

2010 Raphael Merlot First Label

The 2010 Merlot First Label, basically the Reserve here, is all Merlot coming in at 13.2% alcohol. It was aged for 18 months in 100% French oak. Simply a beauty, this is a surprisingly rich and hedonistic Merlot, at least by Long Island standards. Lush on the first taste and bursting with flavor on the finish, including oak nuances, it adds fine structure and shows fine grip on the finish. It improves steadily with aeration, too, showing that it is indeed Long Island—elegant, structured, possessed of some finesse and the ability to age. With air, it acquires a bit of leather and lead and shows off some complexity, too. It becomes increasingly impressive. This was the best of Raphael's submissions this issue. There were 967 cases produced.

Beautiful Raphael, established in 1996, is owned by the Petrocelli family and the winemaker here i...

- Mark Squires (June, 2015)

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2014 Raphael Sauvignon Blanc

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc, the regular bottling, not the First Label also reviewed, has 3% Semillon added. Bright and fresh, with a bit of that gooseberry nuance, this had reductive nuances, too. Sometimes they blow off, but it is something to watch. Otherwise, not particularly concentrated, it is exuberantly fresh and lively.

Beautiful Raphael, established in 1996, is owned by the Petrocelli family and the winemaker here is Anthony Nappa (who also makes wine for himself under his own name). With all those Italians, it is not surprising that the Italian flag flies outside and the wines (here and at Nappa's own operation) contain many references (some subtle, some not) to Italian culture and language. The wines are very much, however, true to the style of Long Island (except for some Rieslings which tend to get sourced in the Finger Lak...

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2013 Raphael Cabernet Franc

The 2013 Cabernet Franc, essentially the estate bottling, is unoaked. On the lighter side, this wins points for its silky texture and focus, plus evidence of a real backbone, that bit of tannic pop on the finish. It doesn't have as much of that Cab Franc character as some, but it is an easy house pour and fine food wine. It should hold reasonably well for a few years, but don't expect this to reward extended aging.

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2013 Raphael Estate Merlot

The 2013 Estate Merlot is unoaked and comes in at 13.5% alcohol. Somewhat straightforward, but rather fresh and lively, this is redeemed by having a real backbone, a sign that it can yet age and improve. It then adds earthy nuances on the finish as it airs out. It has a reasonably solid mid-palate for its level and the region. Quite tight on the finish at the moment, this could use a little time in the cellar, a year at least. If there isn't much depth, for the entry-level Merlot, it is a pretty seriously structured wine at a nice price. Nota bene: like many reds, this will benefit from being drunk cooler. Initially tasted around 73F, it was then retasted at 64F. It seemed twice as interesting. There were 1,301 cases produced.

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2014 Raphael Sauvignon Blanc First Label

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc "First Label," essentially a reserve in Raphael's branding, is all unoaked, with 15% Semillon added. The Sauvignon Blanc is from the winery's oldest Sauvignon Blanc vines (around 15 years). It comes in at 12.3% alcohol and is dry. The Semillon was fermented three weeks on skins to add body and mouthfeel. One of the best Sauvignon Blancs that I saw for this report (and there were quite a few nice ones), this gets it just right. With all of that Sauvignon jazz on the nose, it is fresh, grassy and enticing. It does have a reasonable mid-palate, too, and it finishes with fine tension and flavor. This is impressive, at least in its youth. How it will hold? It should hang nicely for a few years, but it is the type of wine whose exuberance and freshness is part of what makes it wonderful. There is no point to losing that...

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2012 Raphael La Fontana

The 2012 La Fontana is a blend of 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Cabernet Franc, 24% Merlot, 14% Petit Verdot and 9% Malbec. It was aged for 18 months in French oak, only 25% new. Elegant and rather charming, showing finesse and some astringency on the finish, but not much concentration, this tastes great and has the freshness and tannic support to age. If it does not have the depth and texture of Raphael's reserves, it is pretty nice, flavorful and quite a good food wine.

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2010 Raphael Cabernet Sauvignon

The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon is all Cab, aged for 18 months in French oak. A big mouthful on opening, this mostly impresses thereafter with its fine balance, elegant presentation and persistence on the sweet, somewhat oak-laced finish. Tightening with aeration, it should have the aging curve to let it absorb more of that oak. It has finesse, finish, structure and the potential to age. It is pretty nice in its elegant and understated style. Drink or hold—it is approachable now, but it is by no means at peak. There were only 167 cases produced.

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