

# Ramiisol Vineyards' debut releases reviewed

Margaret Rand was invited to the global launch of this biodynamic Virginian winery inspired by Italy's late, great winemaker Gianfranco Soldera, with Alberto Antonini and Pedro Parra as consultants.

Margaret Rand November 9, 2019

Ramiisol is what happens when you mix the foresight of President Thomas Jefferson that the US (and Virginia) could make wines to equal the best in the world, with the inspiration of Montalcino producer Gianfranco Soldera and the high-level science of its owners.

The three 'i's in the name refer to owner Robert Hefner III, and Alberto Antonini, the winery's renowned consultant winemaker, pronounces it by extending the vowel a bit – Ramee-eesol. The 'Ram' comes from the first letters of Robert And MeiLi, his wife. Sol is, obviously, sun. In the logo, MeiLi's brushstroke under the 'iii' makes it signify 'mountain', as in Virginia's Blue Ridge foothills. 'We made it up,' says Robert, at the global launch of the winery and its two Cabernet Francs, at an intimate lunch at the Hefner's London home in Cheyne Row. Controversial Case Basse winemaker Gianfranco Soldera, who died aged 82 in February 2019, was a formative influence on the Hefners. They went to Tuscany to taste wine in 2005, and 'Soldera stood out,' says Robert. He talked to them of the importance of micro-ecosystems, of frogs and insects and of all those details in the making of great wine. 'We went back every year. And we bought a property in the US eight years later.' They thought of Italy or France, 'but neither of us speaks Italian or French'; they thought of Napa, but Napa is very thoroughly controlled and, says Robert, 'I'm a free thinker. I learnt that from Soldera. I like the East Coast; it's handy for travelling to London [where they have a house] and for my business [he's a geologist and geophysicist]. We found a property in Virginia and 18 months later we bought it and we went for it.' What they have today is 10ha of vines, mostly the mature Cabernet Franc that was already there, plus younger Cabernet Franc that replaced some badly planted Chardonnay. And there's Nebbiolo too. The vines grow in decomposed red granite soils as part of a polyculture of forests, lakes, streams and wildflower meadows – that's the Soldera influence – in a humid maritime climate with filtered light.

They call their estate the 'Ramiisol terratorium' of which vines are just one part: it's a holistic approach that aims to achieve Jefferson's goal of making wines in Virginia to equal any in the world. Renowned Chilean consultant Pedro Parra advised on the vineyards and the planting, digging more than 50 three-metre pits to study the soils.

The Hefners built an underground, solar-powered winery equipped with oak vats, casks and concrete eggs. There's no fining, no filtration and no small new oak, and all the fermentation is with wild yeasts. It's a small-scale operation, overseen by Virginian winemaker Robbie Corpora, and Robert can't see it growing more than about 20,000 bottles a year.

Antonini was also greatly influenced by Soldera, and about 10 years ago began more and more to do less and less in the winery. 'Robert says Soldera told him to forget everything he'd ever learnt. And what Soldera told me 35 years ago is what I'm doing now.'

## Ramiisol Vineyards debut releases

### Ramiisol, Cabernet Franc Riserva, Monticello, 2014



Tasted by Margaret Rand (at London, 22 Oct 2019)

96

Made like the Classico (wild-yeast fermented, aged in large older oak vessels, unfinned and unfiltered) but deeper, richer and weightier and with no overstatement. Poised, resonant, with pepper and blackberry fruit and very silky tannins. Precise and long, complex and tight. Fruit from portions of the estate's two best-performing blocks, vinified separately, and after a year were blended into two large Slovenian oak casks then aged for an additional two years and eight months. 3,700 bottles made.

Drinking Window 2020 - 2035

Points **96**

## Ramiiisol, Cabernet Franc Classico, Monticello, 2014



Very fresh and poised with a note of tar, plus raspberries and pepper; silky, energetic and elegant. Layered, lovely fruit, understated. Ageing was in French barriques and Slovenian oak casks for two years, then three years in bottle until release, and the oak is invisible on the palate except as tight structure. Unfined and unfiltered, made from a blend of grapes from across the Ramiiisol vineyards. 670 bottles made.

Drinking Window 2020 - 2030

Points **94**

Read more at:

<https://www.decanter.com/premium/ramiiisol-vineyards-debut-releases-reviewed-427296/#AIF0RHUjp6jgmijz.99>