

Historic family place a wine purist's dream

Karola Sackel, Special to The Chronicle
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Terroir is the buzzword of modern wine lovers, bandied about by ordinary imbibers and pros alike with great abandon - sometimes with ample justification, sometimes less so.

The French concept certainly guides the Burgess family, which has been making wine in the hills above Napa's Silverado Trail for 37 years.

THE VIBE: The big names in the wine business may carry the Napa name around the globe, but it's small, family-owned and -run wineries such as Burgess that are the valley's heart and soul. Operating out of a small building perched above the pristine water of Bell Canyon Reservoir, which supplies St. Helena with drinking water and is not open to the public, this winery wears the patina of age gracefully. The tasting-sales room was built in the 1960s, when Souverain owned the property. It wasn't the first to make wine here. The original grapes were planted by Italian immigrant Carlo Rossini in 1891.

In its early years, Burgess purchased some fruit from nearby vineyards. Not anymore. All Burgess wines - 20,000 or so cases - are crafted from estate grapes from three vineyards on the west and east side of Howell Mountain and the Triere vineyard on the valley floor in Yountville.



THE TEAM: Owner Tom Burgess, an Ohio-born former Air Force and corporate pilot and an all-round sportsman, traces his love of wine to teenage experiences at Lake Erie wineries. He is a hands-on wine man. You might find him repairing a water line or driving a tractor just as easily as extolling his wines to a visitor.

THE EXPERIENCE: This is a wine purist's dream destination - no baseball caps, no cute coasters or food products, just good, interesting red wines poured by knowledgeable, non-pushy staffers who obviously love what they are doing. Tastings are free but require a reservation. There's no fear of finding yourself in a crush of tourists. The driveway cannot be negotiated by buses, having been built "about 20 years before the automobile became the common form of transportation," Steve Burgess said with a chuckle.

Rating: ★★

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THE BURGESS CELLARS ESTATE VINEYARDS

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

*Hillside Vineyards
Napa Valley*

Gorgeous black fruit, gravel, violets, black cherry, anise, juicy palate with nice structure and velvety tannins along with chocolate flavors.

Finishes with very elegant bittersweet tannins.

Notes: _____



THE RANCH VINEYAR & WINERY SITE

Western Side of Howell Mountain.

Planted to: Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.



TRIERE VINEYARD

Oak Knoll District

Planted to: Merlot, Syrah, Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon.



HAYMAKER VINEYARD

Eastern Side of Howell Mountain.

Planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot and Malbec.



CHARDONNAY

*Burnside Road Vineyards
Russian River valley*

Lemon-lime, pineapple, mango, key-lime pie with yummy crust. Full flavored and impeccably, elegantly, balanced amounts of fruit, wood, and acidity. Dry, but very fruity finish.

Notes: _____

VISTING INFORMATION:

Tasting in our barrel aging cellar is by appointment. Please call Monday-Friday, 8:30am-4:30pm.

On Saturday and Sunday an appointment can be made at the winery for groups of 6 or less.

Tasting fee: \$10 per person, one fee waived for each bottle purchased.

WINERY SITE:

Burgess Cellars is located at 900ft elevation on the western slopes of Howell mountain, just northeast of the town of St. Helena, 3.4 miles East on Deer Park Road from Highway 29. **"Best View of Napa Valley."**

WINES:

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah. Library Cabernet Sauvignon, and "winery only" exclusive wines.

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