



Harvest & Varietal Information

VINEYARDS: **Oakville:** Beckstoffer—Missouri Hopper; **Rutherford:** Beckstoffer—George III, Morisoli Borges, Hudson **Carneros:** Truchard **Atlas Peak:** Stagecoach **St. Helena:** Stanton

VARIETIES: 46% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 13% Petit Verdot

PRODUCTION: 5,971 cases **RELEASE DATE:** September 1, 2013

If you like what we do at Cain, you will certainly enjoy our 2009 **Cain Concept—The Benchland**. In fact, it may be your favorite wine. That's what many people have been telling us about last year's Cain Concept, and the 2009 is as good, if not better.

The main thing to know about Cain wines is that they are not “made” to create a dramatic first impression; rather, our goal is to create a lasting impression. This can only be done through less wine-“making” not more. The process begins in the vineyard—the most important element—and it continues through the cellar, on into the bottle as the wine continues to develop. We arrive at our goal only when you have time to sit with your glass and to enjoy the wine during the course of a meal.

The point is that we value complexity, balance, and finish. But, most of all, we value wines with a personality. Wines of true character are defined by the vineyard and can only be made by hand, with thoughtful but limited intervention. To appreciate and to even understand wines like this, we need to slow down, relax, savor, and share the wine with good company. The message is in the bottle.

2009 Cain Concept—The Benchland

The wine rewards contemplation. It shines in the glass like a finely polished garnet. The nose is an undefined mix of red fruits: cherries and plums, surely, but what else? Nothing sticks out; the whole is so tightly composed that it is impossible to pick this wine apart. Sweet and silky smooth on the palate, a firm dense core leads to a satisfying and graceful finish. How can Napa Valley Cabernet be this refined?

Even though we made the wine, we don't have all the answers. As you know, the Cain Concept is about Cabernet Sauvignon grown in the classical Benchlands of the Napa Valley. This makes up about half of the blend. Merlot and Cabernet Franc grown in Carneros contribute much of the balance. Although we love Benchland Cabernet, we have often found that blending adds complexity. In this case, the blend may have been the key.

2009 was a perfect growing season to illustrate our stylistic values. Cain wines are about balance and complexity. We pick in time to preserve the natural freshness of the fruit before it fades on the vine. In this way, we capture lively wines, wines with energy. In this vintage, the rains of mid-October dramatically underscored our aesthetic.

It was a year of relatively low yield; the timing of the growing season was spot on; the mid-June flowering presaged a mid-late September harvest; the grapes ripened under a warm August sun, with few of the hot

spells that can sometimes cook the fruit. The only drama came in the second week of October, when the Napa Valley received nearly three inches of rain on Tuesday the 13th. We knew that the rain was coming and that it would be significant. At Cain, we had picked all the vines intended for the Cain Concept. By our standards, the fruit was ripe, and it was in perfect condition.* Our one concern was that some of our growers might have been too busy picking for other wineries that were also in a rush to bring in their fruit before the rain. Thankfully, the fashion for exaggerated ripeness was still firmly entrenched. Many wineries chose to wait out the rain, leaving us the space to pick.

I remember the rain that day perfectly. Together with a handful of winemakers, I was presenting the Napa Valley to a group of Master Sommeliers. We were in the stylish tasting room of a winery perched on the edge of a hill overlooking the Napa Valley, more than 1000 feet above the valley floor. Ordinarily, the view would have been spectacular. There would have been no better place to survey the Napa Valley. But, on this day, it was a whiteout. We were in the clouds; outside, a drenching rain was blowing sideways; we couldn't see a thing. Although at Cain we had finished picking all of our principal vines, I knew that many wineries still had grapes hanging in this rain, and that it would be at least several more days before they could resume picking. So I said to the group that I had "never seen Cabernet Sauvignon rot." My thought was that the skins are relatively thick and should be resistant to fungi, such as botrytis. But I was quickly corrected by a more experienced winemaker who said, "Well, I have."

For me, the next two weeks were interesting; they were a learning experience. Indeed some of the Cabernet still hanging in the Napa Valley developed tiny green spots of mold and began to rot. If the fruit was not yet overripe, the skins were sufficiently firm to resist the fungi. After the rain, the sun eventually came out, it warmed up and ripening continued. In this case, some really good wines were produced after the rain. In other cases, where the fruit was ripe—at least by Cain standards—the mold did set in. Where there was rot, good wines were produced only through heroic sorting of the fruit, which the very best wineries certainly did.

After we rescued the last of our precious fruit under the threatening rain clouds, everything that followed was simple. The vinifications were straightforward and the blending was obvious. The Cabernets we made from Morisoli-Borges and Beckstoffer Georges III were great. The Merlot from Stagecoach on Atlas Peak, and the Cabernet Franc from Truchard were perfect complements, and the Petit Verdot from Don Hudson in Rutherford added a nice touch of spice.

The 2009 Cain Concept—The Benchland was bottled in June 2011. And after two years in the bottle, it shows remarkably slow development. The wine drinks well now, but clearly has a decade ahead of it. I suggest that you enjoy some this fall and winter but be sure to lay some down.

*A comment on our idea of ripeness: You'll note the alcohol in this vintage is 14.3%—a bit less than in prior vintages, but still more than we would like. At Cain, we don't pick based on sugar level or any other number. Rather, we observe the vines and the fruit as ripening proceeds. Just as grapes can be under-ripe, they can also be over-ripe. Our goal is to harvest the fruit just as it begins to soften, the herbaceous aromas have faded, and the perfume of fruit and flowers are reaching their peak. Although our goal remains the same, each year is different. You can read more in the "Cain Communiqué—On Ripening."

Christopher Howell, Winemaker/General Manager

For information on our other two wines—Cain Five and Cain Cuvée, please visit our website.