

DRX

Meritage at its penultimate
barrel aged three years

1999 North Coast
55% Cabernet Sauvignon
40% Merlot
5% Cabernet Franc

Art and tradition merge in our 1999 DRX, a classic, Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Hand picked and sorted, these grapes came from six of our favorite vineyards representing five separate appellations of Napa, Sonoma and Lake Counties (three of the four counties making up the California North Coast Appellation).

The Vintage: We do not make a Meritage wine every year, reserving the effort for the best vintages, of which 1999 was one. While not as "in your face" as the renowned 1997 vintage, '99 gave us fully ripe fruit with generous depth and flavor quality. The acid and pH balance was better than in '97, so the wines are more elegant. Over the long run the '99 wines should maintain balance better than the '97's will.

The Wine: Cabernet Sauvignon provides the framework, depth and the very long finish. Merlot contributes aromas and flavors toward the front of the palate along with delicacy and refinement. Cabernet Franc adds chocolate like structure toward the top of the palate, broadening the overall experience of flavors. The combined varietal characteristics are enhanced and balanced by three years of extended barrel aging in 85% French and 15% American oak barrels.

1999 is the first vintage we have given the proprietary name DRX to our Meritage wine. During aging, Robert and Michael regularly taste from each barrel to monitor quality and progress, then mark notes on the side in chalk. Barrels that are perfect, needing no special attention or work, are marked with a simple "X". After a couple of years the best of the best acquire a collection of X's and have been racked at least four times, naturally clarifying the wine. DRX is blended from the X barrels of Bordeaux varietals after two years. The Meritage blend is then assembled by taste from these "cherry picked" barrels and returned to our best barrels for an additional year of aging. This rare extra step allows the blend to fully marry and mellow. The use of 3-year, air-dried oak barrels (rather than cheaper 1 or 2-year dried oak), provides a more integrated oak influence, as would be expected from a wine aged several years in the bottle. DRX is a well-balanced, remarkably complex wine that drinks superbly now and will grow more enchanting with additional bottle age.

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1999 Deerfield Ranch, DRX Meritage Red Wine, North Coast, California, \$100. Ruby hued, the wine yields complex aromas of black fruit, cedar, olives and dark chocolate. Balance is impeccable, with substantial tannins that caress the palate rather than dry it. Flavors mirror the nose.

90 points for quality, **88** points for value.

