



TASTING NOTES

Deep purple-garnet in color. Spice and black cherry aromas leap into the nose! Wonderfully aromatic yet subtle toasty oak complements the fruitiness in the mouth. Incredibly soft and smooth. I look forward to cellaring a bottle or two seeing how the wine will develop in 2-3 years, yet enjoying it for dinner tonight.

BENCH VINEYARD SOURCES

For our Bench Vineyards Merlot, two sites were chosen in northern Dry Creek Valley: the Pedroncelli Estate Vineyards along Dry Creek Road east of the winery, and Jasper Long's vineyard, a couple of miles down the road from our own vineyard. The name chosen for this

vineyard blend describes the natural terraces that flank Dry Creek Valley and rise gradually into the steep hills. Characterized by sloped topography and gravelly/rocky residual soils, the "*Bench Vineyards*" offer unique growing conditions that bring out the best in several premium red wine varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc.

WINEMAKING

The 2001 harvest brought in ripe, clean fruit the very beginning of September. The fruit was crushed into stainless steel fermenters and fermented for just over a week. The frequent pumping of juice over the skins (or cap) during this process brings to the wine a substantial increase in color and flavor intensity.

The young wine was aged in small American oak barrels for 12 months in order to develop smoothness and complexity. A blend of 25% new oak is used in the barrel aging program; this allows the fruit flavors to come forward while relying on a subtle backbone of oak components. Sangiovese (5%) adds that bit of extra fleshy fruit flavor with a bit more tannin to make this a fuller-bodied, age-worthy Merlot.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Appellation:	Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County
Composition:	95% Merlot, 5% Sangiovese
Barrel Aging:	12 months in American oak
Alcohol:	13.8%
pH:	3.44
Total acidity:	.63g/100ml
Bottled:	August 2003
Production:	6,100 cases