

Arnot-Roberts

By Josh Raynolds

Duncan Meyers told me that he and Nathan Roberts use whole-cluster pressing for all their white wines "to maximize complexity and get the most vineyard character possible into the wine." Roberts said that if there's a simple philosophy in play here, it would be "to find great soils in cooler spots so that we can make wines with real, natural energy." On the subject of how much they like to intervene during the winemaking process, he told me that they "don't manipulate anything unless we absolutely, positively, no-way-around-it need to, but this is winemaking, not some alchemy or voodoo thing. You've got to know what to do and then be willing not to do it unless it's absolutely necessary. That means being able to let the wine do its thing and resisting the temptation to get too worried or involved at any number of stages, and that can seriously freak you out."

2009 Arnot-Roberts Old Vine White Compagni-Portis Vineyard Sonoma Valley

Pale yellow. A mineral-dominated bouquet displays pear skin, lemon, white flowers and wet stone. Dry, focused and pure, with strong cut to its citrus and underripe orchard fruit flavors. Becomes sappier with air while maintaining its minerality. The finish repeats the lemon note and clings with very good tenacity. 90-91

2009 Arnot-Roberts Ribolla Gialla Vare Vineyard Napa Valley

Light, bright gold. Exotic aromas of peach pit, quinine and blond tobacco, with a strong floral quality. Juicy pit fruit and melon flavors are firm by tangy minerality, picking up notes of honey and dried herbs with air. Pretty wild stuff, finishing with expansive floral and mineral qualities and impressive length. 90-91

2009 Arnot-Roberts Chardonnay Green Island Vineyard Napa Valley

Vivid straw. Fresh citrus and quince aromas are deepened by notes of anise and exotic violet. Dusty, gripping lemon rind and orange flavors give way to deeper orchard fruits in the mid-palate, picking up a hint of talc on the back half. This has a pH of 3.15 and is bone-dry but not pinched. Pretty intriguing, and there's no way I'd have guessed that this was from the New World. 91-92

2009 Arnot-Roberts Trousseau Luchsinger Vineyard Clear Lake

Pale red. Redcurrant, wild strawberry and blood orange on the nose. Light, precise, pure citrus and red fruit flavors put on weight with air and pick up a bitter cherry note, along with a touch of succulent herbs. This stony, sharply delineated wine finishes with refreshingly bitter notes of pomegranate and rhubarb. Emphatically not a wine for size freaks. 91-92

2008 Arnot-Roberts Syrah North Coast

(all whole clusters) Bright ruby. Powerful nose offers textbook syrah scents of crushed blackberry, violet and licorice, plus a lively smoky mineral note. Sweet and lush on entry, then spicy and intense in the middle palate, offering an impressive combination of black and blue fruits and floral qualities. Ripe but fresh syrah with a juicy, impressively long finish featuring notes of candied flowers and minerals. 91

2008 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Clary Ranch Sonoma Coast

Vivid ruby. High-pitched, pungent bouquet displays black raspberry, white pepper and an intense potpourri note. Very fresh and precise, offering tangy red- and blackcurrant and raspberry compote flavors that are underscored by mounting spiciness. Tighter than the North Coast bottling, finishing with impressive clarity and lingering spiciness. This was also fermented entirely with whole clusters. 92

2008 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Griffin's Lair Vineyard Sonoma Coast

(100% whole-cluster fermentation) Black and blue fruit aromas are complemented by notes of anise and black cardamom. Fleshy, seamless but focused blackcurrant and bitter cherry flavors gain sweetness with air, taking a turn to blueberry and showing a strong salty mineral character. Manages to maintain focus thanks to juicy acidity and slow-building tannins, which firm up the very persistent finish. This impressively balanced wine should be even better with a few more years of bottle age. This was picked at a low 23.5 Brix. 93

2008 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Hudson Vineyard North Block Carneros

(50% whole clusters were used to make this wine) Deep ruby with a bright rim. An exotically perfumed bouquet evokes black raspberry, dried cherry, fruitcake and floral oils. Succulent herbal notes come up with air and carry onto the palate, which offers dense, sweet red and dark berry compote flavors and a plush, velvety character. Finishes with strong thrust and impressively pure, lingering dark berry and bitter cherry notes. This is more backward than the Griffin's Lair and calls for more patience. 93(+?)

2007 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Bugay Vineyard Sonoma County

(includes 7.5% each of petit verdot and cabernet franc) Glass-staining ruby. Spicy blackcurrant and cherry preserve aromas are complicated by cracked pepper and a sexy floral quality. Silky, sweet and focused, with concentrated, energetic dark berry preserve and bitter cherry flavors, gentle tannins and an intensely spicy character. This vibrant, pure wine finishes with excellent clarity and nervy persistence. 93

2007 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Clajeux Vineyard Chalk Hill

Opaque ruby. Pungent cherry-cola, mulberry, licorice and dark chocolate on the nose, plus a zesty note of cracked pepper. Sweet, sappy and full-bodied but lithe, with deep dark berry preserve, cherry compote and chocolate flavors complemented by a hint of licorice and a subtle cola note. Finishes with outstanding lingering sweetness and fine, dusty tannins. This wine gained energy with aeration and should be a fine cellar candidate. 93

2007 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Fellom Ranch Santa Cruz Mountains

Blackcurrant, cherry-vanilla, cocoa, potpourri and incense on the nose. Velvety, layered and plush, with a seamless texture to the full-bodied, seductively sweet flavors of oak-spiced cherry and dark berries. The fruit overwhelms the oak notes on the finish, which is broad, sweet and extremely long. Very sexy and balanced to age, with a sneaky floral quality lingering in the empty glass. 94