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Sail on

November 15, 2007



2004 THE MARINER

Dry Creek Valley

RATING: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

(FIVE STARS)

Maybe my wheels have drifted into a rut here, but it's certainly a pleasant one.

Exploring Meritage, both red and white, has led me to some excellent wines I knew nothing about. This week's wine is another extraordinary red, and I promise afterward that I'll jerk the wheel sharply and we'll bounce off in another direction.

Dry Creek Vineyard is one of those family-owned vineyards that has been quietly producing superlative wine for two generations.

The winery was founded 35 years ago by David Stare, a former railway engineer who became inspired by his trips to the Loire Valley and constructed his own estate on the site of a prune orchard across from the Dry Creek Valley General Store.

Stare was something of a pioneer, the first to plant Sauvignon Blanc in Dry Creek – despite pointed advice to the contrary – and a leader in obtaining the valley's viticultural designation, in 1983.

Today the winery is run by his daughter Kim and her husband, Don Wallace, and remains true to Stare's ambitious visions, including the use of sailing motifs on the label.

Hence, **The Mariner, a Bordeaux blend that showcases the best fruit from the Dry Creek Valley,** as well as winemaker Bill Knuttel's assemblage skills.

The wine is 46 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 40 percent Merlot, 6 percent Malbec, 5 percent Cab Franc and 3 percent Petit Verdot. It is aged in French oak for 25 months.

The wine has impeccable balance, reminiscent of some of the best Bordeaux Superior, or Phelps Insignia in its best years.

The nose has cedar, roses, slight notes of herb and prune. On the palate the flavor is primarily cassis, with fine-grained flavors of blackberry and notes of dark chocolate. After several hours of air a little prune shows as well.

Like most Bordeaux Superior, the alcohol is restrained, at just 13.5 percent, and the tannins are mild as well.

As such, it's perfect for pork loin or roasted turkey, although it's certainly not wrong to pour it with sirloin steak.



Dry Creek
VINEYARD