

CHATEAU CAP DE MERLE, 2020

Lussac Saint Emilion

Chateau Cap de Merle is a delicious, round and supple St-Emilion that is ready for current enjoyment. The owners and winemakers, brothers Alain and Jean-Marie Bel, use no wood in vinifying Cap de Merle so its pure and savory Merlot fruit comes through directly upon tasting. The winery's excellent plateau vineyard on sandstone soil assures optimal ripeness of fruit and supple tannins. **The Bels have been committed to working in harmony with nature and sustainable agriculture for more than 30 years.** The vineyard is continuously monitored to ensure that enemies of the vine, such as parasites or fungi, are kept to a level below which they become dangerous. For example, natural predators are encouraged to check the presence of larva from moths (cochylis and eudemis) whose eggs form tiny ruts on grape skins and thus enable the onset of grey rot. The soils are plowed to control grass and break up the surface roots. This also helps to retain rainfall, check erosion, and foster a healthy natural ambiance. As a result of this practice of *la lutte raisonnée*, intensive treatments are unnecessary.

2020 is a superb vintage at Cap de Merle. The growing season began early with frequent rain. The vines flowered correctly in late May, two weeks ahead of the norm. The fruit developed well over the hot and dry summer; veraison occurred in late July. Ideal weather continued over the next 6 weeks. The Bel's vineyard work over the summer was rewarded in September, when a pattern of very warm days and cool nights continued through harvest time, with some beneficial rain at the end of the month. These factors allowed the crop to attain optimal maturity and develop concentration while preserving the grapes' fruity acidity and aromatic intensity. A double selection was carried out to ensure that only perfect fruit was accepted: one sorting in the vineyard, and a second at the winery. The Bels calibrated the vinification to attain a balance of ripe fruit and a supple texture. The sugar level of the must was higher than in both 2015 and 2019. To enhance the extraction of color and aromas, the Merlots were given a 48-hour cold maceration before the start of fermentation. To further advance quality, in week 1 of the three-week fermentation period, the Bels carried out four daily remontages (pumping over) to attain a maximum of color, flavor and supple tannins from the skins. In the following 3 weeks, the frequency of remontages was gradually diminished as the young wine developed richness and texture by extended contact with the lees and circulation of the wine under the cap. The goal was to attain structure only through maceration and not by working the solids with many remontages. The Bels assembled the three varieties 11 months later and then did a light fining with gelatin to enhance the wine's supple texture by removing tannic elements present in the solids. The Bels consider the 2020 vintage **Cap de Merle** to be their finest yet for its ideal balance of exceptional ripeness and concentrated but soft, mouth-filling structure. Cap de Merle 2020 is a Merlot-based Saint-Emilion wine of deeply saturated color and a full expression of generous and round, fresh, complex dark-berry and black-cherry fruit.



The Cap de Merle vineyard is on a well-exposed plateau.



The soil is composed of sand and silt, which drains well.

Technical Details

70% Merlot
20% Cabernet Franc
10% Cabernet Sauvignon

Location: In the commune of Lussac St-Emilion, 5 miles north-east of the town of St-Emilion

Climate: Atlantic climate – humid in Winter, and warm and dry in Spring and Summer.

Soil: The vineyard is a plateau on a silt and sand soil. The subsoil has traces of iron-oxide, mixed with clay.

Altitude: 30 meters

Average age of vines: 30 years

Vineyard size: 22 hectares, one parcel

Density of plantation: 6000 vines per hectare

Pruning: simple *Guyot*

Yield: 55 hectares per hectoliter

Vineyard practice: "*lutte-raisonnée*" for over 30 years

Harvest dates: Merlot: September 21-29
Cab Franc & Sauvignon: Sept. 28-Oct. 2

Yeasts: only indigenous, to preserve typicity of the wine

Maceration & Fermentation period: 2 days of cold maceration for 10% of the volume, and then 3 weeks of maceration and fermentation

Maturation: Stainless steel tanks for 18 months, under blanket of inert gas.

Assemblage: winter 2021

Bottling date: March, 2022