

2003 PETER FRANUS BRANDLIN VINEYARD ZINFANDEL



Vineyards:	Brandlin Vineyard - 100% Mount Veeder
Composition:	95% Zinfandel, 5% Charbono, Mourvèdre, Carignane
Harvest Date:	September 30, 2003
Fermentation:	11 days, up to 87°
Maceration:	15 days
Oak aging:	16 months 100% French Oak, 40% new "Burgundian Coopers"
Bottling Date:	March 11, 2005
Production:	959 cases 750ml

As my mother used to say when I would take her up to Brandlin Vineyard, high in the hills of Mount Veeder, "this is as close to heaven as I am going to get." It's a magical place where you can feel the energy that ultimately finds its way into the wine. There are many well-made technically sound wines out in the marketplace, and then there are those with soul and personality. I know which ones I gravitate toward.

For those new to Brandlin, I need to repeat a little history. In the early 1920s, Henry Brandlin and sons Richard and Chester began planting vines on an eastern exposure hillside overlooking Napa Valley. Today these are probably the oldest vines on Mount Veeder, and they continue to produce intensely flavored grapes, growing for all these years without any irrigation other than the winter and spring rains. The vines are head-trained, independent of any trellis, and without lots of vineyard manipulation, they perform every year. I have worked with this vineyard since 1991, and it is impossible to point to a "weak" vintage.

An unmistakable Brandlin terroir always announces itself—crushed stone, bramble fruit, baking spices, and mushroom/earth that all fluctuate in degree with the vintage. There is always a breadth and complexity that distinguish it from the fat, jammy, simple style often associated with Zinfandel.

As for the 2003. An erratic wet spring and some summer time heat spikes finally settled down. A blast of torrid heat in mid-September affected many vineyards, but Brandlin had enough time to recover before harvest at the end of the month. Those conditions translated into a wine that accentuates blackberry jam, "blueberries and cream" (as one of my good friends and fellow winemakers used to say) cinnamon, rose petal and coffee. The other virtue of the vintage, for reasons I can't explain, is a wonderfully firm structure that supports all those lush and juicy qualities.

I guess it's time to throw it in—as one writer described the 2002 Brandlin: "Mount Veeder has shown itself to be one of the great homes of Zin, and this stunning wine is proof."