

Stuhlmuller Vineyard

The Vineyard

The 150-acre Stuhlmuller Vineyard is located in northern Sonoma County, where the Alexander, Dry Creek, and Russian River valleys come together. With vines planted at the convergence of these three, highly regarded Sonoma appellations, Stuhlmuller Vineyards occupies a unique place in the county's viticulture. Located at the southwestern edge of the Alexander Valley, along the banks of the Russian River, Stuhlmuller Vineyards possesses gravel, clay, and volcanic soils. The geology of this terrain was formed during thousands of years of alluvial fan movement and flooding. Today, these ancient soils, along with the area's distinctive microclimate, provide the ideal environment for growing world-class Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Zinfandel.

From a hillside on the western edge of the property, a fourth Sonoma County appellation, Chalk Hill, is visible. On summer mornings, fog rolls in through the Chalk Hill gap where the river makes its way southwest through Alexander Valley. As afternoon temperatures rise, the fog burns off. Next, maritime breezes from the Pacific Ocean enter the gap, and the vines cool off once again. This typically means a temperature drop of five degrees or more in the late afternoon, a cooling phenomenon referred to as the "Venturi Effect." Stuhlmuller Vineyards is planted to 90 acres of Chardonnay and 57 acres of the Bordeaux varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petite Verdot. The remaining three acres are planted to Zinfandel and Petite Sirah. The Chardonnay plantings are divided into five blocks on well-drained, gravelly benchland adjacent to the Russian River. Approximately 80 percent of the vines are planted with budwood believed to be an old Wente clone of Chardonnay sourced from the famed Gauer Upper Barn Vineyard. The remaining 20 percent is divided evenly between the hand-selected 4 and 15 clones of Chardonnay. These clones produce small clusters and berries with complex character.

The area's fog, breezes, and cool nighttime temperatures give the Chardonnay grapes a reprieve from the afternoon heat and allow them time to develop elegant tropical flavors and crisp acidity. The soil itself imparts a distinctive mineral quality to the fruit, one of the Stuhlmuller Chardonnay's signature characteristics.

The Cabernet Sauvignon is divided into eleven benchland and hillside blocks. The sloping sections of the vineyard are comprised

of alluvial and uplifted benchland soil, sandy loam, gravel, and rocks. The soil is thin in some sections of the vineyard, which reduces vine vigor and produces low yields of small, intensely flavored berries. The fruit exhibits subtle notes of herb and olive, along with the rich cherry, black fruit, and cocoa characteristics that personify the Alexander Valley terroir.

Finally, two small blocks of the Stuhlmuller Vineyard are devoted to Zinfandel and a small amount of Petite Sirah. Both varieties are head pruned in the traditional fashion to maximize flavors and minimize vine crop load. Tom Maple's famous benchland vineyard in nearby Dry Creek Valley was the source of the budwood.

The vines have clearly taken to the Alexander Valley soil. The first estate Zinfandel bottling from the 2001 vintage was a great success, and the subsequent two harvests have confirmed that the future looks very bright for the Stuhlmuller Zinfandel program. Under the guidance of vineyard director Dave Collin, every block of Stuhlmuller Vineyard receives extensive personal attention. Farmed with an eye towards the individual needs of each varietal and every block, Dave and his team tailor trellising and pruning methods based on an overall understanding of each site on the vineyard. A firm believer in terroir-inspired wines, winemaker Leo Hansen works closely with Dave to produce fruit with balance and concentration. To achieve this, the Stuhlmuller team limits yields through vine training, pruning, thinning and fruit drops.

In addition to its hand-on in-house team, Stuhlmuller Vineyards has also worked closely with the vineyard-consulting firm, Crop Care Associates, Inc., for nearly a decade. This combination of Stuhlmuller's own artisan vineyard management, backed by access to state-of-the-art viticultural science and analysis has proven ideal, helping the vineyard to grow consistently excellent fruit year after year. Currently, renowned vineyard consultant Bob Gallagher of Crop Care Associates visits the vineyard regularly, working with Dave and Leo to establish the most beneficial practices in a wide range of areas including: vine training, pruning, canopy management, crop balancing, water management, chemical analysis and an overall minimization of the use of chemicals on the property. This ongoing commitment to quality has helped to establish Stuhlmuller Vineyards as one of the area's premier producers of estate fruit.