



NEBBIOLO Sisquoc Vineyard SANTA MARIA VALLEY, 2002

Cultivated in Italy since the 14th century, and prized by collectors for its longevity and intriguing characteristics, Nebbiolo grapes can produce hauntingly seductive wines. The origin of the name is debated – some say this Piedmontese classic is named after the frosted look of the grape skin, *nebbia*, which is Italian for fog. Or perhaps it is because fog typically blankets the region in the early hours of each day. Others proclaim that it is the *nobile* or noble grape of the region. In any case it is famous in Italy for its precociousness, particularly in Barbaresco or Barolo. This grape thrives at a particular site at the Sisquoc Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley.

Perhaps Pacific sea fog (*nebbia*) rolling through the early hours of the Santa Maria Valley contributes to the character of the grapes grown here. Or perhaps it is the red clay soil, or its position at the cusp of a hill. For whatever combination of factors, the terroir is evident in this Nebbiolo, planted specifically for Palmina at Sisquoc in 1998. Each row and vine is carefully tended by hand over the growing season and into harvest as extreme care must be taken when cultivating Nebbiolo. Many think it is even more fickle, unpredictable and moody than Pinot Noir. Typically harvested late in the growing season, the grapes are delivered to the winery in the early hours of the day to preserve the cool temperature from the pre-dawn pick. De-stemmed, the whole berries are then placed into 1.5ton bins for an initial cold-soak before undergoing a long, controlled fermentation. This winemaking method preserves the color, flavors, acids and tannins for which the wine is so famous. The wine is then aged in a combination of new and older barrels and puncheons for 22 months. Gamba, one of Italy's most famous coopers, provides French oak barrels to Palmina, which are complemented by cooperage from Slovenia to ensure a balanced tannic structure in the wine.

A cornucopia of aromas, flavors and textures are present in this wine! There is a smoky boldness on the nose, with anise, licorice, spice and some meaty notes, complemented by reminiscences of blackberries. On the palate, rather masculine notes of tar, leather, cigar box and toast are then surprised by feminine nuances of rose petal, orange peel, dried Bing cherry, pomegranates and the richness of molasses. Following this yin-yang of flavors, the bright acidic structure of the wine is superbly balanced by the elegance of the soft, dusty tannins. Truffles and bittersweet dark chocolate are evident on the finish. This wine can stand up to food that might overwhelm other wines – hearty stews, braised meats and hard, aged cheeses.

An extremely limited release, the 2002 Nebbiolo, Sisquoc Vineyard is packaged in ½ cases, of which only 96 were produced.