

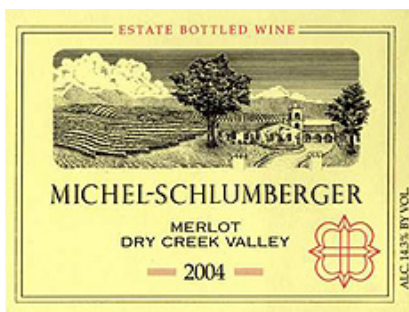
# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Wine Column

Thursday, October 25, 2007

By Chris Knap

### **This Merlot stands as a rebuke to those soft, milky, California Merlots**



Some weeks ago I wrote about the European roots that trailed Jacques Schlumberger and Jean-Jacques Michel to Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley. This heritage is seen in the woodcut-style graphics on Michel-Schlumberger's wine labels (no cute names or fuzzy animals here) and in the serious wine inside the bottle.

In particular, Michel-Schlumberger's Merlot has consistently been serious, sturdy, and by California standards, almost austere.

If you are a fan of Bordeaux this is good to know.

The grapes come from Bordeaux cuttings grafted onto low-vigor rootstock in the winery's estate vineyards.

In past vintages winemaker Mike Brunson has blended in a little Malbec and Cabernet Franc to firm up the Merlot. This time he has added Petit Verdot and Carmenere as well – a classic Bordeaux blend – before aging the wine for 16 months in French oak barrels.

I opened this wine alongside two other Merlots and this one was so massive I ended up recorking it for a day. But the next day it was excellent and on the third day it continued to impress – indicative of a wine that will get better for at least another three years.

The wine has a toasted oak nose with aromas of roasted cherry and blackberry, nutmeg and clove. On the palate it is multilayered, extracted and grainy with baked blackberry and cherry and notes of raisin, black tea, tobacco and wood.

Overall it's an outstanding Merlot that stands as a rebuke to those soft, milky, California wines that have ruined the reputation of this classic Bordeaux varietal.

Serve with an oven-roasted pork loin or roasted turkey.