USA, California, Sonoma County: New Releases from Aperture, The Setting & Aesthete

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23rd Mar 2023 | The Wine Advocate | *March 2023 Week 3*

Vintage	Wines	RP
2020	Aperture Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Del Rio Vineyard	98
2019	Aperture Cellars Nomad	97
2020	Aperture Cellars Bordeaux Red Blend	97
2019	Aperture Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Farrow Ranch	97
2020	The Setting Wines Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley	96

This latest set of releases from winemaker Jesse Katz and associate winemaker Hillary Sjolund includes bottled wines from 2019, 2020 and 2021. A relatively cool, mild season and leisurely harvest in 2019 allowed the team to drive style and resulted in ripe and powerful yet balanced wines, a set of circumstances echoed in the similarly dry, mild season of 2021. The 2020s in this report are especially impressive given the unprecedented challenges of the vintage. Their high quality illustrates this team's supple response to seasonal challenges and dedication to quality via ruthless triage on the sorting table.

Harvest at Aperture Cellars (Photo courtesy of the winery)

Wildfires affected many of the red grapes in 2020, and 38% of the vintage was lost. No Devil Proof Malbec was made, and the only single-vineyard Cabernet produced is the Del Rio. Unforgiving sorting and incredible attention to detail in the cellar resulted in an excellent, if streamlined, portfolio of 2020s that I could not be more impressed with. Katz and his team brought in what they could, running micro-ferments on all the free-run and press wine. "We spent a small fortune on 300 micro-ferments," he says. "We even purchased blenders, trying to understand extraction and using that to get additional analysis. We kept everything separate, kept a percentage of lots out of oak, and anything over threshold we took an insurance claim on or bulked out." Extra barrels meant for lost fruit offered a chance to cherry-pick wood usage, and the pandemic kept Katz and his team isolated in the winery and minimized distractions. "It's the most time I've ever spent in the vineyards," he recalls.

Jesse Katz in the vineyard with his wine dogs

"2020 was the earliest vintage of my career—not a single Cabernet Sauvignon was picked in October," Katz notes, and ironically, this set of 2020s offers notable elegance, energy and detail. Even more exciting than this lineup of 2020s is the purchase of Farrow Ranch in 2021, the site in Alexander Valley where he has sourced fruit for the iconic Devil Proof Malbec for more than a decade. Planted in the 1980s to Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc, Katz and his team took out some of the old vines and replanted other blocks, adding more Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Sémillon vines, totaling 80 acres. Katz has the know-how, team, tools, sites and vision to produce some of Sonoma County's best Cabernet Sauvignon, and readers can look forward to an expanded—and even more delicious—portfolio of wines as Katz and his team continue in their pursuit of excellence.