



Gerald Boyd *from winereviewonline.com*

94 POINTS!

All major wine regions have at least one distinguishing characteristic that sets its wines apart from all of the others. The defining characteristic, usually attributed to terroir, a nebulous French geo-viticulture term, is touted and sometimes drawn to a fine point by producers, but is often elusive to the wine consumer.

For those wineries and growers within the Rutherford AVA (American Viticultural Area) in California's Napa Valley, the component that makes Rutherford wines (especially the red ones) distinctive is "Rutherford Dust," a term that is associated today more with an abstract connection to the Rutherford soils than to a dusty or earthy sensory nuance found in the local wines.

Formed in 1991, the Rutherford AVA is a narrow band of alluvial soil that stretches from St. Helena to Yountville, along the west side of the Napa Valley floor. Rutherford, along with neighboring Oakville, is widely considered the premier source of Napa Valley red wines based on Cabernet Sauvignon. Growers in other Napa AVAs, such as Stags Leap, would be quick to question the primacy of Rutherford, but there's no question that it is among the elite spots for growing Cabernet in Napa--and therefore the world.

This year, the multi-flight tasting, billed as "A Day in the Dust" was held at Rubicon Estate, the winery complex owned by Francis Coppola. Rubicon is a fitting venue since the property was formerly the Inglenook estate, a historic brand that in its glory years was one of the benchmark wineries not only of the Rutherford region but of the United States as a whole. Rutherford grower Andy Beckstoffer noted that Rutherford is part of the old world of wine, not the new world and that 'Rubicon is part of that history.'

Another aspect that gives Rutherford wines an edge over other Napa Valley reds (according to the RDS, at any rate) is sun exposure. "One of the more unusual aspects about Rutherford is that it has a higher radiant value than other parts of Napa Valley." Christie Dufault, sommelier at Quince restaurant in San Francisco says, 'Elegance, restraint and a textural element of Rutherford wines is not found elsewhere in Napa.'

In general, the 2005 growing season was a mild year with plentiful rainfall, allowing maximum 'hang time' to develop ripe flavors, good body and structure. Commenting about the 2005 vintage for Rutherford red wines, Beaulieu Vineyard winemaker Joel Aiken noted that the wines are not aggressive and show great promise. 'The restraint noticed in many of the wines is partly due to what winemakers are doing in the winery,' says Aiken. 'Some herbaceous character was noted early on then it was fleshed out in winemaking, The 2005s show good potential for aging.' Sommelier Tim Gaiser agrees, adding, 'The quality of the 2005 Cabernets is consistent and high across the board.'

My impression of the 2005 Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignons tasted at 'A Day in the Dust,' is that most of the wines are loaded with fruit, balanced but a little tight, needing a few more years in bottle to develop and come together. And I noticed a textural thread woven through most of the wines that, while difficult to describe, leaves a pleasantly full sensation in the mouth.

Slaughterhouse Cellars, Rutherford (Napa Valley, California)

Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2005 (\$60): Slaughterhouse Cellars is a small producer of estate-grown Rutherford Bench Cabernet Sauvignons. The vineyard is planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and a small amount of Cabernet Franc. For the 2005 Cabernet, winemaker Jason Fisher went with 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged 21 months in French oak. This is a Cabernet of superb balance and length, with a subtle blend of herbal, black olive and dark fruits. It has great texture and length, nicely integrated sweet tannins, 14.6% alcohol that is supportive and well integrated, and a long impeccably balanced finish. 94 Gerald D. Boyd Sep 9, 2008

Slaughterhouse Cellars

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