2009 Force Majeure Collaboration Series VI

The Force Majeure 2009 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard Collaboration Series VI represents the inauguration of a new bottling, vinified by James Mantone of Syncline and intended to showcase Mourvèdre, here blended with 28% Grenache, and 24% Syrah. Impressions of jellied Damson plum and blueberry with chocolate syrup are backed-up by the fullness and ester-rich intensity borne of 14.9% alcohol, though, fortunately, no heat or roughness. That said, high-alcohol might be a factor in this bottling’s, for now at least, slightly disappointing lack of textural allure: it’s simply rather glassy and firm in feel, an odd juxtaposition with a wine of such confectionary ripeness. A hint of black pepper and nutty, toasty notes indicative of the well more than half new wood employed here inflect an impressively persistent finish. (There is talk of vinifying Mourvèdre here – at least from the Force Majeure estate fruit – in concrete and...

- David Schildknecht (December, 2012)

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2009 Force Majeure Collaboration Series V

Cabernet Sauvignon Ciel du Cheval

The 2009 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard Collaboration Series V represents a self-described attempt by McBride and Johnson – in collaboration with Chris Gorman – to render a “head-turning wine” showcasing this vineyard’s oldest Cabernet vines. It’s all Cabernet Sauvignon, fermented as well as aged in all-new oak, and dominated by scents of flavors of creme de cassis, chocolate, vanilla, caramelized wood resin and banana oil. For as much as its scents are confectionary and torrefied, I expected a more superficially sweet palate impression, but any such tendency is checked by a very prominent mouthful of tannin, and this finishes with a slightly dry spot and considerable gum-numbing and chew. I hope it was just going through a tough patch when I tasted it, and I won’t try to forecast its future evolution on the basis of this one acquaintance, other than to express tentative skepticism. Entrepreneur Paul McBride and vineyard...

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2009 Force Majeure Collaboration Series I

The Force Majeure 2009 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard Collaboration Series I is a blend of two-thirds Cabernet Sauvignon with, notes McBride a bit oddly, “healthy doses of (P)etit (V)erdot and Cabernet Franc for our take on ‘Left Bank’.” (That said, there is also a bit of Merlot.) In any case, it’s vinified by Ben Smith of Cadence, for more on whose attraction to Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot consult my notes on recent offerings from that winery. The herbaceous side of these cepages dominates in the nose, though in a pleasantly pungent and reasonably complex way. Mint, arbor vitae, and cassis take on a chocolate coating on the glycerol-rich palate, and this finishes with an admirable counterpoint – somehow avoiding too bifurcated a sense – between bittersweetly herbal and torrefied, confitured character. I wouldn’t have guessed that the barrels were 70% new, and there is what I like to think of as a Washington-typical energetic...

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