

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grain-inducing pinot

Road 31 Wine Co. 2014 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest dates: Aug 29 and Sep 9

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

pH at bottle: 3.77

Alcohol at bottle: 14.1%

Brix at harvest: 24.2 to 25.1

Time on Oak: 11 months

TA at bottle: 5.3 g/L

Total production: 835 cases

Vineyard: Three vineyard plots 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.

Vintage: 2014 will always be marked by the “West Napa” 6.0 earthquake that hit just days before the start of harvest. Located directly below the vineyards that comprise Road 31, the earthquake had no direct impact on the fruit or quality, but giant cracks in the ground opened up, the local rivers and springs flowed anew, and the valley scrambled to salvage wine from damaged tanks and barrels. The third year of the drought, the 2014 was also noted for its small berries leading to intense flavors.

Winemaking: 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: With an intensity derived from the concentrating nature of the dry growing season, the 2014 is full and ripe, with dark fruits, a note of cola, and vanilla spice. But also—appropriately, given the earthquake—this wine boasts a hint of earth and is extra lively on the palate.

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 (Winemaker/Truck Owner)



NAPA VALLEY