



# Diamond Series



## Somerston Wine Company

If you feel the name Somerston has a British ring to it, you are most certainly correct. It seems that the Somerston's principal owner, Alan Chapman, is of English heritage. His family was also heavily involved in shipping. When the family's fortunes were moved to the Bahamas, a relative named Somers ran the entire operation.

After purchasing a large property in Napa Valley, Alan Chapman met wine industry veteran Craig Becker. The pair then decided to enter the wine business. A search for names for the new venture finally settled on Somers. The addition of ton (for the family's shipping heritage) produced the newly formed Somerston Wine Company.

"Sometime in the future, we will become Somerston Estate Vineyard and Winery," commented Becker, who serves as the entity's general manager and winemaker. "Even though we grow a good deal of grapes, we actually sell off around 45 percent of what we grow."

Somerston Wine Company is actually a huge estate that occupies some 1,628 acres in Eastern Napa Valley. It is made up of two distinct plots of land that were combined when the property was purchased in 2005.

The first piece, known as Soda Valley, was originally called the Priest Ranch and was settled during the 1849 California Gold Rush. It was comprised of 638 acres and was mostly used for cattle and farming. The second section of Somerston is 990 acres of rolling, volcanic land and was originally settled in 1841. It became known as Elder Valley in 1877 and its first grapes were planted in 1970.

The combined properties sit at elevations of between 800 and 2,400 feet and provide an incredible number of potential growing sites. At this point, there are some 215 acres under vine and all are considered hillside plantings. Due to replantation, only 156 acres currently produce

useable fruit. As more vineyards become operational, it is Somerston's plan to increase its annual production.

"We have a future business plan that calls for us to be around 2,000 cases in the next few years. At our peak, I would hope to be around 5,000 cases, but that is some time in the distant future," Becker added.

Somerston Wine Company's first release of around 300 cases came in 2009 and will top out at just over 800 cases this calendar year. "We have been quite selective about our releases,"

Becker recalled. "We believe we are really good at what we do with our fruit and our intention is to showcase our incredible property. We have divided the ranches into different blocks and each block is named after a clipper ship. At this point we are focusing on individual blocks for individual varietals, but that will probably change in the future.

"When we took over the land, a total of seventeen different varietals were planted. With the changes we have made, we will probably wind up with eight or nine different varietals. One thing I can say for sure is that 85 percent of our grapes will be Cabernet Sauvignon."

Craig Becker is adamant about his company's effort to reestablish the basics that made Napa Valley famous. To that extent, the Somerston Wine Company label attempts just that. "Our property is something special, and deserves to be showcased. We wanted one shot that showed our acreage, the hillside vineyards and a number of other things. So many wineries have just a name or a picture of something relatively nonsensical. Our labels feature scratch art and make a statement. We worked long and hard on the concept and we hope it works for everyone."

Becker is a successful wine industry executive with imposing credentials. After wandering through several college



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Craig Becker – General Manager & Winemaker

scenarios he wound up at Santa Rosa Junior College in Sonoma. While there he discovered the joys of science and met his future wife during a wine appreciation course. Once bitten by the wine bug, Becker eventually enrolled at nearby UC Davis where he furthered his avocation and graduated with a degree in enology and viticulture.

In 1997 he became the winemaker for Napa Valley's prestigious Spring Mountain Vineyard, one of St. Helena's most revered wineries. He stayed until 2003 and then began consulting for other wineries. He is the person responsible for Somerston Wine Company's entry into the rarified air of super-premium Napa Valley wineries.

From its early accomplishments, Somerston Wine Company seems firmly headed toward Napa Valley stardom. With a sensible business plan in place, there seems to be no limit to its success.

## Accolades and Tasting Notes

### Somerston 2010 Napa Valley Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon

**95-Points**, Robert Parker Jr.'s *The Wine Advocate* publication — "A dark, sumptuous wine, the 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon boasts stunning depth, power and richness. Mocha, chocolate, espresso, and cloves flesh out in this intense, full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon. There is so much fruit, the tannins of the vintage are nearly buried. A full throttle, opulent Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2010 is a gorgeous wine from start to finish and a terrific example of the vintage. The 2010 is 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Merlot."

*Winemaker Notes* — "The 2010 Somerston Cabernet Sauvignon is our third release. This wine is intended to be a collector's wine that showcases the potential of the property. The aromas are bright and explosive and continue to develop in the glass. On the palate, the wine is rich and full-bodied, full of fruit and hints of oak spice. The wine is extremely balanced and has great structure, supported with bright acidity. The tannins are present, but refined. The finish is lingering and very enjoyable! This wine will mature over the next 25 years. Just 380 Cases Produced."

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