



## LEEWIN ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Planting of Leeuwin Estate Cabernet Sauvignon commenced in 1975 and 1976.

In the period of 1978-1984 producing Cabernet Sauvignon at Leeuwin involved considerable learning. In 1978 and 1979 there was a lot of experimentation to find the way. By 1982 winemaking techniques were established and over time the style evolved to become more complex and structured.

Whereas understanding the style and techniques for Chardonnay developed early in the history of the Estate, the same for Cabernet Sauvignon and the associated varieties of Malbec, Merlot and since 1991, Petit Verdot, has been more evolutionary. Leeuwin's understanding has tended to unfold as the vines aged and as grape composition altered, sometimes quite dramatically. Today Leeuwin produces a very different style than in 1978.

Young vine fruit from highly vigorous vines, combined with the then current Napa Valley thinking, meant that the early wines tended to have a high extraction and tannin, without the necessary fruit to balance it. Though they have always remained true to the philosophy of traditional extractive winemaking, it wasn't until 1982 that Leeuwin first saw what could be achieved. There was potentially rich fruit with full but delicate texture and a touch of Margaret River leafy capsicum to match and balance the tannin.

However the next three vintages were very different to each other and not quite the style Leeuwin was working towards. The 1985 was popular, but too leafy. The 1986 had much more fruit but was a little light. It all pointed to a question of vineyard technique. They realized that the best batches of wine came from open canopies, moderate yields, later harvesting – in fact in the same sort of balance as the Chardonnay (not really earth shattering conditions these days, but quite something in 1986). Since then, with a greater understanding of the canopies, they arrived at a point where the wild fruit flavors of old were replaced with richer flavors, finer tannins and denser structures. With oak maturation polishing and bringing the wine together, the wine in the bottle today is very different in style to the early Leeuwin Cabernets.

From the commencement of the pruning season each vineyard site is treated individually. Late ripening varieties, Cabernet and Petit Verdot, are pruned early. Pruning is staggered according to relative harvest times to ensure harvest is a steady progression with picking brought forward a little. In the vineyard where normal growth can be excessive, Leeuwin uses a vertical foliage control system to open up the vine. The foliage is hand trained to a hedge and leaves around the fruit are plucked to allow the ripening bunches to be open in the sun in the morning and evening, but to be shaded during the hottest period. In other blocks, particularly in the ideal soil of the mild slopes, the vines balance naturally without the need for foliage management.

During the season there is little summer rain and though mild, it is sunny, with the all tempering late morning sea breeze carrying enough mild humidity to allow the vines to produce well without irrigation. In fact the moderate water stress placed on the vines during the ripening period concentrates flavors and acid. Ripening commences in mid February, continuing through to harvest in the month of April and finishing often around Anzac Day.

Although Leeuwin routinely tests for sugar and acid during ripening, the taste of the fruit, especially the skins, is the most important harvest criterion. The grape should taste neither of leaf at one extreme nor stewed jam at the other, but of plums and spice without noticeable skin flavors, until it is pulped up in the mouth – and then be without

greenness or thinness. At this stage, the berries tend to detach easily from the bunch – the vine itself seems to be dropping as many hints as possible that all is ready to go.

Sugar is around 23.5 brix, acids up to 7gms/litre. Malbec and Merlot ripen slightly earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon, however the integration in the final blend is better if waiting a week, picked with some Cabernet from the same area and co-fermented. Petit Verdot on the other hand is later, usually picked last and seldom fermented with Cabernet.

Processing is as gentle as possible within the tradition of maximum extraction by extended skin contact at moderately warm temperatures.

Leeuwin starts with destemmed but not crushed fruit that is gently transferred to the fermenter, with as many whole berries as possible. The ferment usually starts on day three, using yeasts capable of moderately slow progress through warm conditions to peak around 28 – 30C. The whole berries ferment internally and the juice, liberated by the pump transfer, is pumped slowly over the cap of skins at intervals during the ferment. Extended skin contact of up to 20 days at cool temperatures picks up the best of the skin flavors to add to the fruit extracted and the new wine is drawn off when flavor and texture have come together.

The color is deep red purple, opaque, almost shiny black – the taste mouth filling and powerful, with rough edges everywhere and a clear indication of tannin. The Malbec and Merlot parcels show more obviously developed fruit, less aggressive flavor, the Verdot black, extremely fruity and big in every way including acid and tannin, but never jammy.

The new wines are inoculated with malolactic bacteria in barrels after the first racking. After a further racking and several months of barrel maturation they assemble tentatively the top wine for the vintage. After the blends are made the wine is gravitated to barrels. All of Leeuwin's Cabernets are matured in French oak barriques of wood from the 'Centre of France' and Allier forests. The percentage of new oak hovers between 25 – 40% in the Art Series, dependent entirely on the fruit content of the wine. New wines, strong in currant and plum flavors, can accept new wood readily and develop spicy-smoky notes during the maturation period. The aim is to submerge the wood flavors into the fruit structure. Through the subtle aeration of maturation from the wood of the barrel and the quarterly racking from barrel to barrel, the raw tannins in the new wine are gradually softened and modified.

The withdrawal from wood and the final assemblage depends entirely on how well the wine has developed richness and balance in the barrel. It can be up to 28 months for the Art Series, with the Prelude receiving no less than 20 months. The wine undergoes minimal filtration before bottling, the timing determined by when Leeuwin believes the blend to have come together. Bottles are then laid down in the cool storage cellar for a minimum of twelve months before release.

With another year in private cellars the wine will exhibit positive, integrated and intense flavors, together with a statement of delicate harmony, reflecting the year of its vintage at Leeuwin Estate.



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