

Arnot-Roberts

By Josh Raynolds

I visited Duncan Meyers and Nathan Roberts at their new Forestville winery, a facility originally owned by an apple processor and converted into a winery in the 1940s. Arnot-Roberts shares the winery with Pax Mahle and his Wind Gap project after working out of the Pax facility in Santa Rosa since their first vintage in 2002. The new wines track their previous releases closely, emphasizing aromatic freshness and lowish alcohol levels as a result of the cooler vineyards from which they source their fruit. As Meyers put it, "Arnot-Roberts is part of the new movement toward more energy and less sheer mass."

2008 Arnot-Roberts Chardonnay Green Island Vineyard/Bea Ranch North Coast

(12.9% alcohol) Greenish-yellow. Fresh tangerine and pear aromas are complicated by smoky minerals and brown spices. Rich and weighty but energetic too, offering zesty citrus and orchard fruit flavors and a chewy texture. The spiciness builds on the sweet, very persistent finish. This fruit came from two vineyards, one in Napa and the other in the Sonoma Coast. 91

2007 Arnot-Roberts Syrah California

(includes 10% viognier) Deep, vivid red. Intensely perfumed aromas of red and black fruit, with smoky herbal/ floral qualities adding complexity. Nervy raspberry and blackberry flavors are underscored by a cool graphite quality and framed by silky tannins. Turns spicier on the finish, which strongly echoes the floral note. I'd have guessed this to be a top-notch St. Joseph. This clocks in at a moderate 13.7% alcohol. 92

2007 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Alder Springs Vineyard Mendocino County

Glass-staining ruby. Hypnotic nose displays scents of red berries, cherry, smoked meat, potpourri and minerals; smells like a high-end, old-school northern Rhone. Pure raspberry and bitter cherry flavors are underscored by smoke, graphite and cured tobacco. Candied violet and rose notes build with air and carry through a strikingly long, juicy finish. This vineyard sits at an elevation of 2,500 feet and the wine was fermented entirely with whole clusters. 93

2007 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Hudson Vineyard North Block Carneros

Glass-staining ruby. Suave, mineral-driven scents of cherry-cola, blackcurrant, incense and fresh flowers, with a strong undercurrent of minerals. Spicy, finely etched dark berry and cherry skin flavors stain the palate, with dusty tannins lending support and slow-mounting minerality adding vivacity. Impressively precise syrah with excellent finishing cut and persistence. 93

2007 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Griffin's Lair Vineyard Sonoma Coast

Inky ruby. Vibrant, seductively perfumed aromas of black raspberry, violet face powder, anise and cracked pepper. Weighty dark berry flavors are brightened by zesty minerals, picking up a candied floral quality with aeration. The finish repeats the deep dark berry note and leaves spicy floral and mineral notes behind. Very elegant wine, with the balance to reward patience. This was fermented with 100% whole clusters. 94

2006 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Bugay Vineyard Sonoma County

(contains tiny bits of cabernet franc and petit verdot) Deep ruby. High-pitched aromas of blackcurrant, cherry preserves, smoky minerals, rose, lavender, tobacco and graphite; smells like a cross between a Graves and a Priorat wine. Nervy red and dark berry flavors completely stain the palate, with dusty tannins providing shape and back-end grip. The floral note gains strength with air and carries through the long, strikingly pure finish. Very impressive cabernet, with the depth and balance to age .92(+?)

2006 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Clajoux Vineyard Chalk Hill

Inky ruby. Deeper and more brooding than the Bugay, with ripe boysenberry and smoked meat aromas and a slow-building licorice quality. Slow to open, offering chewy dark berry compote and bitter cherry flavors and solid tannic grip. With air, this gave up pungent floral and incense qualities, suggesting that patience will be required for this to show its best. This vineyard was called Wild Iris through the 2005 vintage. 93 (+?)