



2011 BABYLON TENBRINK VINEYARDS

This wine is composed of 100% Petite Sirah from Steve Tenbrink's remarkable vineyard on the Jones Ranch in Suisun Valley, about 15 miles east of the Carneros of Napa. The valley is warmer than Carneros, but not by much. The soils in most of the surrounding vineyards is very deep and rich alluvium, similar to the middle of Napa Valley—and not great for growing grapes. But this vineyard sits on an ancient river bed: a few feet below the surface of the soil

one finds a deep layer of sand, and beneath this, the ancient cobble of the river. For this reason, the vineyard offers growing conditions as if it were rocky and not bottomland. The vines were planted in the 80s and grafted to Petite Sirah in the 90s, and because of the soil, they exhibit perfectly balanced growth, with none of the excess vigor one might expect from the site. On top of this, Steve farms the vineyard organically and without irrigation. It is truly a superb site.

We harvest this vineyard very late; toward the middle of October. The fruit is desiccating on the vine when we bring it in. The tannins are rich and ripe, and the fruit is now beyond the horrible jammy stage, and well into a kind of dried meat savoriness. We bring the fruit in, introduce it gradually into 600 liter puncheons turned vertical, with their heads removed. We stomp the fruit thoroughly as it goes in, intending to break every berry and release some of them from the stems. Then we refrigerate the puncheons for a week or so and macerate the fruit to release a wide spectrum and depth of flavor. Once the fermentation begins, we encourage it by heating and bring the whole system up to about 95 degrees and keep it as warm as possible for 3 weeks or a month. During this time, we are climbing into the puncheons and performing *pigeage*-- foot treading— no less than 4 times per day. The fruit is rich and strong and we want it to give everything up.

We matured the wine for 36 months in two neutral 220 liter barrels, without topping or SO₂ for the first two years, and only one topping and SO₂ addition in its whole life. We think that the slow constant exposure to oxygen, and simultaneous undisturbed resting on the lees, are essential to the development of the wine. We began this process with an experiment in 2009, and decided that the wine we made with the additional year of aging was not only more sophisticated and more complex— in some ways, it was another, much better wine. The main difference is that tertiary aromas of dried mushrooms and leather replace the piercing dried fruit aromatics of the shorter-aged wine. The wine is bottled with 0 free SO₂ and about 30 mg/L total.

A note on the name: when I first started working with this fruit, I was making wine in Napa, and always had many colleagues around. In 2003, the Tenbrinks made their first delivery of fruit for Scholium for me, and brought the grapes to the winery I was then working at in Napa. My friends were astounded that I was bringing grapes from an outside region, and one with absolutely no reputation for quality, into Napa. They reminded me of the Ancient Romans, and the way that they viewed everything outside of the walls of Rome. Everything outside was barbaric, uncivilized. Babylon, as opposed to Rome.

TOTAL PRODUCTION: about 50 cases

