



## 2006 SYRAH "SANTA BARBARA COUNTY"

### Winemaker's Notes:

2006 marks the beginning of a new direction with this wine. This bottling was previously known as our Black Label Cuvee. For nearly 10 years "Black Label" Syrah was my way of saying "Reserve" Syrah. The idea was prompted by a couple of factors, not the least of which was my belief that the idea of *reserve* wines had been overplayed and bastardized by the late 1990's. But also my prejudice was for an unabashed expression of Syrah. I brooded over the wines to force out their extraction and color. I wanted something that would signify the fact that the wines were big and smoky.

So what happened over the years to this Black Label concept? Since 1997 the wines have been stellar. Why did it finally fade away? Well, the main problem has been the explosion of competition in the Syrah market. While I started with very small quantities of Syrah that initially sold for \$50 a bottle, as I increased production, those prices could not be maintained. Sometime around 2001 I thought the worst case scenario for my Syrah would be \$30 retail. Then it became apparent that my distributors were losing interest. I recalculated my deepest, darkest, most dismal reality at \$25. After all, the wines were great. Certainly consumers would recognize it.

Then, a few years ago, I had a discussion with a respected retailer in Southern California. When Michael Brick of Hi-Time Cellars in Orange County told me, *'While you can sell tiny quantities of great Syrah at worthwhile prices to the minute percentage of America's wine buying cognoscenti, thanks to the Australians, and their deliveries of boatloads of Syrah onto our shores, Joe Wine Drinker is now convinced that if you are paying more than \$10 a bottle for the stuff, you are getting ripped off.'*

For the past few years I now produce *tiny* quantities of great Syrah that Michael described that are part of my Terroir Exclusives portfolio and are sold, at worthwhile prices, only through the winery, to an audience that appreciates them.

I am not the only one who has felt the pressures of a saturated Syrah market, so have many of the growers. Fortunately I am working with a great vineyard at the moment, Estelle, whose proprietors are reasonable enough to supply me with fruit with which I can render beautiful wine at a great price.

And so it is with this 2006 Syrah that we have our first "Santa Barbara County" bottling. The label is still Black. If you want to call it the Black Label Syrah, you are welcome to do so. It won't have the \$50 retail or be hedonistically chunky as in the past. This wine is more slender but still has oodles of character. In fact, this may be one of the most aromatically smoky and gamey Syrahs I have ever made. It strikes me like a lot of the wines I have had out of the Rhone's Cornas area; grilled and rustic, but with a richness and weight that is still the hallmark of good Syrah.

### Technical Notes:

VARIETAL COMPOSITION: 98% Syrah, 2% other varietals

VINEYARDS:

85% Estelle Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley

15% Babcock Estate, Sta. Rita Hills

FINISHED WINE: Residual Sugar: Dry, pH: 3.77, TA: 7.3 gm/L, Alcohol: 13.9%

TIME IN BARRELS: 13 months, 25% new French oak

BOTTLING DATE: November 2007 PRODUCTION: 1,289 cases 12/750 ML

RELEASE DATE: March 2008 SUGGESTED CA RETAIL PRICE: \$21.00 per 750 ML