

Eisele Vineyard

Calistoga, California

DAVID VOGELS, CWP



*BART AND DAPHNE ARAUJO
HAVE BECOME THE ACTIVE
CURATORS OF A HISTORIC
NAPA VALLEY VINEYARD.*

As I drive down the lane toward Araujo Estate, off the Silverado Trail north of St. Helena, Calif., the late-February weather is almost palpable. The fog clings to the hillsides of the tree-covered Palisades Mountains in a scene that could pass for a black-and-white Ansel Adams photograph. As I step into the Eisele Vineyard with Burges Smith, Araujo's vice president of sales and marketing, and winemaker Matt Taylor, the stillness in the air enhances the impression of entering hallowed ground.

The first Zinfandel vines were planted here in 1880. Why grapevines and olive trees instead of wheat, Napa's cash crop of the era? "I'm guessing that they saw this stony, stony place and said, 'I don't care to till it,'" says Smith. "We pull cartload after cartload of stones off the vineyard surface annually."

Walking through a drizzle, Taylor points to a block of what he calls "the heart and soul of the Cabernet—all Eisele clone from the section of old vines that the Eiseles had planted. Simmons Creek flows right through the property here, and all of the rainfall and snowmelt and watershed that come off the Palisades flow through Simmons Creek. The walls of the creek are all the rocks we pull off the vineyard. Up the canyon, you have these really massive boulders, and then you start getting into more cobble, and then more sand down this way. The terroir shows its variance in the different soil profiles."

"We're planted on an alluvial fan," adds Smith, "and the closer we are to Simmons Creek, the more the topsoil has been scoured away by periodic flash flooding. As you go uphill, the soil gets deeper, and we have much more fertil-

Photos by Steven Rothfield