



BLACKBIRD  
VINEYARDS



THE WILDER SIDE OF CALIFORNIA

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*There's rare, and then there's really rare... The stunning debut of Blackbird Vineyards*

2003 Blackbird - Merlot, Oak Knoll District,  
Napa Valley (Premiere release);  
Vinfolio rating: 98 points

Before discussing this particular wine in too much detail, as much as I want to, it makes sense to first talk about the background a bit. Beginning in 1999, Mia Klein, owner and winemaker of Selene Winery introduced a vineyard designate Merlot from Blackbird Vineyards, south of Yountville. This bottling quickly gained wide acclaim among the trade and I noted the 1999 vintage (95 points) as my recommendation over the much heralded 2001 Paloma Merlot (Wine Spectator's Wine of the Year in 2003). I very quietly sold dozens of cases of Selene's Blackbird to my clients who wanted to know what I was so excited about. It wasn't long until the mere mention of Blackbird stopped people in their tracks. It was the best Merlot nobody had ever heard of.

In 2003, the vineyard changed hands. While most of the fruit that year went to Shafer, Behrens & Hitchcock, Viader, and Lail, new owner Michael Polenske and winemaker Sarah Gott carved out a miniscule amount of fruit to begin his legacy. This wine not only follows in the footsteps of the string of the superb Blackbird Vineyards Merlot made by Klein, it sets a new standard unsurprisingly from the same source. An important note here is that as great as the Selene Blackbird was, it only contained 55% of Blackbird fruit. The 2003 is sourced 100% from the vineyard.

Michael and I tasted his 2003 Blackbird last Friday at my office in St. Helena, and I was left with an extremely solid impression of 94 + points. When finished with our meeting, I put the cork back in the bottle and left it on my desk to revisit Monday. The evolution left me speechless... after being open for 80 hours, only being gassed once on Sunday afternoon, the wine had evolved in unexpected ways. The nose reminded me of powdered strawberry and blueberry sifted into a chocolate brownie, laced with ginger snaps, underplayed by the faintest hint of kaffir lime zest and rich coffee. The palate is flawlessly smooth showing amazingly pure blueberry and cherry nectar with seamless integration of the aromas. The sweet finish with high acidity propels this wine into a very rare territory. The sublime finish is that of a rich triple espresso and creme de cassis. La dolce vita! Is there a better Merlot produced in America? 3 bottle limit. Drink: 2005-2010.

Wineries buying fruit from Blackbird in 2004 and 2005 are Pride, Foley, Lail, Vineyard 29 and Harlan (Napa Valley Reserve).



...Rich and complex, with the classy mouthfeel that Napa provides so effortlessly. You might mistake it for a valley floor Cabernet for the new oak-infused blackberry, cherry and cocoa flavors and soft, immediate appeal. The tannins are there, but they're melted, sweet and gentle. **90 points**

BLACKBIRD VINEYARDS  
5033 Big Ranch Road Napa, CA 94558  
(707) 252-4444 tel • (707) 252-9999 fax  
[www.blackbirdvineyards.com](http://www.blackbirdvineyards.com)