

Robb Report

FOOD & DRINK / WINE

AUGUST 27, 2024

This Indulgent Cabernet Sauvignon Blend Shows Off Sonoma's Terroir

Knights Bridge 2021 Draco Dormiere is drinking beautifully now.

By MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSSEN



Knights Bridge

As wine lovers we often get locked into stereotypes about regions and the wine made there. Many people often immediately associate Napa Valley with Cabernet Sauvignon and its neighbor Sonoma with Pinot Noir. Despite the generalization, there are many fine examples of Cabernet Sauvignon or other Bordeaux-style wines, either single varieties or cuvées, from Sonoma, such as Rodney Strong 600R, Vérité La Joie, Peter Michael Les Pavots, and Skipstone Oliver's Blend. To that esteemed list we can add Knights Bridge 2021 Draco Dormiere, an indulgent and complex Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend that showcases the incredible terroir of Sonoma's Knights Valley AVA.

First granted AVA status in 1983, Knights Valley still seems like a wine-world insider's secret. Much of it is closer to Calistoga, the northernmost town in Napa Valley, than to Healdsburg, Sonoma's popular tasting and dining destination. And while there are over 2,000 acres of grapes planted here, only two wineries have onsite tasting rooms, Peter Michael Winery and Knights Bridge, whose state-of-the-art production facility, caves, and tasting room, designed by Howard Backen, were completed in 2021. The first winery built in the AVA in 35 years, it contains cutting-edge technology including an optical sorting table, remotely operated fermentation tanks custom-sized to each vineyard block, and separate climate-controlled rooms for vinification and aging.

It took a new winery—and years of commitment to developing and replanting the vineyards—to create Draco Dormiere, which is Latin for sleeping dragon. A blend of 46 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 16 percent Merlot, 15 percent Malbec, 15 percent Petit Verdot and 8 percent Cabernet Franc from six different vineyard blocks, the premiere release of Draco Dormiere is a blend of the best barrels of these varieties from the 2021 vintage.



Winemaker Derek Baljeu
Knights Bridge

A hot, dry summer with prolonged heat spikes led to diminished yields and smaller berry size, which gave rise to more robust flavors. “The absence of significant rainfall and the cooler nights maintained the grapes’ natural acidity, contributing to a well-balanced, fine, and linear structure in the wines,” winemaker Derek Baljeu says. “These ideal conditions resulted in wines with extraordinary concentration, complexity, and aging potential.” After secondary fermentation and 20 months of aging in 80 percent new French oak, barrel samples are evaluated for potential inclusion in Draco Dormiere.

Draco Dormiere’s metallic label depicts the winery’s knight’s helmet crest, which first appeared on Knights Bridge’s inaugural vintage in 2006, surrounded by two dragons. The crest has inspired design elements around and within the winery, including the aging cave. “To us, it seemed the perfect placement; the wine is stored in the cave and aged in French oak barrels, sleeping until bottled,” says Kelley Bailey, who owns the winery with her husband, Jim. Knights Bridge 2021 Draco Dormiere is deep garnet to the eye and has aromas of blackberry, dark chocolate, crushed violet petals, and a hint of graphite. It is luxurious on the palate, offering opulent tannins shrouded in flavors of cassis, purple plum, cocoa powder, caramel, and lavender with a soft touch of mountainside herbs on the lengthy finish. It is drinking beautifully right now but with proper storage will gracefully age for another two decades.