

MacRostie Winery and Vineyards Vineyard & Viticulture Profile

Wildcat Mountain Vineyard

In 1997, Steve MacRostie discovered an amazing property situated in the remote western borderlands between Carneros and the Sonoma Coast—a location that actually straddles both appellations. Building on a desire to cultivate his own great piece of land, Steve formed a partnership with ranchers Nancy and Tony Lilly to develop an ideal section of their unplanted pastureland as a vineyard. This pioneering mountain location offers a unique composition of well-draining shallow, volcanic soils over fractured andesite, with elevations ranging from 500 to 700 feet. Adding to its appeal for producing exceptional cool-climate varietals, the vineyard enjoys clockwork morning fog, followed by afternoon sun, with moderating cooling breezes. As a result, Wildcat Mountain Vineyard has a very long growing season that allows the fruit to achieve optimal ripeness, with good acidity and excellent structure.

After meticulously examining the property and selecting the ideal early ripening rootstocks, and a diversity of clones, Steve began the careful planting of 58 acres of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah vines in 1998. These plantings are broken up into 18 different vineyard blocks spread across five fields, with a variety of elevations, exposures and soil types. Each block is pruned separately and at different times, using strategies specifically designed to meet the needs of the vineyard section. In addition, irrigation methods are tailored to each block by monitoring leaf water potential. Measurements are made with a pressure bomb, and the vines are allowed to maintain a moderate amount of stress.

The vineyard is cultivated using sustainable farming practices. In practice, this means utilizing more earth-friendly methods to naturally replenish elements in the vineyard that are taken out for winemaking. This includes the use of seeds, stems and skins left over from the winemaking process, which are composted and returned to the soil. In addition, cover crops are grown to build soil health. Few synthetic fertilizers are applied, and organic sulfur normally serves as Wildcat's only protection from the damp fog. All of this helps to maintain the integrity of this rustic site, while supporting its native population of eagles, barn owls, hawks and bobcats.

As Steve and the MacRostie team gain more intimate knowledge of this beautifully evolving vineyard, and as the vines gain more maturity and depth with each passing vintage, Wildcat is consistently producing grapes with profound flavors. A true reflection of terroir, the accompanying wines from Wildcat Mountain Vineyard are earning a much-deserved reputation for their broad, rich character, and intensity of flavor.

Vineyard Partners

Since establishing MacRostie Winery and Vineyards in 1987, Steve has focused on building a small portfolio of partner growers, with an emphasis on top small vineyards in the acclaimed Carneros appellation. Today, more than 20 years later, Steve and his dedicated team work with approximately a dozen growers, with several of these

relationships going back to the beginning of the winery.

“Great wines,” says Steve, “come from great long-term relationships. You need to trust and respect your growers, as you work closely with them. It’s a matter of having the same core beliefs and a shared desire to make something special.”

As part of this shared philosophy, MacRostie is committed to partnering with vineyards that practice sustainable farming methods. In addition to working with vineyards that employ a more chemical-free approach to viticulture, Steve looks for growers who emphasize maintaining good crop levels with balanced vines, uncrowded canopies and good light exposure. Instead of setting yield targets, Steve’s approach to quality focuses on achieving an average of 1.5 clusters per shoot and good overall vine health. “In certain vineyards we have a few small blocks set aside for us. In others it’s a few prized rows. Every spot has its own needs, and our approach to viticulture is about working with our growers to understand and meet those needs.”