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Frequently Asked Questions

What is so special about Montemaggiore?

Here at Montemaggiore, we believe smaller is better. Thinking small means that we focus on one varietal, Syrah – we can research, experiment, learn and perfect the growing and vinification of Syrah. Thinking small means utilizing small-production mountainside grapes—the steep slope of our estate vineyards naturally yield small grapes in small quantities with big flavors. Thinking small also means taking small steps to reap big rewards, which is why we farm in a sustainable, organic, and Biodynamic® manner. Lastly, thinking small means producing small lots of wine that are vinified separately and blended for the optimal flavors. Never producing more than 2,000 cases allows us give you wines which are exceptional and reflect the unique terroir of the Dry Creek Valley.

What is the mission of Montemaggiore?

Montemaggiore's mission is to consistently produce world-class Syrahs and olive oils using Biodynamic farming practices. We intend to produce exceptional wines vintage after vintage, attainable with our mountainside estate grapes. We also intend to be good shepherds of the land, and grow grapes and olives in a sustainable manner without chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Ultimately, we want to produce wine that you are proud to share with your friends and family.

Why do you have such a long and hard-to-pronounce name: “Montemaggiore”?

We wish that our name were short, American, and easy-to-love—but our Italian name, just like Vincent's Italian nose, is not. Pronounced “mohn tay ma JOHR ay”, and meaning “great mountain”, we borrowed the name of our ancestral home in southern Italy. This name reflects the steep mountainside of our vineyards while paying homage to our Italian heritage (along with the Italian heritage of California wine industry).

Why does Montemaggiore specialize in Syrah?

Simply said, Syrah is our favorite grape varietal—and above all, we want to produce wines that we enjoy drinking, producing, and sharing. Syrah makes a wonderful wine for many reasons: it is food-friendly, enjoyable both young and after aging, pleasurable to both the novice and sophisticated drinker, yet relatively undiscovered in America. Perhaps most importantly, the mountainside location and climate of Montemaggiore's estate vineyards are perfect for Syrah.



Why are estate grapes important?

Estate grapes are the key to consistently producing world-class wines. Since we don't buy or sell grapes, Montemaggiore has a constant source of grapes that we know intimately while our grapegrowing and winemaking practices can be fully integrated. We can focus on quality over quantity in the vineyard: we can pick the grapes by block at the optimum ripeness in however large or small quantities required, and the time from harvest to fermentation is minimized. Because we own the vineyards, we can develop a consistent style in our wines that you can count on for excellence. Winemakers who don't own grapes are at the mercy of the market; perhaps searching for new grape sources every year, leading to wines of inconsistent style and quality.

Why are mountainside vineyards important for wine quality?

Steep vineyards are the key to producing grapes of great intensity—just look at all the great vineyards of France, Germany, and Italy. Mountainsides tend to be very rocky and have very thin topsoils, along with excellent drainage. This leads to naturally low-yielding vines, small grapes, and wines of wonderful intensity and flavor—especially important for Syrah, a very vigorous vine that can produce high volumes of low quality fruit when grown in deep, moisture-retaining soils.

What is so special about Nobile, Montemaggiore's Cabernet/Syrah blend?

We can't say "we were the first!" because blending Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah is not a new idea. In Provence, the French have been blending these two varieties since the 19th century and more recently the Australians led the charge in the 20th century. In general, the intense fruit of the Syrah tends to "brighten" the sternness of the Cabernet, while the big tannins of the Cab seem to give the Syrah more structure. For Montemaggiore Nobile (in early vintages known as Superiore), we have put together a special blend in which the exceptional nature of our mountain-grown Syrah and Cabernet fit together perfectly like an elegant hand in a silk glove.

Montemaggiore has a unique-looking press, what's up with that?

We utilize a stainless steel basket press, a high-technology version of an ancient tool (the Egyptian Pharaohs are said to be the first to employ the basket press, made of reeds). A division of the highly-respected French company Vaslin-Bucher, JLB, developed this press in conjunction with the winemaker at Chateau Petrus in Bordeaux. The JLB press utilizes hydraulics to gently press additional wine from the grape skins after fermentation. The press is very gentle, doesn't over-extract tannins, and produces very clean press wine, as it is partially filtered through the mass of pulp it drains through in the basket.

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