



Corison- California Cabernet with Subtlety

By Linda Murphy

February 8, 2007

Those who mourn “the good old days” of less ripe, less alcoholic, ageworthy California Cabernet Sauvignons can take comfort that Paul Draper at Ridge Vineyards isn’t the only one making wines the old-fashioned way.

Cathy Corison, whose winemaking resume includes Freemark Abbey, Chappellet, Staglin, York Creek and Long Meadow Ranch, founded her Corison brand in 1987. Since then, she has stayed true to her belief that vines are not “sugar machines,” that grapes should be picked at the moment when their green character disappears and before the flavours head toward prunes, that an herbal note adds complexity, that oak aging lends texture rather than flavour, and that alcohol levels of around 13.5 per cent allow the fruit to shine without truncating the life of the wine.

“I don’t want to make rocket fuel,” she says.

Corison harvests at lower Brix levels than most of her colleagues (typically 23.5 to 24.5) to make a wine she wants to enjoy with food, and one she wants to drink 10 years or more after release. Those who love aged bordeaux will appreciate aged Corison Cabernet Sauvignon.

Corison purchases grapes for her Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, and uses estate fruit for her Kronos Vineyard Cabernet. Kronos vines, planted south of S. Helena, are 35 years old and yield just 1.5 tons per acre. “It’s an economic disaster,” says Corison, who makes just 400 cases of Kronos, “but it’s a gift to make wine from these old vines.”

A recent tasting of Corison wines yielded the following notes:

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 Napa Valley 16.5 Drink 2009-2018
Edgy tannins and an herbal streak beg for cellaring. Deep black cherry and cassis fruit lies underneath the firm structure, with cocoa, tobacco and cedar notes in the background. Tart, mouthwatering acidity suggests long-term aging.
\$60

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 1996 Napa Valley 17.5 Drink 2007-2014. Black cherry, dried herbs and cinnamon spice dominate the nose; the palate mirrors the aromas, with cola and new-leather notes, and very refreshing acidity. Lingering finish, with drink-now charm and also a future in the cellar.

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 1995 Napa Valley 17 Drink 2007-2012 Savoury spice, cigar box and black cherry liqueur nose, with more vanillin oak present than in previous

vintages. Has an attractive dusty texture, with a cassis/ripe black cherry fruit profile. Crisp acidity, lengthy finish.

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 1994 Napa Valley 18 Drink 2007-2014 Tremendous complexity in its mix of cedar, earth, mint, anise and black cherry notes. Velvety tannins, with perfect weight and richness, it drinks beautifully now, yet has the legs to run for several more years.

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 1991 Napa Valley 17 Drink 2007-2010 Grippy tannins and mouthwatering acidity dominate, with juicy black cherry/raspberry fruit plumping the palate. Complexity comes from hints of sage and earth. Good length and balance.

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 1990 Napa Valley 16 Drink 2007-2009 Vanilla, dried herbs and red cherry dominate the nose. The palate is bright, lean and clean, with cherry/cassis fruit and a subtle brushiness.

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 1989 Napa Valley 15.5 Drink 2007-2008 From a cold, wet vintage comes a wine that overcomes the adverse growing conditions. Pie cherry and red berry flavours are fresh and lively; complexity comes from leather, brush and black tea notes. A fine effort from a difficult vintage.

Corison Cabernet Sauvignon 2002 Kronos Vineyard Napa Valley 17 Drink 2007-2014 Fleshy and viscous, with more extract and weight than the Napa Valley bottlings, yet it remains elegant and supple, with enough tannic structure and acidity to last. It's also under 14 per cent alcohol.
(\$98)