



ROTH ESTATE

Exploring the Art of Winemaking

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

Roth Estate has undergone quite a transformation over the years. Initially produced with a focus on volume, Roth wines were sold primarily to wholesale markets. This earlier phase of the winery's history allowed it to establish a foothold in the industry, but its focus shifted significantly when the Foley Family Wines group acquired it. Under Foley's ownership, Roth transitioned to a more premium approach, emphasizing small-lot, high-quality wines that reflect the unique terroirs of Sonoma County, particularly the Alexander Valley and Russian River Valley.

The Vodka Connection

In its earlier days, Roth Estate also ventured into spirits by producing vodka. This endeavor was an exciting chapter in the winery's history, as the vodka was made from wine grapes rather than traditional grains or potatoes. The use of wine grapes for vodka production resulted in a smoother, fruitier spirit with a unique character—a reflection of Roth's innovative spirit at the time. However, the production of vodka has since ceased as the winery pivoted to focus entirely on crafting fine wines.

The Caves at Roth Estate

The brick caves at Roth Estate are a highlight of the winery, offering guests an immersive journey into the heart of winemaking. These caves, built into the hillside, are both functional and striking, serving as the perfect environment for aging wine while creating an unforgettable tasting experience.

Design and Ambiance

The brick-lined walls give the caves a rustic yet refined feel, blending old-world charm with modern sophistication. The warm, reddish hues of the bricks contrast beautifully with the dim lighting that filters through the tunnels. The ambiance is serene.

Functionality

The caves are more than just a visual treat—they play a critical role in the winemaking process. The naturally cool and stable conditions within the caves are ideal for aging wine in barrels, helping to maintain consistency in temperature and humidity. This controlled environment allows the wine to develop its complexity and balance over time.

Tasting Experience

The caves also serve as a venue for exclusive tastings. Here, guests sit at elegantly set tables or stand among rows of French and American oak barrels, surrounded by the earthy aroma of aging wine.

Our Cave Tasting at Roth Estate

My husband, Steve, and I were excited as we approached Roth Estate. I have previously enjoyed wine tastings at several of the other Foley Family Wineries, and the two of us had enjoyed a cave tasting at Lancaster Estate the day before. Our guide for the day welcomed us warmly and led us to the estate's famed wine caves. Steve and I discussed the difference between the Lancaster caves and the Roth caves and came to the joint conclusion that the caves at each estate were stunning in different ways.

The Pinot Gris: A Symphony of Brightness and Creaminess

Our first tasting was the 2022 Pinot Gris from the Russian River Valley. Our tasting guide passionately described the journey of this wine. This white wine was aged for five months in neutral French oak before being finished in stainless steel.

I swirled the wine in my glass, noticing how the oak treatment had transformed the wine's texture. The viscosity was slightly thicker, giving it a creamy mouthfeel while still maintaining a crisp acidity. Each sip was a melody of tropical notes, with pineapple taking center stage.

Our guide explained how the oak aging tempers the malic acid, creating a softer profile. Yet, the wine retained a lively acidity that balanced its creamy texture beautifully—a testament to the winemaker's finesse.

Our tasting was paired with a delicious cheese plate





with triple cr em French brie, a white cheddar with espresso rind, and mild goat gouda. Marcona almonds from Spain, poached in olive oil and sea salt, accompanied the cheese, along with dried cherries, Turkish apricots, rosemary and sea salt crackers, and a dollop of fig jam.

The Elegance of the 2022 Chardonnay

Next up was the 2022 Chardonnay, also from the Russian River Valley. This wine was aged for nine months in French oak, with 30% of the barrels being new. Made entirely from chardonnay grapes, it was a classic representation of the varietal with a Roth Estate twist.

As I took my first sip, flavors of ripe apple, pear, cantaloupe, and a hint of vanilla danced across my palate. The influence of the oak aging was evident but not overpowering, lending a richness that balanced the wine’s bright fruit character. A subtle nuttiness added depth to the finish.

The Unique Sauvignon Gris

Steve and I were excited to taste the sauvignon

gris, a propriety white wine. The wine’s acidity comes from the 72% sauvignon blanc and its body from 28%the pinot gris. This wine is typically only found in Bordeaux, Chili, and at Foley’s Chalkhill and Roth wineries. Small amounts, generally 2%, of sauvignon gris can be found at a scattered number of other wineries in the Sonoma and Napa valleys.

The 2021 Malbec: A Juicy Delight

The 2021 Malbec was a blend of 85% Malbec, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Petit Verdot, aged for 20 months in 75% new French and American oak. Juicy, fruit-forward, and bursting with flavors reminiscent of a freshly baked blueberry muffin, it was a delightful surprise. The extended aging process had given the wine a luscious mouthfeel, while the careful blending added complexity.

The Grande Finale: 2019 Reserve Red Wine

Our tasting concluded with Roth Estate’s 2019 Reserve Red Wine from Alexander Valley. This

Bordeaux-style blend, comprising 71% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Merlot, and 6% Petit Verdot, was a true masterpiece. It was aged for 20 months in 85% new French and American oak and was a wine crafted for savoring.

Steve took a sip and leaned back with a smile on his face. The wine was bold yet refined, with layers of black currant, plum, and a touch of spice unfolding with each sip. The tannins were present yet velvety.

A Day to Remember

As our tasting concluded, Steve and I found ourselves lingering in the cave, reluctant to leave. We again discussed the beauty and functionality of the caves. Although we love to taste wine in the vineyards, on a picnic, and in beautiful wineries, tasting in the caves was a unique and memorable experience.