



USA, California, Napa Valley: Continuum's 2017 & 2018 New Releases

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In the context of the American wine industry, few families have as much of a grape history as the Mondavis. Considering the family's unwavering pursuit of growing wine grapes even during the Prohibition era—shipping fruit to home winemakers during those dark, alcohol-forbidden American days—in 2019, the family celebrated 100 years in wine with an unbroken string of harvests.

Poised at around 1,500 feet overlooking Oakville's valley floor—where it all began for the Mondavis—Continuum clearly marks the present and the future of the family in Napa Valley. Its "Sage Mountain" vineyard up on Pritchard Hill, not far from Colgin and Ovid, is a prime location for the "new" Napa, expressing mountain fruit in a classically bold yet fashionably refreshing style.

At its core, Continuum is Napa Cab at its finest. But one of its signatures is that it is not just about Cabernet Sauvignon. Of the 62.85 acres planted to the Sage Mountain vineyard thus far, just over half, 37.51 acres, is Cabernet Sauvignon, with about 30% of the vineyard—a relatively high proportion—devoted to Cabernet Franc. The rest is Petit Verdot (11%) and Merlot (4%).

"Cabernet Sauvignon is king, but Cabernet Franc on hillsides is incredible too. It has depth and elegance and silk," Tim Mondavi told me. "We have slightly reduced our plantings of Petit Verdot and increased Cabernet Franc, since it does so well here."



In any normal year, the plan would be for the Continuum blend to roughly reflect the percentages planted. But recent years have been anything but “normal.” Tim explained that the percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon in Continuum in 2015 and 2016 (just under 50% in both years) were a bit lower than anticipated, because a cold snap in 2015 affected the that year’s yield and also the fruit set for 2016.

In 2017, the Cabernet Franc contributed just 18% of the Continuum blend. “In 2017, a lot of our Cabernet Franc was still on the vines when the fires came through,” he told me. Prior to the fires, about two-thirds of their fruit was harvested and in the cellar. While they harvested the remaining third after the fires and kept it separate, ultimately, it was not considered acceptable to include any of this post-fire fruit in the final blends. The 2017 Continuum is unquestionably one of Napa Valley’s top wines from this notoriously challenging vintage. It has beautiful, striking purity, offering a crystal-clear view of the vintage’s perfumed, flamboyant and seductive personality, before the devastating fires came through.

The 2017 Novicium—Continuum’s second wine—is a very different, if also delicious, animal. It is nearly equal parts of the four varieties grown in the Sage Mountain vineyard. “Everything we do is about Continuum,” Tim commented. “Novicium has to be great too. It has our name on it. But the priority is Continuum. Continuum has greater depth, nuances and complexity. Novicium takes the last lots...but we don’t bottle everything! Novicium still shows that nerve that this land has, that minerality. It’s just that Continuum has more layers and elegance. Novicium is a bit firmer. By nature, Novicium has a wider swing in the variation of blend each year.”

Then we get to the 2018 vintage, which I first tasted at the winery as component parts in February 2019 and recently tasted as a finished tank sample just about to be bottled. Composed of 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Cabernet Franc, 9% Petit Verdot and 6% Merlot, the blend is pretty close to mirroring the plantings this year. "I think in 2018 the varietal mix is pretty much spot on," Tim said. "The average age of vines is just under 20 years old this vintage." My mind was completely blown by how spectacularly this wine has come together. Without a doubt, here's where we see how incredibly special this singular Pritchard Hill site really is. This 2018 Continuum joins the ranks of Napa's most legendary wines and is a vintage that I urge fans not to miss!

Vintage	Wines	RP
2018	Continuum Proprietary Red	(98 - 100)
2017	Continuum Proprietary Red	97+
2018	Continuum Novicium	(91 - 93)
2017	Continuum Novicium	91+