

Melville

CALIFORNIA | STA. RITA HILLS

With the top-scoring syrah along the central coast, Melville proves the grape can thrive in the cool Sta. Rita Hills.



CHAD MELVILLE

CHAD MELVILLE WAS THERE ALONGSIDE HIS father, Ron, and winemaker Greg Brewer when they started their winery in the Sta. Rita Hills in 1997. Together, Chad and his brother Brent planted the original vines that still grow at the Melville estate, including their Donna's Block syrah and Sandy's Block pinot noir (both planted in 1998). When Brewer left in 2015, Chad, who had been playing the role of viticulturist, started to oversee winemaking, too. He focuses on small-lot wines, tailoring the farming and winemaking to each parcel, and taking a light hand in the winery to let the terroir differences show through. (He hasn't used new oak in more than a decade.) The Melvilles farm mostly pinot noir, but they also have the largest planting of syrah in the Sta. Rita Hills. They produced two dynamic syrahs from close to 20 acres of the variety, and they continue to plant more. —S.L.



FOUNDED:
1997
OWNERS:
Ron & Chad Melville
WINEMAKER/
VITICULTURIST:
Chad Melville
ACRES OWNED:
120
ANNUAL
PRODUCTION:
10,000 cases
ESTATE GROWN:
100%

2018 Sta. Rita Hills Donna's Block Syrah (\$48, 95 points) Donna's Block is four acres of syrah growing in sand, a well-drained soil that keeps the vines' natural vigor at bay. Early on, the fruit growing there showed an intensity that the Melvilles encouraged with restricted irrigation, aggressive vine thinning and, in this cold climate, lots of exposure to the sun. They've fermented their syrah as whole clusters for 15 years now, gaining a reputation for spicy, aromatic wines like this 2018: It's wildly aromatic, with scents of green olive, dried venison, lavender and thyme, and flavors of dewy blue and black berries at its core.

2018 Sta. Rita Hills Estate Syrah (\$38, 94 points) Apart from Donna's Block, the remainder of Melville's syrah goes toward this estate bottling, a cold-climate syrah made with some whole clusters (40 percent) and neutral oak barrels. The 2018 brings to mind a cool morning with scents of pine needles and red roses. The flavors are darker, with blackberry compote refreshed by the wine's thread of acidity.

2018 Sta. Rita Hills Sandy's Block Pinot Noir (\$50, 93 points) Sandy's Block sits just above Donna's in the most northwest corner of Melville's estate, where the soil is entirely sand. It's been bottled as its own cuvée since 2009, when then-winemaker Greg Brewer started to notice the fruit's floral aromas, concentration and bright acidity. The 2018 has spicy bergamot and violet scents and earthy strawberry fruit that energizes the wine.