

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grain-inducing pinot

Road 31 Wine Co. 2010 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest dates: September 17 to Oct 10

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

pH at bottle: 3.76

Alcohol at bottle: 14.1%

Brix at harvest: 23.2 to 25.7

Time on Oak: 11 months

TA at bottle: 5.6 g/L

Total production: 772 cases

Vineyard: Three vineyard blocks 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, provided two very different blocks. The structure of clone 114 comes from block 17, which is higher on the hillside, and the robustness of clone 777 comes from block 14, which is tucked down away from the wind.

Vintage: After three years of drought, 2010 finally brought significant rain. While drought stress does concentrate flavors, there's a point at which stress becomes enhanced interrogation. All of California was desperate for a drink in 2010, and thank goodness we got it. This was a much cooler growing season, with no appreciable heat strikes, which is music to Pinot Noir's ears. The heavy fall rains held off until way after harvest, keeping the growing season itself relatively dry, but this is the year that Mother nature put the "coastal" back in coastal California.

Winemaking: A five-day cold soak preceded 14 days in fermenter, in an attempt to extract all that was present in the skins in this subtle vintage. Run to barrel before the finish of fermentation, the wine sat on its gross lees (without racking) for the entire time it was in barrel, which adds wonderful texture and weight to the mid-palate. Judicious use of Tokaj (Hungarian) oak for a portion of the new oak added a nice hint of spice to the profile.

Wine: If the 2009 Road 31 Pinot Noir was Rachel Welch, the 2010 is a little Japanese woman in a Kimono: equally sexy, but for an entirely different set of reasons. Definitely pretty and decidedly subtle, the 2010 delivers perhaps the quintessential beguiling Pinot Noir experience. High tone aromatics of rose hips, perfume, Bing cherry, and a hint of cola lead into a silky but delicate mouth feel filled with both red and black fruits, with a slight tip of the balance to the former. The surprise—and glory—is the finish, which is sustained like a standing ovation at the end of a ballet. The acid structure of this wine means it will drink well into a decade past the vintage date, and it will always be a great compliment to food.

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