



Senel Wine's Top 10 Wines of 2010: #3

If they keep this type of effort up, Donelan will soon join the ranks of the Syrah Elite.

2008 Donelan, Cuvee Christine, Syrah, North Coast, CA (Release Price \$45)

I'm in love with Rhone varietals. Be it the stunning aromatically floral experience that Viognier delivers or the depth of character that a well-crafted Syrah or Mourvedre offers, these grapes make sensational wines.

Most believe that the very best Syrah comes from the Rhone; however I find this to only partially to be true. In the recent decades, the New World has given the Old World all it can handle. Due to the sheer breadth of quality of Rhone-styled wines that are available, there's been quite a spike in those that set themselves apart. New World producers such as Sine Qua Non, Saxum, Alban, Cayuse, Torbreck and the legendary Penfolds Grange typically get the lion's share of the publicity; however there is a new kid on the block that deserves the same recognition.

Donelan is one of the exciting emerging producers to recently emerge onto the California scene. The label was born out of a contentious break-up that saw winemaker Pax Mahle leave the winery bearing his name, PAX. With the newfound freedom of running the direction of the brand without an outside partner, owner Joe Donelan has been determined to build off of the already solid reputation that PAX had; however this time under the Donelan name. It's only a matter of time before you start to hear Donelan in the same breath as those wineries mentioned above.

The 2008 Donelan Cuvee Christine is an exceptionally expressive wine. It has a pure deep plum color and the sight of this wine is visually striking (a comment that I rarely make). Layers of aroma are present with dark red fruits showing prominently and are then complemented by a generous amount of underbrush and pine. The flavor profile of this full-bodied wine is equally as impressive. Big, yet bright red and black fruit lead to fresh cinnamon and earthy notes. This is one of the bigger Christine's I have had; however it's not brooding, but rather like a running back navigating your palate with power, energy and grace. Give this a little more time in the bottle and watch out!

(Senel Wine Rating: 94+ pts)