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## A Blend of Cultures

Philippe Melka makes California wines with French style

**PHILIPPE MELKA BOASTS A RESUMÉ** that includes degrees from the University of Bordeaux (geology, agronomy and enology) as well as stints at Haut Brion and Pétrus in Bordeaux, Dominus and Ridge in California and estates in Tuscany and Australia. With his wife Cherie, another Ridge alum with French training, he created Melka Wines in 1996.

The offerings are few but are among Napa's most exceptional wines. The cuvée called CJ is named for Melka's children, Chloe and Jeremy. Yearly production is 1,500 cases, made from 100% Napa Valley vineyards ranging from Coombsville to Calistoga. Meant to be enjoyed young, it still has plenty of class and structure.

Melka's Métilisse wines (from a French word for "blend of cultures") are sourced from two outstanding Napa vineyards. Jumping Goat Vineyard, owned by Jim and Stephanie Gamble, is located in the heart of St. Helena, adjacent to Spottswoode. The 3.5-acre estate sits on an old river bench reminiscent of Bordeaux's Graves area; it was planted in 1999 by celebrated vineyard manager David Abreu, who chose Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot for this terroir.

La Mekerra Vineyard is named for a river in Algeria that flows near Melka's father's childhood home. The eight-acre hillside vineyard lies at an elevation of 2,300 feet and is planted Cabernet Franc (on compacted volcanic ash) and Merlot (on clay loam). The wine is reminiscent of a great Right Bank Bordeaux but with California panache.

I tasted through the recent releases recently with Philippe. Here are my notes.

**92 Melka 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, CJ, Napa Valley (\$45)** Explosive juiciness with bright acidity, velvety texture and rich plum and cassis; great structure, supple and very long with style and balance. 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Merlot, 9% Petit Verdot.

**94 Melka 2007 Métilisse, Jumping Goat Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$125)** Dark, fragrant and rich with deep, intense ripe plum and velvety texture; chocolate, spice and finesse; powerful yet very elegant; long and beautifully balanced. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot.

**95 Melka 2007 Métilisse, La Mekerra Vineyard, Knights Valley (\$175)** Dense and rich with firm structure and soft tannins; tight but showing a coiled potential; layered and complex with tar and great structure; long and balanced, classic and immense. 65% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Franc.