

PALMINA



2003 SISQUOC Nebbiolo, Santa Maria Valley

Nebbiolo is a grape varietal that requires attention, but when grown in the right place with extreme attention to farming, can reward with an astounding expression of place. So it is with Nebbiolo grown at Rancho Sisquoc in the Santa Maria Valley, and to such a delightful extent that we have named this wine after place – *Sisquoc*.

An ancient grape that dates back to the 14th century, Nebbiolo probably originated in an east-west valley in the northeast of Italy. The name “Nebbiolo” is thought to either translate to “noble” or as a representation of the unique, frosted sheen on the ripe grape skins (“nebbia” is Italian for “Fog”). Nebbiolo must be grown in the right place, with the right soils, exposures and climate and demands expert care and attention in the vineyard. Despite its thin skins, the varietal is a late ripener and normally the last grapes harvested at Palmina. It is no coincidence that the east-west Santa Maria Valley, the calcareous/clay soils and south-facing hillside slopes mirror conditions in Piemonte, where Steve and Chrystal return each year to exchange and share information on this temperamental grape. Their passion for this varietal is recognized by their Italian colleagues, who have annually invited the Clifton’s to represent California at the *Nebbiolo Symposium*, held each year in Italy.

Nebbiolo is a wine that benefits and improves with aging, and the 2003 *Sisquoc* is no exception. This need for more time than other varietals begins with initial delivery of the grapes to the winery, where the newly fermented wine undergoes an extended maceration of four weeks on the skins with twice daily hand punch downs to fully extract color and flavors. The wine was barrel aged sur lie for eighteen months in a combination of Slovenian and French oak barrels, then racked and returned to barrel for an additional six months of aging. Bottled in 2005, the wine was aged in bottle for a year prior to release, but will still benefit from 5-7 years of cellaring to fully display its noble character.

A deep ruby color with garnet edges is a first impression of the 2003 *Sisquoc* and leads to the correct assumption that this is a wine of merit and character. The wine’s bouquet is a cornucopia of spice, coffee and smoke and an underlying tinge of breadfruit. Dark fruit characteristics on the palate abound – plums, black cherry, red currants and more plums are joined by a zingy hint of orange peel and rose petals. Spicy notes of anise and pipe tobacco and an earthiness that is astoundingly “Sisquoc” then lead to an extremely long finish replete with elegant tea-like tannins.

Decanting *Sisquoc* is definitely recommended, as the wine needs some aeration to fully strut its stuff. Hearty foods and hard, bold cheeses beautifully complement the wine, which demands food in order to be fully enjoyed



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