



2007 Stolpman L' Avion

After seeing Red Rhone Varietals excel on the steep limestone hillsides of Stolpman Vineyards, Tom Stolpman decided to experiment with Roussanne in a narrow, straight valley used in the 1930s and 1940s to land the previous' owners small plane. Hence the Avant-Garde label and name L'Avion "The Airplane". Because the rows are planted perpendicular to the hillside vineyards, the "Landing Strip" is easily identified from the hills above. The drainage is excellent on the hard limestone, and the moderate winter rainfall in Ballard Canyon never dilutes the crop.

Roussanne ripens very late, and at the Stolpman Estate we typically pick the fruit in mid November with tremendous phenolic ripeness and low sugars. The resulting wine shows a long continuum of fruit flavors, from hints of citrus and pineapple to pear and honeysuckle. It's golden hue with tinges of green forshadows the lush, rich flavor inside the glass. Depending on the vintage, we will occasionally co-ferment the Roussanne with small amounts of Viognier to expand the aromatic profile of the wine. The Limestone soils and subsequent struggle to ripen allow the Roussanne to retain balancing acidity, unusual for how late the grapes are picked.

After pressing, the wine is fermented in 100% new 500 liter French oak puncheons. After the completion of fermentation, malolactic fermentation is allowed to occur naturally, usually commencing in the late Spring and finishing by the beginning of Summer. Our Roussanne is seldom racked to preserve the anti-oxidates in the lees. This keeps the Roussanne, which has a tendency to oxidize, fresh through its elevage. Battonage (lees stirring) is kept to a minimum. The Sur Lee aging adds to the viscous mouth-feel and lingering texture.

Roussanne is grown in California solely on a boutique level as mass producers have focused on more popular white varietals. The team at Stolpman sees great potential for Roussanne because of its beautiful aromatics, complex fruit flavors, and full bodied weight. L'Avion is concentrated enough to be complimented by new French Oak, not overpowered by it. We feel that Roussanne is the most delicious and interesting of the Rhone white varietals and is best suited for our Ballard Canyon vineyard. Viognier grows on the vineyard solely to serve as a blending agent for our Syrah and sometimes for our Roussanne.

Many red wine drinkers tell us that L'Avion is their favorite white, and the golden-hued wine often surprises people who normally stay away from whites. This is most likely because L'Avion behaves like a red wine. It needs over a year in oak to integrate; and then several months in bottle to settle; and after opening, L'Avion evolves and develops in the glass. L'Avion also proves to convert ardent chardonnay lovers with its beautiful fruit, rich viscous texture, and oak backbone.

Robert Parker Wine Advocate **93 Points**