

INSIGNIA 2005

Joseph Phelps Vineyards

Napa Valley



Tasting Note:

92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot, 1% Merlot

Deep, deep purple-black, opaque right to the rim, with a visual texture of velvet. Densely fruited on the nose, with restrained black skinned fruits, sloes and damsons, with a trace of spice and oak. On the palate it is fresh on entry, with pure black fruits again underpinned by traces of spice, with the tannins barely discernible until the very end of the finish. Wonderfully stylish, incredibly restrained, this is a wine which bridges the gap between the old and new worlds and will evolve and mature for 15 years plus.

The Vintage

As each successive vintage of Insignia increases in finesse and density, the 2005 rightly takes its place at the top of the quality scale, highly rated at 93-96 points by Robert Parker. With only small amounts ever allocated to their overseas partners, this has put even greater pressure on the quantities available to the UK market, and we expect demand to be as high as ever – it always sells out on first offer. The fact that it would cost more to buy in the US now than it does here should also add some satisfaction for the UK buyer.

With copious rain in the early part of the season, and perfect weather at bud break and flowering to ensure a fine fruit set, producers in the Napa Valley were more than hopeful of a good vintage. Indeed, so successful was the fruit set that at Phelps, most vines produced three bunches of grapes where they would normally have produced just two, requiring a rigorous green harvest to keep the vines in balance. In the Napa Valley temperatures can easily top 35°C during September, yet in 2005 the weather was more temperate, prompting people to talk of Napa's 'Bordeaux vintage', with some producers worrying that without an Indian summer the fruit wouldn't have the opportunity to develop fully. Thankfully, September and October had magnificent weather, cool but consistently sunny, which meant that the grapes ripened to perfection, and were picked at exactly the right time.

This cooler growing season meant that the grapes spent much longer on the vine than usual, being harvested up to a month later than in an average year, and Phelps harvested the Insignia fruit between 29th September and 1st November, an unprecedentedly late harvest. Despite nature's generosity the production of Insignia was down, the smallest ever, bar 2004, as the emphasis was, as ever, on making a wine of the highest quality and consistency. As in 2004, all the fruit has come from Phelps' own vineyards across Rutherford, Napa, Stags' Leap and from their St. Helena ranch. Happily, the reduction in Insignia meant a small increase in Phelps' Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 production. We first offered this wine last year and we are able to offer a further six cases of 6 bottles at £175 in bond.

Insignia 2005: £595 per six bottle case, in bond London



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