

# WOLF FAMILY VINEYARDS

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## *Karen Culler*

Doug and Jane Wolf had just purchased the Inglewood Estate from the Jaeger family in 1996 when vineyard manager and vintner, Jim Barbour contacted me to discuss the winemaking program. The timing was perfect. I had decided to leave a corporate job at Robert Mondavi's Vichon winery after many years, and create my own wine brand, Culler. My plan also included becoming involved with other premium quality, small production wines. Although the main vineyard replanting was just underway I sensed that this location on the west side of St. Helena was something special and with Jim's encouragement I decided to meet Doug and Jane. My intuition served me well.

The Wolf's initial intention in purchasing this property was not for the winery, but as it became clear what the estate was capable of producing, their desire to make an artisan crafted, top quality Cabernet Sauvignon aligned with what both Jim and I knew would be possible. With those "marching orders" we only use the best wines from the best vineyard blocks for the Wolf Family Vineyards Estate wines. I feel lucky to be involved in such an uncompromising project.

### **Thoughts on the Vineyards**

Beginning with the harvest of the 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon from this newly planted vineyard, I discovered the depth of flavor development and texture potential in the wines. Ten years later and with greater vine age, I'm even more impressed but not surprised. Wolf Family Vineyards is ideally located in an area of Napa Valley, where the microclimate, soil and topography all come together to produce a superior wine. The Cabernet vines tend to be fairly self regulating, and this makes the winemaking somewhat easy. The grapes definitely dictate the wine at this winery. The berries are small and the clusters are very loose. The vineyard rarely needs thinning and produces a crop of less than 3 tons per acre every year. The grapes mature evenly, and at a pace that allows great tannin maturity. The tannins are soft at first, but then develop fully and are richly textured within this well balanced wine. It makes my job so easy

Since 1997, we have replanted most of the vineyard, except for the old vine Cabernet Franc which is a unique opportunity in itself having been planted in the 1970s. We've discovered what works and what doesn't within the confines of the property lines. For example, no longer is Merlot grown here even though it had historically

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been a Merlot estate. And although we concentrate on Cabernet Sauvignon, we planted a little Malbec and Petite Verdot to round out the repertoire of Bordeaux varietals. We also planted a thin sliver of a vineyard to Sauvignon Blanc and Sauvignon Musque. I have been extremely happy with the results of each of these decisions.

I could go on and on about this winery and one would be surprised to know that we're talking about less than 7 acres of vineyard! My passion runs deep for this project. The factors that I consider when deciding to work with a winery are—the vineyard site, the owners and their philosophy and the vineyard manager. All come together in perfect harmony at Wolf Family Vineyards and as a result, together we make beautiful wine.