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2005 Peacock Family Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain District, Napa

I have a hard spot in my heart for peacocks. Spending summers with my father in Sonoma County as a kid, we had a neighbor with a bunch of peacocks that would wander over towards our house and hang out in the trees nearby. Beautiful birds? Yes. But they also have an incredibly loud, piercing call that at 5:00 AM makes you wonder what peacock stew tastes like.

I recently learned what Peacock wine, er, rather Peacock Family wine tastes like, and we won't hold the bird's reputation against Christopher and Betsy Peacock, because the wine they're making from their perch high on the slopes of Spring Mountain is pretty darn good. The Peacocks purchased a 50 acre ranch and homestead on Spring Mountain in 1991, which came with a small parcel of Cabernet grapes already planted. This 6.2 acres of low yield, hillside Cabernet had been contracted out in past years to Barnett Vineyards, which sits three miles up the road.

After beginning construction on their home in 1991, the Peacocks began overhauling their vineyards and began producing a small amount of wine under their Peacock Family Vineyard label in 1993. They've replanted several sections of the vineyard, and continue to make only about 400 cases of wine each year.

Christopher Peacock comes to the wine business from a long road of history, divinity, and law studies on the way to his latest career as a real estate entrepreneur. In addition to an abiding interest in travel and fly-fishing, Peacock has always had a passion for wine, and when he and his wife decided to move out of the city, Napa was a logical choice.

The Peacocks eventually brought on winemaker Craig Becker, who now also holds the title of General Manager, and have been working with him for just shy of a decade now. Becker got his start at Robert Mondavi Winery, and in 1997 he started making wine at Spring Mountain Vineyard, which is where the Peacocks tracked him down. In addition to his duties at Peacock, Becker also makes wine for Armstrong Ranch, Kelleher Family Vineyards, Coniglio, Borra Winery in Lodi, and his own brand, Michael Austin).

The viticulture and winemaking practices at Peacock are what you might expect from a family run 6-acre mountain vineyard. Becker practically knows every vine personally, and farms the vineyard sustainably with the attention to detail that is only possible at this scale. The grapes are hand harvested from their low-yielding vines and carefully sorted multiple times before fermentation begins, almost always from native yeasts.

The wines go into French oak barrels (50% new) and are fined with a single egg white per barrel. The wines age for 26 months before being bottled unfiltered.

Tasting Notes:

Inky ruby in color, this wine has a compelling nose of tobacco, wet earth, and black cherries. In the mouth it is smooth and robust with suede-like tannins that envelop dark flavors of espresso, black cherries, and pipe tobacco. The finish, which is long and satisfying, incorporates notes of cocoa powder and river mud. Lovely and quite smooth, betraying no trace of heat from the hefty 15.8% alcohol.

Food Pairing:

I drank this wine today with grilled bratwurst, grilled vegetables, and great pleasure.

Overall Score: between 9 and 9.5

How Much?: \$95

