

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Road 31 Wine Co. 2013 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest dates: Sep. 15 and Sept 27

Oak: 33% new; (60% French, 40% Tokaji/Hungarian)

pH at bottle: 3.74

Alcohol at bottle: 14.1%

Brix at harvest: 24.2 to 25.1

Time on Oak: 11 months

TA at bottle: 5.21 g/L

Total production: 845 cases

Vineyard: Three vineyards contributed to this wine. From the Nord Vineyard, at the southern mouth of the Napa River where the water spills into the San Pablo/San Francisco Bay, comes the prettiness of clone 115. Stanly Ranch, in Carneros just west across the Napa River from Nord, provides the structure of clone 114 and the robustness of clone 777. Finally, a “new old” friend, a re-planted vineyard on a hillside that I used to get fruit from (before it was torn out): Castrucci Vineyard on Suscol Ridge provides a more powerful, hillside presentation of clone 115.

Vintage: 2013 continued this peculiar combination of worsening drought and bountiful harvest; these two factors combined to make a really tasty wine ... and plenty of it. To produce superior wines, vines want (well, perhaps “need” is a better word) to suffer. It moves the plant’s focus from growing greenery to concentrating on its offspring: the berries. Skin and phenolic ripening was excellent in 2013, mostly because the vines were at a deficit for water due to the drought. Yet once we started picking, the berry size and clusters weights were pleasantly above expectation. The fruit carried a smidge less acidity onto the crushpad, but only slightly less than previous vintages. The result is a most friendly wine with ageability.

Winecrafting: A three-day cold soak preceded nearly a score of days in fermenter. This was a vintage that would ferment fast, if left to its own devices. Temperature control and yeast selection were key to letting it run out and coaxing out complexity. Run to barrel before the finish of fermentation, the wine sat on its gross lees (without oxygen nor racking) for the entire year of aging, which adds a creamy texture and significant weight to an already intense wine. A mixture of Tokaji (Hungarian) and Mercurey (French) oak contributes a nice blend of spice and vanilla to the profile.

Wine: The 2013 is a flashback to the 2008 (another second-year-of-drought wine). This wine presents a profile of red fruit on the nose, but dark fruit on the palate. The mouthfeel is weighty and luxurious. A touch of earth and rose in the aromatic is balanced by toasty and spicy oak on the finish. But, not only is the 2013 one of those cooler kids in the junior class, but it may well arrive at a future high school reunion in its own private jet. It has longevity. Over the next decade, it will transform from energetic...to elegant.

Road 31 Wine Co. produces tiny batches of one handcrafted Napa Valley Pinot Noir. The label pays homage to the gravel road outside my grandparents’ homestead back in Kansas—where I too was born—and the mighty green ’66 Ford Truck that drove it regularly. My grandfather, a farmer, willed the truck to me when he passed in ’86, and the truck now seems right at home bouncing among the vines of Napa. The green truck and I oversee farming, harvest and hauling of the grapes to cave space borrowed from some friends up in Stag’s Leap district of Napa. My hands handle every step of the crafting: fermenting, barrel aging, bottling, and peddling. I am a one-man show (with a little help now and then from my wife, my cousins, and Daisy Dog).

–Kent Fortner (Winecrafter/Truck Owner)



NAPA VALLEY