



FROG'S LEAP

2018 MERLOT WILLIAMS ROSSI RUTHERFORD NAPA VALLEY

WINEMAKER NOTE FROM RORY WILLIAMS

A BRIEF HISTORY

Over the years, we've spoken at length about our farming practices: our early adoption and advocacy for organic farming, our dogged insistence on dry farming all our grapes, and the attention to detail that those practices require of us. These practices are designed to encourage and emphasize the natural differences of soil, water, climate, and microflora that make each vine different from the next, and give rise to idiosyncrasies in wines from different sections of a vineyard. At Frog's Leap, our effort always extends toward making wine honestly, where a given vintage of wine is always true to its time on the vine and the place where it was grown.

It was with this philosophy that we approached a new wine, the Williams Rossi Merlot. In 1995, we were introduced to siblings Louise and Ray Rossi and their historic Rossi ranch, situated at the northern end of the famed western bench in Rutherford. By 1997 we were helping Ray farm the ranch, taking all the fruit from the vineyard. In 2007, Frog's Leap acquired the ranch and began to plant vines in areas that had long lain fallow and replant diseased blocks. Rossi is a complicated ranch with a kaleidoscope of different soils—ancient rivulets of heavy sand and gravel streak east-west though rich gravelly-clay loams, marked by almost imperceptible changes in elevation. While heavy pure clay dominates the westernmost area, a little to the north that clay mixes with gravel to create our best Merlot ground. Right next to the Merlot, a small bump in the percentage of gravel creates the right conditions for Cabernet Franc. In other words, the stage was set for a ranch whose wines could speak to the heart of our core purpose of cherishing the different and the idiosyncratic, if we were willing to make the effort. The Williams Rossi Merlot is the culmination of that effort.

When making a reserve-style wine, a winemaker will usually look to select his or her "best" barrels in the blend. For my dad and me, the basis for that selection is made in the vineyard. Each year, our eyes are focused on how the vines planted in each soil type are adapting to the conditions posed by the vintage, and we head into harvest with that knowledge. When sampling, we select areas of the ranch—largely defined by specific areas of soil—that are exceptionally delicious that year, and ferment them separately. These mini-fermentations, usually so small that they are often done in individual barrels, are then selected down to the best barrels after the wines are complete. The specific blend will change from year-to-year as different areas respond to vintage conditions, giving a wine whose character is wholly rooted in the connection that our family has to our home here in Rutherford

THE BLEND

81% Merlot, South Creek block (Northern heavy clay), Rossi Vineyard, Rutherford
Planted 2010 in silty clay, Inglenook clone on St. George. Harvested September 13th.

14% Merlot, North Creek block (Old vines), Rossi Vineyard, Rutherford
Planted 1991 in silty clay, Inglenook clone on St. George. Harvested September 20th.

5% Cabernet Franc (Northern silt), Rossi Vineyard, Rutherford
Planted 2010 in gravelly loam, Petrus clone on St. George. Harvested September 21st.





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CONTINUED

ABOUT THE WINE

2018 was one of the most picture-perfect vintages we've ever experienced in Napa: plenty of winter rain, a gentle, moderate growing season, and a long, bountiful harvest period with lot of morning fog and afternoon sunshine. Moderate years like this tend to be ideal for the sections of soil that tend toward richer, more exotic flavors, which is typical of the northern end of the South Creek block of Merlot. These vines form the core of the '18, and give the wine a certain flamboyance and plushness that is nevertheless in balance with a strong core of acidity. Backbone from the old vines of North Creek and spice-box top notes from a small amount of barrel-fermented Cabernet Franc complete the wine, giving a more full-throated version of Merlot that shows off the greatness of the year and the potential of these vines.

ABOUT THE SOILS

South Creek Merlot – Despite being one block, the South Creek Merlot really has two halves. The southern half of the block has a touch more gravel (being right next to a block of Cabernet Sauvignon), is more vigorous and slightly higher-yielding; the northern half (which formed the core of the 2018 blend) is heavier in clay, much less vigorous, and lower-yielding. In warm or extreme years, the low vigor and production of the northern end can suffer a bit, giving wines that are exotic and flamboyant, but individually a bit hot—perfect for blending into our regular Merlot. Cool, moderate years preserve the acidity and moderate the exoticness just enough to make the wine spectacular on its own. We love this kind of year!

North Creek Old Vines – These vines, our oldest Merlot vines, have long been a cherished section of vineyard for Frog's Leap. These vines, which we've referred to in the past as "Ray's Block," sit on a low patch of soil that is particularly heavy in clay, and is one of the coldest sections of the whole ranch. While the impressionable young vines of South Creek can be heavily affected by changes in the weather, the old vines always ripen slightly later and lend tremendous backbone. Slightly more acidic, slightly more tannic, and slightly less flamboyant, this block will often form the core of the Williams Rossi Merlot, but took a backseat in 2018.

Cabernet Franc – This block is our only section of Cabernet Franc at Rossi, where gravel, clay and silt combine in the right percentages to help this fabulous, but fickle, variety to shine. This small block runs parallel to South Creek Merlot, and the northern end of the Cab Franc block is similarly low in both vigor and yield, and is always highly expressive and rich in body. Great years allow us to play with turning the dial to 11, and a small section was barrel fermented. The resulting wine was almost too flamboyant—richly structured and extremely aromatic. A small amount in the finished wine added just the right amount of top-note complexity.

STATISTICS

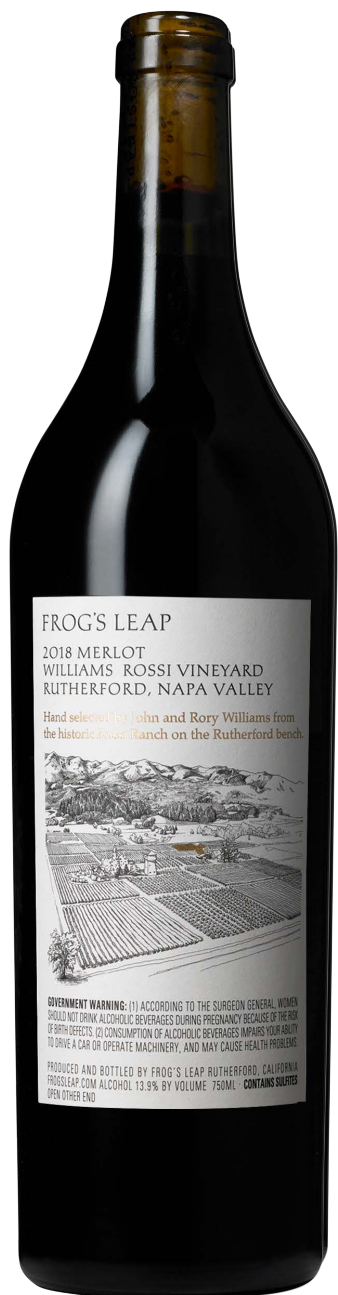
harvest chemistry: 24.4 ° brix 5.1 g/L total acidity, 3.37 pH
final chemistry: 13.9% alcohol, 6.0 g/L total acidity, 3.56 pH,
0.03% residual sugar bottled December 2, 2020
486 cases produced, from 20 barrels

WINEMAKERS

John Williams Rory Williams Pablo Polanco

VINEYARDIST

Frank Leeds



BALANCE, RESTRAINT AND DEEP RESPECT FOR THE NATURAL EXPRESSION OF THE VINE