

CHATEAU CAP DE MERLE

Lussac Saint Emilion, 2009



Chateau Cap de Merle is a delicious St-Emilion that represents excellent value. The owners and winemakers —brothers Alain and Jean-Marie Bel— use no wood in vinifying Cap de Merle, so the pure, rich, and savory Merlot fruit comes through directly upon tasting. The winery’s excellent plateau vineyard on sandstone soil assures optimal ripeness of fruit and supple tannins.

The Bels have been committed to sustainable agriculture for more than 20 years. Each vine has a fifty-year lifespan, and thus it is of utmost importance to protect its health for the long term. The vineyard is continuously monitored to ensure that enemies of the vine, such as parasites or fungi, are kept to a level below which they become dangerous. For example, natural predators are encouraged to check the presence of larva from moths (cochylis and eudemis) whose eggs form tiny ruts on grape skins and thus enable the onset of grey rot. As a result of this practice, known in French as *la lutte raisonnee*, more intensive treatments are unnecessary.

2009 is an outstanding vintage at Cap de Merle. It saw the continuation of the advances in the Bel’s winemaking, aimed at making Cap de Merle even more deeply colored and rich-textured. Springtime was wet and warm and budding occurred relatively early in April. The vines developed rapidly and flowering took place in early June. The summer months were hot, sunny and dry, allowing maturity to advance. *Veraison* began early, at the start of July. Jean-Marie Bel worked all summer to maintain a good balance of the leaves in order to facilitate the maturation of the grapes. His work was rewarded in late August when hot and dry weather continued through harvest time, allowing the crop to attain full maturity with outstanding concentration of flavor. The grapes were picked under perfect conditions: this was a “dream vintage” commented Alain Bel. A double selection was carried out to ensure that only perfect fruit was accepted: one sorting in the vineyard, and a second at the winery. The Bels calibrated the vinification to attain a balance of ripe fruit and a supple texture. To enhance the extraction of color and aromas, the Merlots were given a 48-hour cold maceration before the start of fermentation. To further advance quality, in week 1 of the three-week fermentation period, the Bels carried out four daily *remontages* (pumping over) to attain a maximum of color, flavor and supple tannins. In the following 3 weeks, the frequency of *remontages* was gradually diminished as the young wine developed richness and texture by extended contact with the lees. →



The Cap de Merle vineyard is on a well-exposed plateau.



The soil is composed of sand and silt, which drains well.

The goal was to attain structure only through maceration and not by working the solids with too many *remontages*. Given the perfect quality of the fruit, the Bels prolonged the vatting period in 2009 by 10 days, to give the wine an added level of depth. The Bels consider the 2009 Cap de Merle their finest yet, for its deeply saturated color and expression of ripe, fresh, supple and complex fruit.

Technical Details

80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc
10% Cabernet Sauvignon

Location: In the commune of Lussac St-Emilion, 5 miles north-east of the town of St-Emilion

Climate: Atlantic climate – humid in Winter, and warm and dry in Spring and Summer.

Soil: The vineyard is a plateau on a silt and sand soil. The subsoil has traces of iron-oxide, mixed with clay

Altitude: 30 meters

Average age of vines: 25 years

Vineyard size: 20 hectares

Density of plantation: 6000 vines per hectare

Pruning: simple *Guyot*

Yield: 55 hectares per hectoliter

Vineyard practice: “*lutte-raisonnee*” for over 20 years

Harvest dates: 23 September for the Merlot; 13 October for the CF and 16 October for the Cabernet Sauvignon

Yeasts: only indigenous, to preserve typicity of the wine

Maceration & Fermentation period: 2 days of cold maceration for 10% of the volume, and then 3 weeks of maceration and fermentation.

Maturation: Stainless steel tanks for 18 months, under blanket of inert gas

Assemblage: In February after harvest

Bottling date: March 2010