

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grain-inducing pinot

Road 31 Wine Co. 2009 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest dates: September 7 through 16

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

pH at bottle: 3.65

Alcohol at bottle: 14.2%

Brix at harvest: 24.1 to 26.1

Time on Oak: 11 months

TA at bottle: 5.25 g/L

Total production: 818 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 clones 114 comes from block 14, which is higher on the hillside, and the prettiness of clone 777 comes from block 17, which is tucked down away from the wind.

Vintage: I fear that saying “2009 was a glorious year” might seem a bit odd; after all, 2009 marked that whole financial Armageddon thing. But the truth is, Mother Nature doesn’t have a stock portfolio, and she couldn’t care less about credit default swaps. In fact, in 2009 she delivered the last in a string of three fantastic drought years; “fantastic” because stressed vines yield super-concentrated flavors. 2009 was her crowning third act, her “Return of the Jedi,” her “Return of the King.”

Winemaking: Couldn’t have asked for better fruit coming in. A four-day cold soak preceded 14 days in fermenter. 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. Using Tokaj (Hungarian) oak for a portion of the new oak added a nice hint of spice to the profile.

Wine: The 2009 Road 31 Pinot Noir Napa Valley is beautiful, yet beguiling. Yes, it is sunny-California Pinot Noir—blackberry, cherry, toasty oak—but there is a hint of the Old World there too: leather, tobacco, and earth. The first impression quickens the pulse, but the wine’s structure is such that five years in the cellar will yield even more poise, depth, and beauty. Those who enjoyed the 2007 and 2008 will love the 2009; it takes the best of both of those, turns it up a notch, and adds a surly French accent.

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