

Spring Mountain District Tasting Notes

MASTER SOMMELIER TASTING NOTES

On Wednesday, September 1, 2004, wine writer and author, Karen MacNeil, and Master Sommeliers, Ronn Wiegand, Peter Marks, Tim Gaiser and Gilles de Chambure tasted five flights of Spring Mountain District 1999, 2000, and 2001 Merlots and Cabernet Sauvignons. The tasting was facilitated by Paul Wagner, Wine Educator, Balzac Communications. Their tasting notes follow.

PAUL WAGNER

Tasting Facilitator, Instructor, Viticulture and Winery Technology Department, Napa Valley College & Principal, Balzac Communications

MERLOT: The tasting group had a very positive response to these wines. The wines were described as very balanced and well-made, with good fruit. The fruit character was primarily red fruits with a bit of an herbal note, and the texture of the wines were of special note: plush and balanced, with an interesting stony, compact character on the mid-palate.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON: These wines were described as having deep, rich fruit, still with a tendency to red rather than black fruit: the best had notes of ripe red berries and cranberries. The wines were elegant and supple, with great balance. The texture had some chalky notes from the terroir, but combined those with ripe, supple tannins and elegance.

With both varietals the panel was very impressed with the wines as a whole. They felt the winemaking was of a high caliber, and that the wines spoke to the character of the soil and climate, as well as the unique individuals who made them.

KAREN MACNEIL

*Wine and food writer, author of the award-winning book *The Wine Bible*, Chairman of the Professional Wine Studies Program at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, host of a 13-part public television series "Wine, Food, and Friends with Karen MacNeil", and winner of the 2004 "Outstanding Wine and Spirits Professional of the Year" award granted by the James Beard Foundation.*

"... these Spring Mountain wines showed extremely graceful tannin structures — in other words, they were just about the most supple, seamless, satiny mountain wines I've ever tried."

"In general, the Spring Mountain wines displayed an uncommon amount of balance. In particular, one associates mountain wines with slightly elevated amounts of perceptible tannin (at least when



Spring Mountain District Tasting Notes

the wines are young). But these wines showed extremely graceful tannin structures — in other words, they were just about the most supple, seamless, satiny mountain wines I've ever tried.

As for flavors, the wines displayed copious amounts of red fruit (raspberry, dried cherry, sour cherry, dried cranberry) and sweet pipe tobacco. But what I appreciated most was the sense of minerality which 'lifted' the flavors and gave the wines uniqueness. In particular this sense of minerality is, I think, key. European wines are often viewed as having a corner on the market of minerality and California wines are often accused of missing out on this sophisticated aspect of wine flavor. But Spring Mntn had an enviable amount of minerality. Was it the ancient soils? (My understanding is that SM (Mayacamas Mountain range) is one of the oldest of the NV mountains...). The vast diversity of soils?

I also found that the winemaking was — thankfully — restrained. None of these wines seemed overextracted, opulent to the point of obscenity, or so oaky that other flavors were completely beside the point.

All in all, I was surprised and delighted by the wines."

RONN WIEGAND

Master Sommelier & Master of Wine, publisher, Restaurant Wine

"Spring Mountain wines really have improved in recent years. It's not just the Cabernets that have attracted my attention, but also the Merlots, which are among the best from Napa Valley."

PETER MARKS

Master Sommelier, General Manager Copia

"I would say the Spring Mountain wines are truly unique and high in quality. Rich, but not too rich, well-balanced, flavorful, complex wines with the ability to drink well young and have the capacity to age gracefully."

"In looking back over my notes, what I saw consistently in the aromas were dark red and black fruits (cherry, plum, currants and occasionally blackberry). I recall someone in the group saying the wines had more red than black fruits, yet I found a fairly even split between the red and black types. Their intensity was very good and quite rich, but not over the top.

I also noted a slight earthiness in most of the wines. More of a mineral or rock-like earth character



Spring Mountain District Tasting Notes

as opposed to dusty/loamy earth note common in Oakville/Rutherford/Stags Leap. Finally, in at least half the wines I found a hint of herbs. I don't mean this in the negative sense such as herbal/vegetative, but rich, sweet, fresh herbs such as rosemary, thyme and slight pine. This herb note was subtle and offered a beautiful contrast and complexity to the rich fruit character, and I find it very appealing. May be due to the cooler climate of this appellation compared to other Napa AVAs.

On the palate, across the board the wines were almost all impeccably balanced. A few wines reached high levels of ripeness and have obvious "hot" notes from their alcohol, but I was generally surprised not to find more of them. I loved the good levels of soft/well-integrated tannins that seemed perfectly matched to the level of fruit to allow for 10+ years of aging. I noticed that I rarely commented upon the acid levels, which to me means the wines were exceptionally well balanced in acid/pH. Oak levels were generally very good, with not too many over-oaked Cabs. Overall, most of the wines had good, rich flavors and medium-full body, and were not big, huge, super concentrated, alcoholic, inky monsters.

These favorable notes could be highly correlated to the quality of the vintage, and I'm sure this is certainly the case. But in tasting the few non-2001 wines and from past experience, I would say the Spring Mountain wines are truly unique and high in quality. Rich, but not too rich, well-balanced, flavorful, complex wines with the ability to drink well young and have the capacity to age gracefully."

TIM GAISER

Master Sommelier

Common denominators such as a red-fruit/cranberry character, naturally high acidity, and a pronounced chalky earthy quality in the mid-palate were readily apparent in most, if not all, of the wines. After the tasting one could only conclude that wines from the Spring Mountain appellation do have a very recognizable "stamp" of identity."

"Terroir is not the first word that comes to mind with Napa Cabernet. However, a recent tasting of 22 top quality Cabernet and Merlot wines from the Spring Mountain appellation demonstrated more than a handful of unifying characteristics. Common denominators such as a red-fruit/cranberry character, naturally high acidity, and a pronounced chalky earthy quality in the mid-palate were readily apparent in most, if not all, of the wines.

After the tasting one could only conclude that wines from the Spring Mountain appellation do have a very recognizable "stamp" of identity."



Spring Mountain District Tasting Notes

GILLES DE CHAMBURE

Master Sommelier, Senior Wine Educator, Robert Mondavi

"The Spring Mountain tasting did highlight a commonality of character in the wines and also showed the diversity of individual style and personalities that makes wine a reflection of Man and Nature. The overall quality of the wines was at a very high standard, highlighting the commitment and dedication to viticulture of this "mountain" community."

"Thank you for inviting me to Spring Mountain growers tasting last week. Please pass on my congratulations to the vintners, for a valiant cause in their effort to search for and define the uniqueness of their location."

The tasting did highlight a commonality of character in the wines and also showed the diversity of individual style and personalities that makes wine a reflection of Man and Nature. The overall quality of the wines was at a very high standard, highlighting the commitment and dedication to viticulture of this "mountain" community.

All the Merlots showed a beautiful ripe fruit character and aromatic lift, balanced with a freshness and elegance that combined character and finesse with drinkability. Merlot seems to do extremely well on this mostly east / morning light side of the Napa valley and the cooling evening and night temperatures give the wines a freshness and acidity to balance the ripe character of the fruit. Altitude and hillside vineyards may also help in naturally lowering yields, to give these wines personality, character and a sense of place.

The theme of ripe fruit and overall quality of the winemaking was echoed on the Cabernet Sauvignon flights. The rich ripe fruit qualities (red cherries and plum) and especially the suppleness of the tannin gave wines of elegance and finesse (versus power extraction and alcohol). The balance between the suppleness of texture surrounding the rich concentrated core of fruit gave wines approachable early on with still a great ageing potential, it seems that 2001 was a great year for Spring Mountain."

