



DOMINUS & NAPANOOK

2010 Vintage, En Primeur

The name Christian Moueix incites immediate recognition in the wine world. Christian is the younger son of the late Jean-Pierre Moueix who established the eponymous firm Etablissements J-P Moueix in Libourne and to a great extent placed the wines of the Right Bank on the world stage. The business, overseen by Christian combines the role of a traditional *négociant* house with the ownership and management of many stellar properties, including Châteaux Trotanoy, La Fleur Pétrus, Hosanna and most recently Belair-Monange, amongst others. Jean-Pierre was pioneering in his day, an incomer to the region from the Corrèze and Christian, in turn has set his sights beyond Bordeaux. He studied at UC Davis, California, in the late 1960s and fell in love both with the Napa Valley and the particularly classical style of wine produced there. A seed on an idea had been sown and Christian set his sights on making wine there, some day. It took time to find the right property but in 1981 Christian came across the historic vineyard Napanook, at the foot of the Mayacamas Mountains. This was part of the old Inglenook Estate, the wines from which had originally attracted Christian's attention and admiration.

Vision and pioneering spirit notwithstanding, it was by no means plain sailing in the early years, Christian battling with an almost vertical learning curve under the critical gaze of curious, not to say sceptical, onlookers.


Christian's background was irrevocably bound to the Merlot grape, yet this was Cabernet country, with a climate which bore little resemblance to that of Pomerol. He had to get to grips with the vineyard and unfamiliar methodologies – and there was not even a winery.

Faced with this dilemma, Christian turned to his tried and tested philosophy, founded on the fact that wherever wine is made, the vineyard assumes supreme importance and the quality of the grapes is paramount. In Napa the vines are assiduously cosseted. In winter, very precise cane pruning ensures ideal cluster spacing, for optimal ripening. Crop-thinning is standard, either once or twice each year, depending on the growing season. This is to ensure balance and to concentrate the remaining fruit. Between 20% and 30% is generally removed. The grape clusters are separated to facilitate the circulation of air and *nettoyage* is exercised before harvest, that is, removing fruit which does not meet the Moueix's exacting standards. Canopy management and leaf plucking are also the norm and given the rain-free, dry summers, the grapes are even given a gentle wash before harvest to remove any summer dust and to aid the final maturation process. No effort is spared to produce the very best quality crop possible, the grapes picked by hand with small French shears rather than harvest knives and transported in small baskets to protect the clusters. The sunny side of the vines is picked before the shady aspect, to maximise maturity.

Christian's approach (a wine is only as good as the grapes from which it is produced) and the results soon began to convert the critics, with the wines attaining worldwide acclaim.

Once in the cellar, the grape bunches are sorted by hand and today there is a complementary optical sorting machine. Parcels are fermented individually and there is gentle pumping over and a delicate low pressure pressing.

In 1996, Christian released a proprietary blend made from blocks of vines which produce more accessible, earlier maturing wines, exuberant fruit supported by soft tannins. This was to become Napanook, a wine created to be enjoyed in its youth. Napanook has developed its own trajectory, enjoying an elevated reputation in its own right. Both wines have a hugely faithful following – well-deserved.



ALISON BUCHANAN

January 2014

2010 VINTAGE NOTES

2010 began with a cool and wet spring, impeding the start of the growing season. Bud-break, flowering and ultimately *véraison* (when the grapes change colour) were all delayed, in turn. Summer, on the whole, was cool, but there was a record-breaking heatwave at the end of August, temperatures reaching 41.6°C (107°F). The combination of the heat in late summer and an early autumn led to dramatically reduced yields of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot but also extraordinary concentration of colour and tannins. Cabernet Sauvignon relished and thrived on the late season warmth. In addition to climatic influences on volumes, the vineyard is undergoing a dramatic, extensive replanting programme and that, allied to Christian's rigid sorting regime, has savagely reduced volumes.

2010 TASTING NOTES

NAPANOOK

This year's Napanook blend is comprised of 98% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot and aged for 18 months in 20% new oak barrels. 2600 cases were produced in 2010. Intense jet-plum in colour, firm - almost opaque - to a tight, dark cherry rim, this offers dark, spiced fruit, dried flower potpourri and wild herbs on the nose, dark, earthy and brooding – relatively restrained. The palate is rounded and supple, cherry-rich, with mineral undercurrents and shades of citrus and caramel, beautifully balanced. There is a sense of focus on both the nose and palate and particularly on a sustained, rather elegant finish. As ever, Napanook, at this stage, will drink when decanted but will be even better with just a modicum of patience.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

18+

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2015 – 2025+)

£425/CASE OF 12 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

DOMINUS

The blend in 2010 is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot, aged for 18 months in barrel, with 40% new oak. 3000 cases were produced. We ought to be better prepared for this by now but every year we reflect on the self-restraint here. Auto-suggestion prepares us for more typical, heady Californian styles but there are no hard edges, no over-use of oak, no over-extraction. There is certainly a sense of place; indeed Christian Moueix oversees such rigorous sorting that this is the very essence of *terroir*. We are presented with Napa Valley understatement within a classical guise. 2010 is unusually evocative at this early stage. Opaque jet-plum, it offers spiced black cherry and plum compote, earthy, graphitic minerals and hints of citrus zest on both the nose and palate. The latter is

luscious, generous and well-rounded, sweet and ripe, supported by beautifully-integrated tannins and excellent mineral definition. A backdrop of cedar, grilled fennel and dark chocolate all contribute to considerable complexity throughout, finishing long – almost sinfully seductive. This 2010 vintage seems unusually gregarious at this embryonic phase and many will enjoy this from the outset – particularly when decanted. It will also develop beautifully in the bottle – an amazing Dominus.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

19+

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2017 – 2030)

£875/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

TASTING GUIDE

Our tasting notes provide full details but, at your request, we have also introduced a clear and simple marking system. We hope these guidelines assist you in your selection.

14 - 16 A VERY GOOD TO EXCELLENT WINE

16 - 18 AN EXCELLENT TO OUTSTANDING WINE

18 - 20 AN OUTSTANDING TO LEGENDARY WINE

Wines are judged within their peer group, eg. *Villages, Premier Cru, Grand Cru*. A definitive score of a young wine is almost impossible.

We usually offer a spread (eg. 14-16) that relates to a potential to achieve a higher mark. A '+' adds further to that potential.

A score is a summary only. The devil is in the detail, so please focus on the tasting notes.

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