

November 15, 2008 Issue

California's Cabernet's Win-Win Vintage: Newcomers In Cabernet Country

Eight Napa Valley wineries bolt out of the gate with quality

CORRA

The 100-percent solution

Celia Welch Masyczek started her label in 2004, focusing on Cabernet and Sauvignon Blanc. She's hardly a newcomer, though, having made brilliant wines at premier Napa estates such as Staglin, Scarecrow, D.R. Stephens, Rocca and Hartwell over the course of her 26 years in the wine business. With Corra, Masyczek, 48, started small, with only one barrel of Sauvignon Blanc and 11 of Cabernet Sauvignon, but it was enough to get her off and running. Corra is the Celtic goddess of prophecy, who often appeared in the form of a crane (depicted on the label), and the name celebrates the winemaker's Irish heritage.

While the 2004 Cabernet (91 points, \$125) came from a Beckstoffer-owned vineyard in St. Helena, those vines were pulled after that harvest. For the 2005 (93, \$125), Masyczek used grapes from Lake Hennessy-Pritchard Hill; in 2006 and 2007, she added fruit from Oakville and Rutherford. An early tasting of the 2006 suggests it is the best of the first three vintages, showing tremendous depth and structure; the 2007, while very young, is also impressive. For 2008, she is buying a total of 6 tons of grapes from those same areas: Pritchard Hill's Sage Hill and Rutherford's Boschwitz Vineyard, close to Scarecrow and Rubicon in Oakville. She crushes the wines separately, blending once she has a read on quality and how the blend will work, which can take months.



The Sage Hill fruit gives the blend its intensity and tannic backbone, she says, supplementing the purer valley-floor grapes from Oakville and Rutherford, which offer the loamier currant, herb and anise-olive quality typical of those areas. The Corra style is ripe but also marked by elegance and finesse, with alcohols falling into the 14.5 to 15.2 percent range.

"All of the best wines I've made have been 100 percent Cabernet," muses Masyczek. She makes her wines at Keever in Yountville, another client. —J.L.