

The Specifics

Wine Details

Wine Name:	Lava Cap Merlot
Vintage:	2023
Varietal(s):	100% Merlot
Appellation:	El Dorado
Country:	California
Alcohol:	14.5%
Production:	20 months in French oak



What Is It

Merlot is the most planted varietal in Bordeaux and the earliest of the Bordeaux varietals to fully ripen. It's an extremely versatile grape. Picked "early" (as soon as it becomes ripe) leads to a more medium-bodied Merlot with moderate alcohol and flavors of strawberry and raspberry. Picked "late" offers up a Merlot that is full-bodied, inky in color, with higher alcohol and blacker fruits such as plum and blackberry. Genetically speaking, Merlot is the offspring of Cabernet Franc and an incredibly obscure varietal called Madeleine. As such, it is a half-sibling to Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Carmenere, all of whom share Cabernet Franc as a parent.

The Lava Cap Merlot is opulent and rich with Bing cherry, plum, blackberry jam, black olive, cedar, clove, and a touch of menthol. It is medium- to full-bodied, presenting an excellent alternative to Cabernet Sauvignon. Awarded 92 points from Wine Enthusiast.

Who Made It

As the name might suggest Lava Cap was founded by geologists and situated atop distinct volcanic ash soil. The vineyards are located far within the interior of California and at high elevation (2,400 to 2,700 feet). This inland location allows the vineyards to completely avoid the fog that covers coastal California vineyards every morning. That fact, combined with the advantage of elevation offer more direct sunlight to the vineyards allowing for fuller ripening. The volcanic soils allow for excellent drainage while imbibing the resulting wines with clear minerality.

Doug's Deep Thoughts

This is Californian wine, but it ain't Napa or Sonoma or Paso Robles. The El Dorado AVA might as well be on Mars when compared to its more famous state siblings. The Pacific Ocean, so prominent a player in most California wine, has no real influence here. El Dorado is about elevation, sunlight, and soil. That is clearly expressed in their wines. Lava Cap Merlot is not your light, red fruit, maybe even chill it a bit Merlot for Tuesday night. This is one of Lava Cap's darkest offerings with a velvet finish that just gives me a feeling of warm summer nights outside looking up at the stars. It's dark and warm and expansive and would pair quite well with a s'more should a campfire be nearby. A steak would work too.