



## THE SHAFER MERLOT STORY

AN EXPRESSION OF CHARACTER

When the Shafer family moved to Napa Valley in 1973, Merlot was a minor variety used simply as a blending grape to soften Cabernet Sauvignon.

By the early 1980s change was in the air. Doug Shafer had earned his degree in viticulture from UC Davis and was assistant winemaker at Lakespring Winery where they, like a few other local wineries, had started producing Merlot as its own varietal.

Doug loved that Merlot was softer, brighter, and juicier than Cabernet Sauvignon with mouth-filling red fruit such as cherry and strawberry. When made properly it had depth and age-ability. He started bugging his father John Shafer, who'd started Shafer Vineyards in 1978, saying, "You should plant some Merlot." Doug was so convinced that Merlot would connect with a lot of fans he kept after his dad and finally John Shafer relented.



### A NEW ERA BEGINS

On a chilly January morning in 1981, a crew of guys warmed up their chainsaws, standing among three-acres of decades-old Zinfandel vines in a vineyard block called Lower Sunspot.

John looked to his son Doug with a smile, "Are we really going to do this?"

Soon the vineyard block was filled with the smell of newly cut wood. Afterward the Shafer team grafted Merlot budwood that John had secured from Three Palms Vineyard onto the Zinfandel trunks using a process called T-budding.

The first Shafer Merlot was the 1983 vintage, released in 1985, to a great deal of good press and consumer demand. Nearly all Napa Valley wineries offered a Chardonnay and a Cabernet Sauvignon; Merlot on the other hand was just bursting onto the scene and it was flying off the shelves.

Eventually this popularity created adverse results because Merlot is a difficult grape to cultivate. A bit too much frost early in the season, a day or two of rain, a spike in the temperature and Merlot doesn't respond well. It requires a lot of vine-by-vine attention or harvest will yield tons of under-ripe fruit.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF SUCCESS

By the early 2000s consumers were swimming in a sea of Merlots that were thin, green, and uninspired. When the character Miles in the 2004 movie *Sideways* said in no uncertain terms that he would not be drinking any [bleeping] Merlot, he expressed what many consumers were feeling.

Wineries across the U.S. suddenly found themselves with a lot of Merlot they couldn't sell. Countless acres of Merlot vines were torn out and planted to new varieties.

Meanwhile at Shafer, after more than 20 years of careful, attentive cultivation and production, Merlot was still winning over new fans. And sales of Shafer Merlot went up.

### MERLOT ON THE RISE

Today Merlot is a success story again. Producers who know and love this grape have stayed with it. Many of these wines reflect the depth and lushness the variety is known for in other parts of the world. Finally Merlot is taking its place as a great wine on our shores too.

Shafer grows about half of its own fruit in a secluded vineyard just south of Stags Leap District and sources the remainder from small, carefully tended vineyards that predominantly lie along the rugged foothills running along the cool eastern edge of Napa Valley's southern end.

By focusing along this corridor and working meticulously for the highest quality in the vineyard and in the cellar Shafer's Merlot achieves the kind of ripeness that expresses varietal character in layers of rich, plush flavors and aromas.