

ONE PERFECT HOLIDAY PAIRING:

VDR BY SCHEID FAMILY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCHEID FAMILY WINES



Dave Nagengast is VP of winemaking at Scheid Family Wines.

The choice to bring two powerhouse grapes like Petit Verdot and Petite Sirah—both known for providing intense color and structure—together in a single blend is an unusual one that could potentially yield over-the-top results. But in the hands of Scheid Family Wines VP of winemaking Dave Nagengast, who tempers them with a splash of silky Merlot, it's the right move. Still, he humbly gives all the credit for VDR (Very Dark Red)—which he calls “an all-purpose wine, big, bold, and impactful yet smooth”—to the exceptional sites producing the fruit, particularly Hames Valley Vineyard.

Lying just north of San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles in the southernmost reaches of the Monterey AVA, Hames Valley is one of 12 estate vineyards in Scheid Family Wines' holdings, which span 4,000 acres in the Salinas Valley. All of the vineyards are CCSW Certified, and the family “plans to convert their entire growing operation to organic within the next few years,” according to Nagengast—who adds that in a sea of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Hames Valley “provides a unique microclimate well suited to the varietals” that appear in VDR. Hot, sunny days and cool nights allow for fully developed phenolics and ripe tannins along with bright acidity.

In the company's 100% wind-powered Greenfield winery, Nagengast vinifies using the traditional pumpover method in large tanks and finishes the wine in a mix of American, Hungarian, and French oak barrels and barriques, only 20% new to ensure freshness and fruit-forwardness. The blend changes each year, he says, with the 2018 vintage “highlighting the spice and fruit of the Petite Sirah,” which in turn “accentuate food by wrapping [themselves] around the dish.”

Indeed, with top notes of sage and cypress wafting in a sea breeze; tangy blackberry bramble and violets rounding out the mid-palate; and additional flavors of fleshy black plums, blueberries, cocoa, and green and black peppercorns, VDR has an aromatic warmth and gravitas that make it perfect for a winter's evening. Nagengast recommends serving it at holiday meals or paired with cold-weather fare like pungent blue cheeses, prime rib, stroganoff, or mushroom risotto. —Simone FM Spinner

Scheid Family Wines' 12 vineyards span 4,000 acres in the Monterey AVA.



VDR 2018 Red Blend, Monterey (\$25) The initials VDR stand for Very Dark Red, a reference to the opaque black-carmine hue of this blend of Petite Sirah and Petit Verdot. The grapes are sourced from some of Monterey's warmer, more southerly vineyard sites, which are shielded by the Santa Lucia Mountains and the Gabilan Range. Aging for 12 months in French, American, and Hungarian oak adds a “seasoned” character to the wine, resulting in a complete sensory experience that offers a glimpse into the personality of its powerful, fruity, and dense varieties. Ripe aromas of black cherry and milk chocolate lead to teeth-grabbing black-tea tannins. With further exploration come juicy notes of roses, sweet beets, cherry, and vanilla. Balanced acidity and the persistence of red-berry aromatics ensure that VDR strikes a fine deal with hearty dishes such as grilled lamb or meat stew. **92** —M.M.