

2022 Blankiet Estate Prince of Hearts Red Wine, Paradise Hills, Napa Valley

Review by Joe Czerwinski
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Rating: **93 points**

Drink 2025 – 2035

The 2022 Prince of Hearts Red Wine includes 44.8% Merlot, 40.6% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9.7% Cabernet Franc and 4.9% Petit Verdot. Hints of cedar and menthol accent notes of ripe cherries, red raspberries and milk chocolate notes on the nose, while the medium to full-bodied palate is supple and creamy textures, leading into a long, mocha-tinged softly dusty finish.

Owner Claude Blankiet presaged our tasting of the 2022 by saying, “Heat is always the enemy of wine. We experienced this 20 years ago, trying to dry farm our vineyard and during a heat spike in September, our grapes shriveled in three days. We started experimenting with shade cloth in 2004 and now we have 75,000 linear feet protecting the fruiting zone, in addition we use tiny water misters that lowers the temperature by 10 degrees around the clusters. We used both systems in 2022 – It saved us.” While neighboring Dominus is not bottling any 2022s, said Blankiet, “For us, our wines kept their freshness. Using the shade cloth as louvers – lowering and raising them –we can mitigate the excess of solar radiation without slowing ripening.” Blankiet said that some people opted to harvest early – the end of August or early September. “But here, when we tasted, the fruit wasn’t ripe,” he said, so we waited.

Winemaking consultant Graeme MacDonald, who began working with Blankiet in 2016, does a reasonably large saignée –about 20% -- which goes toward the estate rosé, but he isn’t dogmatic about avoiding water additions. “The goal is always to pick perfectly, he said. “I don’t like acid adjustments because I think you can taste

them later.” He also limits yeast nutrient additions to induce reduction. “If you get the picking decision right, you can avoid many of the adjustments,” he said. “I like being hands-off. I want to be the invisible winemaker if I can.” That said, MacDonald isn’t shy about discussing what he does do. “Since I have been here, the goal has been to bring out more tannin and structure. We do big saignées and 40 to 50 days macerations.”

The fruit is chilled to 24° F to improve destemming, and there is a long cold soak (seven days or more), at the end of which he adds a ‘pied de cuve’ (native wild yeasts starter). A warm initial fermentation stage (above 90 degrees Fahrenheit), which he then backs off as alcohol levels rise, followed by an extended maceration under closed lids without further pump-overs (with temperatures as low as 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit).

“There is bitter chocolate that starts to come out, and that’s when you know you are done,” said MacDonald. “I like reduction because that’s how you get the graphite, the minerality to come out.”

During aging, he will do barrel swaps to avoid “over-seasoning”. Any particular lot is racked as needed and he slowly build the blends over the entire course of the élevage. By his own admission, he often has last-minute changes, like adding another gallon of Petit Verdot into the blending tank.

“Wine is man and technique, science and nature” said Blankiet. “That’s the magic of wine.”

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