

Rudd. Since my last visit to this estate (the "Estate" has apparently been dropped from its official name), David Ramey has gone off to pursue his own venture and the talented Charles Thomas, who made several vintages of the consistently excellent Cardinale, took over in April of 2002 and was responsible for blending the 2001s. Rudd's 2000 Estate Red Wine, to be released in September, is the first red from this large property just inside the Silverado Trail in Oakville. There is also a Jericho Canyon bottling from 2000; but beginning with 2001 ex-winemaker Ramey will continue to work with this fruit as Rudd

completes its evolution to estate fruit. Thomas believes that each vintage here has been better than the previous one, with 2002 having yielded especially perfumed wines. The winemaking objective at Rudd, according to Thomas, is power with finesse. Production, now at 10,000 cases, will eventually rise to about 15,000.

2001 Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley (\$28; no new oak used; a portion of this wine was aged in the small stainless steel "barrels" that are becoming increasingly popular on the North Coast): Brisk, slightly metallic aromas of white grapefruit and soft citrus fruits. Juicy and nicely delineated, but with only moderate complexity. Offers good texture but could use a bit more personality. From purchased fruit from Oakville and Rutherford; Rudd will eventually switch over to its new parcel of sauvignon blanc on Mt. Veeder, scheduled to be planted this spring. (The young 2002, still on its lees at the beginning of March, showed a bit more density of texture and minerality.) 88.

2000 Chardonnay Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$50; 65% new oak): Quite oaky aromas of hay, butterscotch, honey, nutmeats and spices. Rich, silky and full, with notes of nuts and resinous oak. Finishes with a slight edge of acidity. Offers good texture and material but seems quite oaky today. (The 2001, still in barrel, offered enticing notes of candied lemon peel and grapefruit and showed better integration of oak.) 87.

2000 Jericho Canyon Vineyard Red Wine Napa Valley (\$100; a blend of 53% cabernet sauvignon, 29% merlot, 17% cabernet franc and 1% petit verdot): Slightly porty aromas of candied black cherry, licorice, fresh herbs, menthol, exotic spices and soy sauce. Supple in the middle, with a restrained sweetness. Slightly medicinal flavors of cooked plum and meat. Lacks generosity but finishes with sweet tannins for a 2000. 89.

2001 Oakville Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley (the first vintage for this estate cabernet): Good full ruby. Porty aromas of black cherry, tobacco and menthol. Sweeter and fuller in the mouth than the 2000 Jericho bottling, with black cherry and menthol flavors. The big, tongue-dusting tannins are broad and firm. 90-93.

2000 Oakville Estate Red Wine Napa Valley (bottled in June of 2002; 86% cabernet sauvignon, 9% cabernet franc and 5% petit verdot): Saturated medium ruby. Aromas of currant, black cherry, smoked meat, truffle and loam. Lush and sweet, with a very suave texture and complex flavors of graphite, truffle and game. Dense, fat and ripe; a very successful cabernet-based wine from the 2000 vintage. The fine tannins arrive late, allowing the flavors to linger. The first vintage for the estate's flagship wine. 91.

2001 Oakville Estate Red Wine Napa Valley (cabernet sauvignon with bits of malbec, cabernet franc and petit verdot): Saturated ruby. Aromas of blackcurrant, black cherry, soy sauce and menthol, with a whiff of celery seed. Very primary, somewhat clenched flavors of black cherry and menthol. A somewhat medicinal, uncompromising red, with strong notes of minerals and graphite. Finishes firmly tannic and persistent. Thomas expressed confidence that this youthfully muscular wine will eventually surpass the more pliant 2000. 89-93.