

## PARAS VINEYARDS

Near the crest of Mount Veeder, 1,200 feet high along the old stage-coach trail from Napa to Sonoma lies a vineyard once known as Veedercrest and the source of some of iconic Cabernets of the sixties and seventies. How this site came to be purchased and lovingly replanted by a San Francisco lawyer and a Burgundy-trained winemaker both of whom made their name with Rhône varieties is a tale that could only unfold in California.

Jim Paras's passion for wine led him in 1988 to establish the Jade Mountain Vineyards label. Paras turned for winemaking advice to a young Beaune-trained vintner and then Burgundy resident, Douglas Danielak and the two collaborated to produce above all Rhone-inspired wines from such sources as Lee Hudson's then young Syrah plantings in Carneros and ancient Mourvedre vines from Frank Evanghelo in Contra Costa County. As the reputation of Jade Mountain spread, Paras began searching for his own property.

In 1991 after what he refers to as three years of "climbing what seemed to be every hillside in Napa and Sonoma" they discovered the by now rather run-down Veedercrest property. The redevelopment, which Paras refers to as "building the Grand Coulee Dam on a small scale" involved buttressing and terracing the site's hardscrabble shale soil and planting it with Grenache, Syrah and Viognier. But Paras did not stop there. Given the history of this site, he planted Cabernet Sauvignon and a bit of Merlot. And, given his love of the great wines of the Langhe and of a challenge, he planted Nebbiolo.

The young crops from the property's Rhône varieties quickly established a distinguished place among Jade Mountain's sources, with



three barrels of show-stopping estate Syrah arriving in 1994. The first crop of Cabernet Sauvignon came soon thereafter, but the time was not ripe for a separate estate bottling, since this variety had never been a part of Jade Mountain's program. As for Nebbiolo, well do I recall the first, 1996 crop that finally fermented in a pickle jar – "just six bottles for the entire world" as we jokingly remarked while enjoying the effects of its apparently having completed malo in bottle! But the exciting part was that it smelled unmistakably of Nebbiolo – the gamut of illusive flowers and fungus and road tar ...

In 2000, Paras sold Jade Mountain to the Chalone Group, along with rights to the fruit of the Paras Vineyards on Mount Veeder ... except for Cabernet and Nebbiolo. The first wines under the new Paras Vineyards label were a 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon and Nebbiolo. Because of the tiny quantities produced from this property's low-yielding young vines, Paras is marketing the wine only in California, and in the markets serviced by his long-time friends at Vintner Select. Beginning with the 2005 vintage, the entire crop from all of the property's varieties will revert to estate vinification and bottling.

The almost inhospitably arid and rigorously breezy conditions that made Paras and Danielak on their first encounter with this property think "Syrah", make for challenging conditions to a young Cabernet, let alone a Nebbiolo vine. Water has had

to be carted to keep the young plants from expiring. And although Cabernet is harvested here somewhat earlier than it is farther north on the Veeder Range or on Spring Mountain, the Nebbiolo (which is first to bud on the property) has already been harvested as late as November!

The Danielak style is for wines of structure and depth. He abhors what he deems the current fashion for flashy and jammy but superficial fruit. What we have here are the makings of great vins de garde.

Varieties: *Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo. The property's Viognier, Syrah, Greanche and Merlot revert to estate custody with the 2005 vintage.*

Production: *4-500 cases, but with the aforementioned additional varieties, production is expected to rise to somewhat more than 1,000 cases.*

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"[Paras and Danielak] are concentrating on producing the finest Cabernet of which their sun-baked patch of mountainside is capable. ... Paras has become a relatively serious producer of Nebbiolo too – albeit in small quantities ..."

**Jancis Robinson, "In Praise of California's Mountain Vineyards"**

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