



LUXURIOUS WINES IN NAPA VALLEY: CLASSIC MEETS MODERN AT HOURGLASS WINES

Posted by Jenna Francisco | Featured, Wine & Spirits | October 20, 2016.

As one of the premiere wine destinations in the world, Napa Valley has no shortage of excellent wineries. Besides its place as a wine and culinary mecca, it's first and foremost a land of incredible natural beauty. The valley that extends from the town of Napa in the south to Calistoga, the narrowest point at the north, enjoys a perfect combination of warm daytime temperatures and very cool, foggy nights thanks to the valley's proximity to the Bay Area. Add to that Mediterranean climate the rich, diverse soils of Napa Valley, and it's no surprise that you'd be hard pressed to find a bad bottle of wine coming out of Napa Valley.



However, thanks to the sheer number of wineries in Napa Valley now, what can be a challenge here is knowing where to find wineries with history and heart. **Hourglass Wines is one such winery—a winery that's deeply connected to the place, both from its honoring of the terroir and the winery's history in the area.** But the winery is also forward-thinking—as you'll see, innovation is just as important as terroir or history in helping Hourglass Wines become a respected producer of Cabernet Sauvignon and other classic Napa Valley wines.



Jeff Smith, the proprietor and vintner of Hourglass Wines, came into these beautiful vineyards thanks to the determination of his father, Ned, who bought the original six-acre parcel in 1976. Here he planted Zinfandel, his favorite grape, but when the vineyard was ravaged by phylloxera in the early 1990's, Jeff asked Dr. Mark Kliewer, Dean of the UC Davis viticulture program and one of the world's respected specialists in grape growing climates, to provide a site evaluation.

Dr. Kliewer immediately recognized the importance of the Hourglass site's unique location and predicted that the property had the potential to become one of the premier Cabernet Sauvignon growing sites in Napa, with the ability to produce complex, deeply-structured wines. Being situated at the narrowest pinch of Napa Valley's hourglass shape, the vineyard's terroir is unique—a combination of influences from the Mayacamas and Vaca mountain ranges. It also enjoys a perfect growing climate with the warm days to get the fruit ripe but with a dominance of cool breezes to cool grapes in the afternoon.

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The vineyard was named “Hourglass” to reflect its unique soil and geographical location and later replanted to Cabernet Sauvignon in 1992. Hourglass Wines received almost instant fame with its 1997 wines—their very first release! A local “cult tasting” featured a flight of 1997 vintage Cabernets that critic Robert Parker, Jr. had scored 100 points, and one more new wine thrown in just for fun: the Hourglass Wines 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon. To everyone’s amazement, this new, unknown wine held its own in the tastings, and soon after, a wine that was not even for sale was sold out. Since then, the Hourglass Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon has built a steadfast following, becoming one of the most sought-after small production Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons in the country, affirming Dr. Kliewer’s prediction from all those years before.



Innovation and growth have been key components of the Hourglass vision. One important step was the acquisition of the Blueline vineyard. It was a surprise discovery on a Sunday drive on the beautiful Silverado Trail near the town of Calistoga, at the north end of Napa Valley. There Jeff found a site located just below the Vaca Mountains with two streams framing it. Jeff sites the importance of this vineyard’s location: “for thousands of years these streams have fishtailed back and forth, creating the rock and gravel beds that are the underpinning of the vineyard’s soil structure. If you look at the great vineyards of the world, almost all of them have a rock component of some kind.” Since then, it’s become home to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec and allowed Hourglass to diversify beyond the excellent Cabernet Sauvignon at their original vineyard.



Two more recent changes have been the construction of a modern, Olle-Lundberg designed state-of-the-art winery in 2009 and the addition of noted winemaker Tony Biagi to the team in 2012. Jeff and Tony consider Hourglass a “post-modern” winery—a winery that takes present-day winemaking to the next level through a fusion of both modern and classical techniques. Through Hourglass Wines’ connection to the place and honoring of the unique terroir combined with their interest in innovating and growing, the winery has become one of the “it” wineries in Napa Valley.

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Here are some of the beautiful wines that Hourglass Wines produces.

2014 HGIII

The HGIII is blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah. An elegant, fruity, silky wine that showcases an excellent example of what a good blend can be—the flavors and textures of the three varietals playing off each other to create that perfect balance. \$50

2013 Hourglass Estate Cabernet Sauvignon

This wine is a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, all from the original Hourglass estate vineyard. The wine has a dark color with notes of intensely dark fruit. Balanced, pure, and structured with silky tannins at the finish, this is an example of a powerful, luxurious wine that is totally drinkable. \$165 (94-96 points from Robert Parker, who claimed that this may be the best Cabernet Sauvignon that Hourglass had ever produced.)



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2013 Blueline Cabernet Sauvignon

This beautiful wine begins with notes of tobacco, smoke, and herbs and leads to flavors of black fruit and cocoa. The wine is structured with minerality, a nice reflection of the location where the grapes were grown. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Petit Verdot, 6% Malbec. \$125

2014 Blueline Estate Malbec

A 100% Malbec that comes from just one vineyard, this wine has become a staff favorite at Hourglass Wines. With a bouncy freshness from start to finish, it's a rich, round wine with balanced earthy and fruity components. A must for those who wish to try California Malbec. \$75



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2015 Estate Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc

This 100% Sauvignon Blanc is the only white that Hourglass makes, and it makes a nice addition to their repertoire. It's a rich, layered wine thanks to its being a blend of grapes from contrasting vineyards: the Varozza vineyard with 46-year-old head-trained vines and the Larkmead Lane vineyard farther north in Napa Valley. Notes of citrus and apple on the nose lead to rich flavors of vanilla, citrus, and white peach. The older vines from the Varozza vineyard give deep fruit flavor, while the gravelly soil in the Larkmead Lane vineyard balance with wine with a minerality and vibrant tang. This is a wine to be enjoyed now. \$40

2014 Hourglass Estate Vineyard Merlot

This dark Merlot demonstrates what a Napa Valley Merlot can be—flavors of plum and black cherry play off refined tannins and expressive aromas. It's an earthy yet sexy wine that can be saved for that special romantic occasion or for when you want to impress friends or loved ones with a fantastic California Merlot. This wine should hit its peak in the next three years. \$75 (91 points in Wine Spectator)

