



2000 SYRAH "BLACK LABEL CUVEE" *Santa Barbara County*

Winemaker's Notes:

Years ago, I started hearing kids describing things that were good as "bad". If something was especially pleasing in an awesome sort of way, then it was really "baaad". Being in my forties, I will admit that the latest in hip linguistics could be happening right under my nose, and I would not even know it. But it seems to me that at least one of the more recent terms for something that's really good, is that it's "sick". Now I have known that this 2000 Black Label Syrah was going to be quite good from the moment we started crushing its grapes. The fruit was just too strong to suggest otherwise. But at its first racking over a year ago, a point at which the master blend was put together for the first time, I asked one of my young winemakers how it tasted in the tank. When he said, "it's totally sick", that was when I knew we might have something really special. That was when I knew we might have one of those wines that hits a sort of stupefying level of quality.

When you think about the vineyard sources in this blend, it is sort of nauseating. In vintages like 2000, with a little burst of warm weather at the end, our Estate Syrah goes through this sublime metamorphosis, ripening into the most intense, spicy fruit I know of. Then, David Thompson (Thompson Vineyard) and Loren Colahan (Alisos Vineyard) grow astonishing Syrah in the Los Alamos Valley, and it all goes in the blend. Finally, when you think that I was able to twist Steve Beckmen's arm (Beckmen Vineyard) for a pinch of the best Syrah in the Santa Ynez Valley, it really is disgusting. We took all the barrels from these great sources and pumped them into one tank. Real tough. A year and a half later, after a nice gentle *élevage* in the best 50% new French Oak barrels that money can buy, well, the wine is totally sick.

The theme here is one of looming girth. The wine is dark, dense, and extremely rich. But what really impresses me are the accompanying effects of restraint and elegance. Often, when I taste wines that are this ambitious in their ripeness, extraction, and cooperage, they come across like Port. They show lots of fruit and sweetness, but an aldehydic, raisny overripeness goes along with it. This wine's acidity and textural density do a great job holding its more high-toned Syrah fruit tightly together. The wine lets your palate explore the realm of a hedonistic, dark chocolatey fruit syrup, but it never lets you get stuck in it like quicksand. Intense blackberry resonates throughout the wine. In the nose are Syrah's trophy elements of pepper, truffles, and violets. I love the way this wine's amplitude is conveyed to the senses as beautiful. It's rare.

Oh yeah, one final note. While this is the best Syrah I have ever made, to accommodate the soft economy, we lowered the price. Enjoy.

Technical Notes:

VARIETAL COMPOSITION: 100% Syrah

VINEYARDS:

- 34% Thompson Vineyard, Los Alamos Valley
- 27% Alisos Vineyard, Los Alamos Valley
- 21% Beckman Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley
- 18% Babcock Estate Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley

FISHED WINE: Residual Sugar: Dry;

Alcohol: 13.8%; pH: 3.54; TA: 6.8 g/L

COOPERAGE: 40% new French oak Remond, 60% seasoned French oak

TIME IN BARRELS: 18 months BOTTLING DATE: June 2002

TOTAL PRODUCTION: 1,125 cases 12/750ml

RELEASE DATE: August 1, 2002