

Larner Vineyard: Sweet Spot for Syrah and Grenache Part 2

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Mikael Sigouin of Kaena Wines pours his beloved Grenache, of which Larner Vineyard is a favorite.
Patricia Decker

Mikael Sigouin of **Kaena Wines** is affectionately known as the “Grenache King”. He says, “I love Grenache, because to me, it’s a challenge above any other grape I ever worked with...it’s so tough to grow, so tough to make and achieve that level of complexity...I think by treating Grenache with true respect and patience, you can achieve greatness with it”. He poured a near vertical tasting of his Larner Vineyard Grenache, 2006-2012 (minus 2007), a fascinating study of the vintages. From the full-bodied and well balanced spice of 2012, to the big and fresh, ageable 2009, the wow factor of 2008’s aromatic fruit, to the still youthful 2006 with ripe fruit, Larner Vineyard has inspired Mikael, who says, “if you take all the steps right, patience pays off, what you have is the greatest reward”.

Russell P. From of **Herman Story Wines** offered a taste of older vintages. He poured a 2004 Larner Vineyard Syrah, along with a 2007 and 2009, and a 2006 Grenache, along with a 2011 70% Syrah/30% Grenache blend. From says, “I’ve worked with this vineyard since 2002, it has a special place in my heart. I always do a vineyard designate every year. Ballard Canyon is an area that is so

unique to all my other sites that I get fruit from. I like the fact that you can get everything brambly and ripe, at the same time, it holds acidity”. He’s right, the Syrahs are rich and spicy, with good acidity, and the blend was elegant and delicious, the best of both worlds.



Patricia Decker

Seth Kunin of **Kunin Wines** poured three Larner Vineyard wines, his iconic 2003 Pape Star blend (65% Grenache, 20% Mourvedre, 15% Syrah), and a 2009 and 2012 Syrah. He says, “I love Syrah, because, to me, it’s very versatile.

You can have it with a burger or pizza, you can have it with rack of lamb or filet mignon, you can drink it usually pretty young, you can age it very gracefully. To me, it’s rustic but elegant”. Seth is partial to his Rhône wines from Larner, saying there’s no other place he would rather source his fruit. “I want to make **wine** that I’m proud of and like to drink, and I like to drink wines with some finesse. I like to drink wines that have ageability, that are food friendly, that have balance and elegance, and I think that wines from here really have that in spades”.

McPrice Myers poured three Rhône style Larner Vineyard Wines. Although he is based in Paso Robles, he seeks out fruit from renowned vineyards, like Larner, to craft his expressive wines. One of the few producers to offer a white, the 2013 Viognier was floral, with tropical and stone fruit, it was vibrant and delicious. A big, succulent 2012 Larner Vineyard Syrah followed, but the best of the bunch was an excellent red blend, the 2012 Hommage a Stevan Larner. This 62% Grenache and 38% Syrah wine was dense and complex, full bodied with good acidity, accented with herbs and spice, it’s a beautiful California wine with an Old World sensibility.

Michael Larner joined the party, showcasing his vineyard with several bottles. He greeted the wine press with a glass of the 2014 Larner Malvasia Bianca, an easy drinking white with good acidity. While touring the vineyards, the 2014 Larner Rosé was poured, a blend of 55% Syrah, 35% Grenache, and 10% Mourvedre, made by the saignée method, a rosé with lots of structure and berry fruit. Back in the barn for the organized tasting, two 2010 Syrahs were poured, an Estate and Reserve, in addition to the 2010 Larner Elemental blend, 57% Grenache, 33% Syrah, and 10% Mourvedre. The Elemental was polished and balanced, with ripe blackberry and plum fruit, black pepper, hint of mocha, and a mineral body. The Estate Syrah was big and bold, with black fruit, cured meat, smoke, spice, and espresso bean while the Reserve was more elegant, framed with cedar.

Michael’s geology background and formal viticulture training has given him a keen insight into the vineyard’s potential. He is a great ambassador for the region. Michael was pivotal in making the case for the new **Ballard Canyon AVA**, realizing the uniqueness of their Syrah, when, a few years ago, a side by side tasting of six Ballard Canyon producers’ wines with 45 sommeliers evolved into a “Why aren’t you an AVA?” moment. Now that the AVA is a reality, more people are aware of the stylish Larner Vineyard wines that reflect the mixed bag of maritime and warmer inland climates. The vibrant wines of Syrah and Grenache shine, their vines flourishing in the sweet spot of Larner

Vineyard.



Patricia Decker

Burbank Wine Shopping Examiner