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THE PREMIER BLOG OF THE WEST

Parallel Worlds

BY STEVEN PHELPS



Looking back at the history of Napa Valley there is a fascinating period in the early 1900s where it was all about experimentation. Farmers were figuring out how to work with new machinery, growers were looking at new techniques, and a huge influx of immigration brought many of the cultivars and winemaking traditions that have made the region great.

But, says winemaker Philippe Melka, it took a long time to figure it out.

“There was Riesling, and Chardonnay, and Cabernet, sometimes all in the same vineyard,” says Melka. “If you look back at history, the attitude for many years was just trying to experiment and see what could work in Napa Valley. And I think that ... over generations the winemakers ... they’ve evolved quite a bit. But we’ve also learned over the years that what Napa produces best is Cabernet, and I don’t think that’s going to change.”

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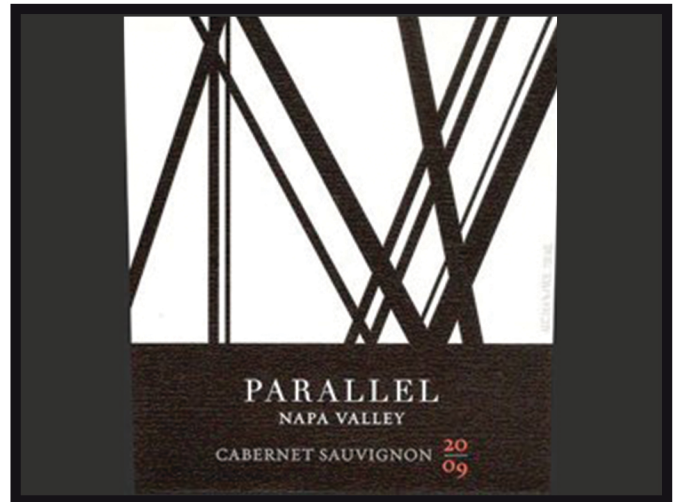
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Parallel partner and co-found

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of commitment that everybody associated with the wine has for it.” Everyone from the various partners to the winemakers to the wine club members, says MacQuoid, brings a special kind of energy to the wine. But perhaps none more so than Melka.

A Bordeaux native who crafts gems for names like Roy Estate, Vin 29 and Marston, Melka was named Food & Wine magazine’s Winemaker of the Year in 2005. The best wines, he proclaims, come from a style of winemaking that allows the variety to tell its own story. The winemaker’s role, as he lovingly describes it, is that of a guide, a caretaker, a facilitator for superb wine that is given an opportunity to shine on its own. And getting it right, says Melka, is a tricky combination of the winemaker’s attitude and the whims of Mother Nature.



“[Parallel] is a small production—1500 to 2000 cases—so we’re very small scale. We try to be a Cabernet haute. My focus and motivation on any project I have is to try to give the wine a feeling of what the owners are like, what they bring to you, which in this case is excitement, fun, energy, sophistication and something very classy.”

“I don’t think any of us expected to win Best in Show,” he says of the accolade, “but the fact that we did just shows the kind of passion, the kind of commitment that everybody associated with the wine has for it.” Everyone from the various partners to the winemakers to the wine club members, says MacQuoid, brings a special kind of energy to the wine. But perhaps none more so than Melka.

“In ’05 we were just beginning to tell our story... in ’07 we got some great recognition, and now [in 2012] I think people are really sitting up and taking notice.” That kind of maturation, he explains, requires a little expansion and re-thinking of the business end of things. Although the label expects to stay near and dear to the realm of Napa Valley that it loves, its obvious that change is nothing to fear in this case as Melka excitedly talks about the possibilities such a change might bring.

No matter where they end up, he says, Parallel will continue to create elegant wine that stands on its own. “It’s a very non-interventionist kind of winemaking,” says Melka. “We keep it all about the terroir, and about the passion.”