

Vérité: Sonoma micro-lot wines

Yohan Castaing takes a look at the terroir-led wines of Vérité, and tastes several vintages of each...



Vérité sources its grapes from 54 micro-lots across four AVAs in Sonoma. Credit: veritewines.com

Vérité factbox:

Owned by Jackson Family Wines.

First vintage 1998

Grape varieties Merlot, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec.

Wines

La Joie is a Médoc-like, Cabernet-Sauvignon-dominant wine. Finely-etched and elegant with subtle length.

La Muse, Merlot-dominant, is more in a Pomerol style. Fleshy and mellow with poised berry fruit.

Le Désir showcases Cabernet Franc. Stands out for the quality of its tannins and floral finish that's light on its feet.

Grape sources Four sectors of Sonoma:

Kellogg Estate in Knights Valley : 20-year-old vines on average, on gravelly, volcanic soil at 170 and 300 metres. Warm days, cool nights, and a southwest exposure make this prime terroir for ripening Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Alexander Mountain Estate, located in Alexander Valley at 300 to 740 metres. Varied soils of volcanic origin suitable for Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot in addition to Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Vines are between 10 and 25 years old.

Vérité Vale in the Chalk Hill area: The soils here have higher clay content, with Merlot, Cabernet-Sauvignon and Petit Verdot vines between nine and 25 years old.

Jackson Park in the small Bennet Valley AVA: 10-year-old vines planted at 200-300 metres on pebbly volcanic soils with some clay, on which Merlot thrives. Hot days and very cool nights.

If truth be told, the vast **Sonoma** wine region has long been overshadowed by the **Napa Valley**. Certainly, its greater terroir diversity makes it less easy to peg into a category of regional and stylistic identity. For the Bordeaux-blend 'micro-cru' wines from Verité, it's this complex diversity of soil types and hillsides with varying orientations, as well as a significant day-night temperature shift, that are the cornerstones of their singular character and stellar quality.

The tasting

A vertical tasting of Verité's three wines in Paris, to celebrate its 20th anniversary, took place in the presence of winemakers Pierre and Monique Seillan, and their two children, Hélène and Nicolas. 'With Verité, we wish to listen to and respect the message from the soil and craft a truthful expression of the diverse Sonoma sites in a way that combines the traditions of the old world and the potential of the new world,' said French-born Pierre. The estate's name in French boldly says it all.

The terroir

The four appellations providing the grapes benefit from the distinctive climate of this region, where the cooling winds blowing eastward from the Pacific Ocean keep at bay the heat generated during the day by the ardent California sun, while also influencing the cool nights.

Gradual ripening of the Bordeaux varieties is the main advantage here compared to the Napa Valley, allowing them to retain acidity, producing wines with freshness and elegance. As noted by Hélène Seillan, in charge of winemaking alongside her father since 2012, 'The cooling winds enable us to lengthen hangtime without paying the price of excessive concentration.'

Of the four appellations providing grapes for Verité, Chalk Hill bears a name that's understandably appealing to wine connoisseurs, but in fact the light-coloured soil doesn't contain that much of it, sharing with the three others volcanic soils, albeit a variant with white ash and sandy loam. All four terroirs have soil types that allow the grapes to retain their natural acidity, giving the wines thrust and a vertical structure on the palate that augurs a remarkable capacity for ageing.

The wines are in general rich and velvety but have finesse, focus and freshness, thus encapsulating the Sonoma style at its best. They demand at least ten years to blossom and have the potential for staying the distance for up to 50 years.

Tasting Vérité:



Verité, La Joie, Sonoma County, California, USA, 1998

This remarkably complex wine comes from the inaugural vintage, an El Nino year marked by disruptive weather patterns. It's made from a blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Merlot, showcasing ripe berry fruits with hints of spice and charcoal along with a minty note that emerges with aeration. It ...



€
515.00

Points 97



Verité, La Joie, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2002

A spicy, mint-infused aromatic framework for its lovely bouquet of black currant and berry fruits. It's an impressive, densely-fruited wine elevated by superb tannic structure and freshness. It should age beautifully over the next decade.

Points	95
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Verité, La Joie, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2005

A stunning wine, one of the most accomplished of the series, made from 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec. 18 months of barrel-ageing in new French oak has given spice and a charcoal note to the blackberry fruit. It has a dense, tightly-wound texture with ...

Points

100



Verité, La Joie, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2007

This comes from a vintage that brings together all the elements that showcase the potential of Sonoma terroirs. The wine is made from a blend of 68% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc, 5% Petit Verdot and 4% Malbec, and aged in new oak for 16 months. This is ...

Points 97



Verité, La Muse, Sonoma County, California, USA, 1998

Another remarkable wine from the complicated inaugural vintage of Verité. A blend of 90% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, it spent 13 months in new French oak. It has a multi-layered bouquet of truffle, leather and spice along with floral scents of peony and rose. There's the telltale precision and ...

Points 97



Verité, La Muse, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2002

The complex nose expresses subtle spice and mint notes on a foundation of ripe black raspberry. 93% Merlot and 7% Cabernet Franc. It has all the Verité hallmarks of density with freshness and lightness of touch on the palate, but also more acidic thrust than the 1998.

Points 97



Verité, La Muse, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2005

This blend of 88% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc and 2% Malbec spent 18 months in new oak. Its fragrant, floral aromas mingle with the characteristically subtle spice notes. The palate is full-bodied with a marked yet mellow tannic structure, followed by an appealing note of gastronomic bitterness on the finish. ...

Points

99



Verité, La Muse, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2007

A blend of 85% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc and 5% Malbec, this has spent 16 months in new oak barrels. It's full-bodied yet finesse-driven, with spicy, fleshy black fruits including some black cherry. It has concentration, length and elegance, with remarkable freshness and an enticing bitter almond edge. This merits ...

Points 99



Verité, Désir, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2002

Attractively aromatic, this has ripe dark fruit scents with a touch of smokiness. The sumptuous mouthfeel is energised by exemplary Cabernet Franc freshness, while the liquorice-infused finish is long, elevated by an ethereal airiness. 52.7% Merlot, 41.2% Cabernet Franc, 5.1% Cabernet Sauvignon and 1% Malbec.

Points 94



Verité, Désir, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2005

This has a complex nose with some earthy, hot-stone elements as well as smoked meat and kirsch characteristics. The tannins are finely-etched, effortlessly supporting the cherry and blackberry fruit. As is common with even the most concentrated wines from Verité, the finish is long and light-footed. 50% Cabernet Franc, 39% ...

Points	100
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Verité, Désir, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2007

A superb Cabernet Franc character, with multi-layered aromatic complexity packed with black fruits and noble spices. The palate gives the sensation of caressing cashmere, so plush is the fruit and so finely woven is the tannic framework. A supremely elegant, ethereal expression. 44% Cabernet Franc, 44% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon

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Points 98



Verité, Désir, Sonoma County, California, USA, 2015

This has a light touch of toasty oak on the nose and perfectly integrated albeit perceptible tannins on the palate at this stage, a bit like a smooth-textured corset for the dense, focussed and sweet-textured fruit. Despite its youthful intensity, this gorgeous wine impresses with its freshness and subtlety. 64% ...

Points	99
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