



## MELKA WINES

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Melka is a newer face in the Napa valley, he's from Bordeaux, where he was educated as a geologist, and he came to California to work at Dominus in 1991, focusing on the connection between soil type and ripeness in the vineyard. Since then he's become a full-time consulting winemaker for brands such as Vineyard 29, Lail and Constant. Selling for anywhere from \$75 to well over \$100, these are limited, estate cabernets that have debuted in recent years (Vineyard 29 is the oldest, first released in 1992.) More recently, he's begun making his own Cabernet blend, Métisse, and has been hired as winemaker for Agustin and Valeria Huneus's Napa valley Estate, Quintessa. "There's all this excitement about wine," he says, on a break from a busy crush schedule at Monticello Vineyards, where he makes wine for a number of his clients. He's relaxed, soft-spoken and friendly, possessed of what may be a California-influenced calm. "There are all these people coming from the South Bay and from Silicon Valley wanting to invest in vineyards. What does that mean for consultants in the business? The demand is higher. Because most of the time these people buy a small piece of land, and they don't want to start a huge business with a lot of management of people. They want to stay small." For a new estate such as Lail, (owned by Robin Lail, who knew Melka from her days as an owner/partner at Dominus), with only one three-acre cabernet plot and a two and a half-acre merlot vineyard, a winemaker with viticultural experience like Melka is an attractive hire.

Melka went looking specifically to fill his client list with small estates. "I wanted to work with a small company because that was the only way for me to really be a part of viticulture and winemaking. It is very exciting but it's also a lot of pressure because everything is very, very high quality," he says. "If you are a winemaker in a big winery you have, I don't know, twenty percent of your wines which are 'Reserve'. The rest are second label or whatever. In the consulting business, everything has to be Reserve. For example, a small company I started to work with last year, Vineyard 29, has one tank of grapes, you know? That's why you have a little bit more pressure, because you don't play with a lot of margin."



Philippe Melka, the Bordeaux transplant behind such wines as Lail, Métisse and Constant.

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