered one of the best growing regions in the world. Kent's earliest plantings were suitably mature to start making ultra-premium Pinot Noir by 1986. He crushed about 10 tons of Pinot Noir and small amounts of other varieties, including Chardonnay, purchased from neighboring vineyards using the tractor shed and garage as a cellar. The wines were very well received and the winery started to grow. In a few years, Kent and his wife Celia Ramsay were running the business full time producing great Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Starting in 1989, Kent and Celia launched a second brand, called "Ramsay" - Celia's maiden name - which was originally intended to focus on some 'less-than-usual' varietal wines. But as time passed, the Ramsay brand has taken on an entirely different identity, that of a true 'second label'. Best known for its high quality, but lower-price, Ramsay Pinot Noir is often poured by the glass in wine bars and restaurants. The Ramsay-brand line also includes a Cabernet Sauvignon, and a Merlot.

Since its modest beginnings, the Kent Rasmussen Winery has evolved into one of the most important Pinot Noir producers in the Carneros region.

Characteristics: On the nose, this wine is a classic California Pinot Noir—lots of nice dark-berry fruit, toasty oak along with the “earthiness” that is only seen in the best Pinot. On the palate, this wine is a stunning example

of what Pinot Noir can be—rich, complex, yet full of bright fruitiness and spice. The predominant characters follow the nose—dark bramble-berry fruit, along with some bright cherry notes, toasty oak and a good hit of classic Burgundian complexity. Over it all is a bright balance of cardamom spice. The tannins are in just a little drying, sort of like chewing on a marigold, and offset the fruit nicely.

Food Pairing: Rich meat dishes of lamb, pork or game.

