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# Derenoncourt releases benchmark Red Hills Cabernet

February 27, 4:19 PM - SF Drinks Examiner - Deborah Parker Wong



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Deborah Parker Wong

It's a given that a gifted winemaker like Bordeaux consultant Stéphane Derenoncourt would make world-class wines from single-vineyard Napa Valley fruit but his choice of Lake County's Red Hills, an area that is still being closely watched and evaluated for it's potential, is truly exciting. With the release of his first portfolio of California wines, Derenoncourt not only recognized the potential of Lake County's high-elevation volcanic soils, he has established a new benchmark for Red Hills Cabernet Sauvignon. The winemaker and his team recently debuted five wines from the 2006 vintage at tastings held in Napa and San Francisco: Cabernet Sauvignon (\$220) and Cabernet Franc (\$140) from the Caldwell Vineyard in Coombsville, Merlot (\$140) from Stagecoach Vineyard in Atlas Peak and a Hudson Vineyards Carneros Syrah (\$60) in addition to the Beckstoffer Red Hills Cabernet

(\$40).

Derenoncourt's signature light-handed approach which is noted for allowing wines to express terroir has worked to elevate Lake County fruit from a site that he immediately recognized as being superior. "Once I saw the color of the soil, I knew," he said during an interview at COI in San Francisco where he tasted with members of the press and trade including sommeliers Marcus Garcia from Fleur de Lys and Chris Deegan from NOPA. "We tasted a lot of wine from the [Red Hills] and found that it had a tendency to be over extracted," said Derenoncourt who buys Beckstoffer's fruit by the acre and has made some



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Stylistically, he strikes a precise balance between the level of extraction and a nuanced application of oak for a wine that reveals darker red fruit and plenty of minerality in a concentrated, persistent mid-palate with nuances of tobacco and sweeter wood tannins on a bright finish.

All five wines demonstrate Derenoncourt's individual approach both to site and variety; there's a distinction about each wine and on the whole, they have met with glowing reviews.



Stéphane Derenoncourt and Fonda Hopkins at COL.

Derenoncourt began developing his grapes-to-bottle California project in 2004 in partnership with Southern California negociant Fonda Hopkins, co-founder and president of [Montesquieu Wines](#), who describes his work as "a personal creative endeavor" and collaborated with him to source the fruit and to place the first allocation of wines. Derenoncourt has appointed winemaker H el ene Mignot to oversee production of the label at Arkenstone Vineyards on Howell Mountain. While the 1,500 cases produced in 2006 have already been allocated, 2007 is right around the corner and additions to the portfolio will include a Cabernet from Ink Grade (on the eastern side of Howell Mountain) and three reds from Cotturi in Sonoma that are scheduled for release in September.



Derenoncourt winemaker H el ene Mignot

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