

CANVASBACK®

WASHINGTON STATE

Canvasback Update 4.28.2016.

Greetings from Red Mountain,

The first modern arrivals to this area were hardscrabble immigrants. They came in oxcarts and covered wagons via the Oregon Trail, to settle and farm in a region that promised good dirt, sunshine, and ample land. They were homesteaders: hardworking rural Americans, Germans, Italians, and Irish. The second wave brought relocated dust-bowl refugees from Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas, choked out of their failing farms, seeking opportunity in the irrigated desert of Washington State. Next came Mexican families, far from their homeland, to work in the fields and orchards.

These migrants endured arduous journeys to get here, and they worked over tough ground once they arrived. They pulled rocks from fields. They dug canals and diverted streams. They planted wheat, potatoes, onions, orchards, and vineyards. They were a determined, thick-skinned people.

I think about our wines from Canvasback in the context of this place where they are from: that they are the result of hard work in this land of extremes, their character defined by the thickness of their skin.

People frequently ask me what makes Red Mountain Cabernets different from Napa Cabernets. As I carry on about Growing Degree Days, average rainfall, latitude, and evapotranspiration, I'll watch their eyes glaze over. So let's keep it simple. It's about thick skin.

When it comes to making muscular, sumptuous Cabernet Sauvignon, we concern ourselves largely with the skins. All of the potential flavor, color, and textural bits in a red are derived from the skins. Meanwhile, the sugars and the acids are largely contained in the *juice* of the berry. And while sugar is important for its role of turning boring old grape juice into a fun alcoholic beverage, we can all agree the yummy, fleshy, dark, brooding flavors; all the blackberry, plummy, dark cherry and spicy goodness of Cab, is coming from those skins.

One may wonder what is happening in nature that delivers up these wonderful, thick-skinned berries to Canvasback? On Red Mountain, it is simple. It is a southwest-facing hillside in the hottest part of the State of Washington. The Mountain is a natural solar panel that scoops up all the heat of the sun in the afternoon, when the sun is in the southwestern sky. During the day, it gets much, much hotter than Napa. Midsummer daytime temperatures



Wheat farmers using a steam engine to thresh the grains from dryfarmed crop, 1907. North of Red Mountain, in Washington State



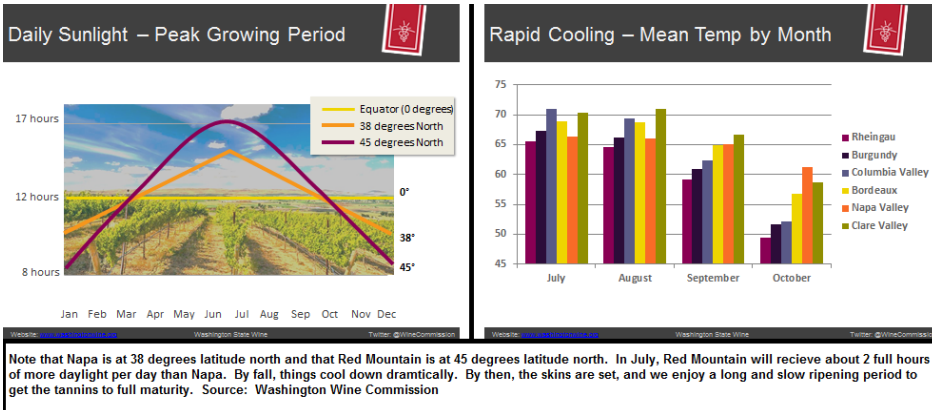
Obelisco Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon cluster from Red Mountain. Most of these berries are smaller than half of the tip of your pinky figure. Weighing in at 0.85 to 0.95 gram per berry, they are small but potent. Like Napoleon.

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WASHINGTON STATE

can stay above 100° F for several weeks during June and July, causing the skin of the berry to thicken in resistance to the sun. Factor in that Red Mountain is also much windier than Napa, and that thickens skins up even more. Finally, vegetative growth and vigor factor in on skin thickness. That we are in a desert, in nutrient-poor soils, we

tend to have small canopies and small clusters, with lots of little berries. It's all about the skin to juice ratio.



Red Mountain has a shorter growing season than Napa, made up for by the intense summer heat we receive. We just began bud break around the first of April, putting us just about a month behind Northern California bud break.

How does this translate into flavors in the glass? First, one notices the inherent *bigness* of Red Mountain Cabernets. While the tannins may be fully mature and ripe, there is noticeably high tannin. It gives the sensation of weight and intensity. It can be chewy and assertive on the palate. Napa tannins tend to be more polished and fine grained, Red Mountain tannins tend to be broad-shouldered and angular. Napa is seductive and graceful, Red Mountain is brash and explosive. If they were African animals, Napa would be a Lioness, Red Mountain would be a charging Rhino (see figure 3.)

These thick-skinned cabs make for wines that demand your time, your patience. It takes a year or so in bottle for them to come back together. They start to really hit their stride around year six. At 20-30 years, they are on full afterburn, glowing with refined energy like a hardwood coal in the heart of a bonfire. Slowly is the power of the sun un-packed.



In the winery, we've decided to chase all of that extract. We run long macerations to pull out all the yummy bits in tandem with the many layers of Red Mountain tannin. We've settled the age-old debate over whether punchdowns or pumpovers are better, by doing both, in the same day, to most of our fermenters. And then we take all that raw material and shape it up over the next two years of its life in the cellar, to make something sleek and enduring. It's like making a good table from a solid piece of oak.

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WASHINGTON STATE

Konrad Adenauer said: “A thick skin is a gift from God.” Some people think this was in reference to the challenges of rebuilding post-war Germany, but I’m pretty sure he was referring to grapes. To put things clearly, without abuse of metaphor: Red Mountain is such different a climate from Napa, that it receives completely different patterns of light and heat. The thickened skins make for formidable wines. Our charge is to take something tough and make it into something beautiful.

So I hope this update disambiguates the nature of Red Mountain Cab. You can now explain to your friends and neighbors that Red Mountain Cabernet from Canvasback is like a charging rhino oak table, ridden by a German migrant raised on grit and rocks in the Eastern Washington heat, a flavor explosion smoldering in your backyard bonfire. That will keep things clear.