



## 2003 SANGIOVESE

**VINEYARDS** Merlo Vineyards are situated near Warm Springs Dam on the western slopes of Dry Creek Valley. Their highest ridges command striking views of Lake Sonoma and beyond. The classic growing conditions of warm days and cool nights prevail. Fog is rare and vines receive prolonged sunlight for much of the growing season.

Harry and Billie Merlo have two sangiovese vineyards that offer distinct combinations of soil, exposure, elevation, clone, rootstock and trellising. While they stand proudly on their own, each planting creates a complementary wine that is blended to form one of greater structure and added complexity.

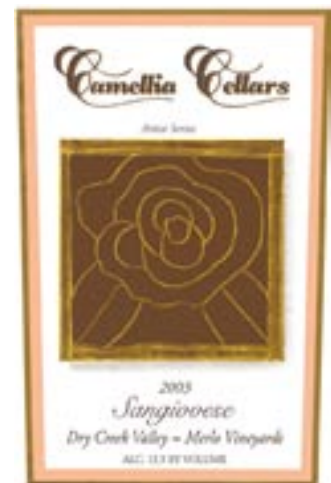
Ten acres of a piccolo clone from Brunello di Montalcino lie at 900 feet of elevation on a 22% slope with southeastern exposure. Once covered by a solid mass of decomposed granite, TNT Hill was developed in 1995 with the help of 6,000 pounds of volatile explosive. It was blasted to a depth of 15 feet before vines were planted in the graded debris. Absent of any topsoil, the stark medium of shattered granite and smaller particles stresses vines and restrains their vigor. The vineyard lives up to its name in dramatic fashion by imparting intense flavors of bright fruit.

A second and larger planting of sangiovese grows at 700 feet of elevation on a southwest-facing slope. Also derived from decomposed granite, the lean mountain soils are more fertile and less rocky than TNT Hill. The Grosso Clone 24 is used exclusively. A major component of most red wines from Tuscany, it fortifies the mid-palate with great mouthfeel and dusty tannins.

**VINTAGE** Rivalled recently by only the 2002 vintage, the 2003 growing season followed a brisk winter of moderate rainfall (40 inches). Buds broke early the first week of March as the skies gradually cleared and temperatures slowly rose. The remainder of spring and summer was predictably warm and dry with few heat spikes. Green clusters were thinned in late August. Mild temperatures in September provided a comfortable backdrop to crush and about 10 extra days of hang time. The vines developed thick skins that gave rise to great extraction and complex flavors in the wine.

**TASTING NOTES** *This elegant wine reveals a huge bouquet of cherry and raspberry syrup with a touch of lemon drop. Waves of fruit phenols roll over the tongue to embellish the enjoyment. The tannins are light while the acidity is firm. Quite substantial upfront, the mouthfeel is thick and slow moving like an Italian opera. A lengthy finish of deep fruit and subtle smoke complements food without overpowering it. Try it with grilled chicken or pork and mango-peach salsa. Aging potential: 7–9 years.*

— Winemaker Bruce Snyder



### TECHNICAL DATA

Appellation: Dry Creek Valley  
Varietal content: 100% sangiovese  
Harvest date: September 18, 2003  
Yield: three tons per acre  
Fermentation: 60–70% whole berry; four days cold soak;  
12 days in open-top stainless steel tanks;  
four days extended maceration  
Finished alcohol: 13.5%

Aging: 15 mos. in tight-grained one and two-year-old Hungarian oak barrels  
Total acid: 0.66g/100ml  
pH: 3.48  
Bottle date: December 20, 2004  
Total production: 392 cases  
Release date: June 1, 2005  
CA suggested retail: \$24.00