



The Ehlers Estate Vineyard and Viticulture Profile

History: The Ehlers Estate vineyard is located on an historic winegrowing site in the northern part of Napa Valley's acclaimed St. Helena appellation. Grapes have been cultivated on this coveted site since the mid-1800s. The vineyard was replanted using a diversity of clone and rootstock selections under the guidance of renowned enologist, Jacques Boissenot, in 1995, 1996 and 1997. Today, under the leadership of Winemaker and General Manager Kevin Morrissey, the Ehlers Estate Vineyard, which is the source of exceptional Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Sauvignon Blanc, is certified organic and is farmed using both organic and biodynamic principles.

Contiguous Layout: The Ehlers Estate vineyard benefits from a unique Old World layout that is quite rare in California. The historic Ehlers winery building is located in the center of the contiguous estate vineyard. The farthest point on the property from the winery is approximately 600 yards, allowing the Ehlers team to have complete control over every aspect of the viticulture program, leading to greater focus and quality.

Diversity: The contiguous 42-acre Ehlers Estate vineyard offers a remarkable diversity of soils, clones and rootstocks, and is approached as a mosaic of small vineyard blocks. The vineyard is divided into five main blocks (based primarily on soil type) and 25 sub-blocks, which are largely defined by unique combinations of clone and rootstock. Eleven of these blocks (totaling 25 acres) are dedicated to six different clones of Cabernet Sauvignon planted on multiple rootstocks, allowing the winemaking team an expansive palette of fruit during the blending process. The vineyard also features seven sub-blocks of Merlot, four of Cabernet Franc, two of Sauvignon Blanc and a block of Petit Verdot.

The site's 39.4-cultivated acres display four distinctive soil types, each of which offers unique growing conditions that enhance the diversity of the vineyard. These soil profiles include a knoll with sandy, low vigor soils, a section with rich, well-draining sandy loam soils, a low-elevation section with dense, heavy clay soils, and a very rocky, mineral-rich section at the base of Spring Mountain (the primary source of Cabernet Sauvignon for Ehlers Estate's sought-after "1886" bottling). Row orientations in the vineyard are east/west and north/south.

Because of several factors including the estate's varietal differentiation, clone and rootstock selections, and a range of vine ages and soil types, there is usually an entire month between the picking of the first and last grape. This, combined with the fact that the vineyard surrounds the winery, makes it possible to pick all the grapes at ideal ripeness, which in turn helps to produce wines with beautifully articulated flavors.

Microclimate: Because the vineyard is located at the valley's narrowest point, between the Mayacamas Mountains to the west and Howell Mountain to the east, it benefits from a unique microclimate. This location allows for constant airflow through the vineyard, which brings fog in the morning, but clears it out in the afternoons, giving the vineyard ample sunshine, mediated by cooling breezes. These breezes also moderate heat spikes, allowing for excellent, even ripening of the fruit.

Practices: Morrissey, Vineyard Foreman Francisco Vega, and Ehlers Estate's fulltime, seven-person vineyard crew work to honor the diversity of the vineyard. In practice, this means that each of the site's 25 sub-blocks benefits from farming techniques tailored to its combination of soil, clone and rootstock. All hedging and canopy management is done by hand, and depending on the varietal, vines can receive up to six passes of pruning and thinning to limit yields. Instead of setting arbitrary yield limits, the team works to limit total clusters. The number of clusters varies based on block, soil and varietal, with an overall average of 14 clusters per plant.

Though the Ehlers Estate vineyard uses a vertical trellis, the crew has begun converting the vines to cane pruning for Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.

Organic Farming: As part of a vineyard-focused, socially responsible approach to winemaking, the Ehlers Estate vineyard is farmed exclusively using earth-friendly organic farming methods. These methods help to preserve the purity and character of the estate's fruit, leading to stellar wines reflecting an authentic sense of place. Ehlers Estate adopted organic practices beginning in the fall of 2004. Since then, no pesticides have been used on the vineyard. In July of 2008, Ehlers Estate was awarded organic certification, reflecting more than three years of deep commitment to organic farming practices.

Biodynamic Farming: In the spring of 2005, Ehlers Estate began practicing biodynamic farming, a holistic, chemical-free approach to agriculture that is practiced by several of the world's oldest and most respected wineries. Based on the work of Austrian scientist and philosopher Rudolph Steiner, biodynamic farming is a comprehensive alternative to industrialized agriculture that approaches vineyards (or farms) as complete living organisms. To achieve greater vineyard health and fruit quality, biodynamics focuses on naturally derived plant and foliar treatments. Winemaker Kevin Morrissey works closely with renowned biodynamic consultant, Philippe Armenier, to ensure that Ehlers Estate embraces all of the strict criteria and practices of biodynamics, including the use of all plant and foliar treatments, and adherence to the biodynamic calendar and the natural cycles of the earth.

One of the elements that make biodynamic and organic viticulture so successful is the intimate, hands-on attention given at every stage of winegrowing. This hands-on attention greatly enhances quality. Simply put, the wines of Ehlers Estate are made from estate-grown grapes that come from healthy, happy, chemical-free vines.

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