

# Lee Hudson

A highly regarded grower makes the case for Carneros as a site for Syrah

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When Lee Hudson purchased his 2,000-acre property in Carneros in 1981, the varieties thought promising for the region were Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Syrah wasn't a consideration. But now Hudson Vineyards is putting Carneros Syrah on the map.

Hudson is a perfectionist. Friendly but intense, he looks you firmly in the eye-especially when talking about his commitment to grapegrowing. Of the 180 acres he has under cultivation, about half are planted to Chardonnay, with Syrah the second largest planting at 40 acres. His vineyards are divided into 54 blocks, and he sells grapes to 34 different vintners. It's not unusual to have three wineries source from the same block.

The 58-year-old Hudson, born in Houston, worked summers on his family's Brahman cattle ranch and calls himself a "Texan Francophile" because of his mother's influence. She served wine at the table and taught him French as his first language. During high school, Hudson spent a year in the south of France, where he recalls the smell of lavender and the coveted truffles of the region. Not surprisingly, he likes aromatic wines such as Syrah.

He studied horticulture at the University of Arizona, and later earned a degree in viticulture and enology at University of California, Davis. He spent time in Oregon and Burgundy before arriving in Napa. The first grapes he sold were to vintners in his class at Davis-peers such as David Ramey, John Kongsgaard and Bruce Cakebread. More recently, he's sold Syrah to Neyers, Lewis, Tor, Orin Swift, PlumJack and Duckhorn.

"I'm constantly refining. It's a learning curve," says Hudson, who studies each block of grapes to learn its strengths and understand its capacity. Hudson admits his first Syrah planting, in 1989, was a trial in thinning and yields. Syrah's predilection for bearing a heavy crop means that thinning is a regular part of Hudson's management. After veraison, Hudson gives his staff what he calls "quantifiable directives" on thinning, often three or four passes, because as he says, "You can't glue [the grapes] back on." Half-or sometimes more than half-of the grapes end up on the ground.

Hudson is selective about which producers use his name, and he can refuse its use by a client. "I license my name because it's the only thing I've got. It has to be the right block, the right person, the right package." Hudson adds that a vineyard designate-his or any other-doesn't mean it's a great wine. "It just means it's site-specific. There are many blocks on my ranch I would never want to be a designate."

Driven by the concept of excellence, Hudson thrives on the challenge that grapegrowing brings. "It's the most lauded form of agriculture," he explains. "There's no other type of agriculture that asks for excellence like grapegrowing." While talking about the expectations his clients have from him, Hudson interrupts himself to say, "I don't like picky people, but I like particular people." And Hudson is a particular person himself.

## LEE HUDSON

### Recommended Wines

92	LEWIS Syrah Napa Valley Hudson Vineyard 2007	\$60	115 cases
92	NEYERS Syrah Napa Valley Hudson Vineyards 2008	\$48	115 cases
91	TOR Syrah Carneros Rock Hudson Vineyard Alban Clone 2005	\$150	20 cases

