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One common goal, two distinctive finds

By DALE ROBERTSON

Another visitor who dropped by was Rob McDonald, representing the opposite end of the spectrum.

The 44-year-old McDonald leads a simple life in Napa with his family, in a house with a small vineyard for a front yard. From the vines, he makes about 25 cases a year, mostly for friends.

Yet he, too, came to Houston touting a bottle of wine. The 2005 **Girls in the Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon** is his only commercial wine, and he makes roughly 3,000 cases of it. The “girls” are the vines, sustainably farmed in the Amber Knolls vineyard in the Red Hills AVA of Lake County, well removed from hip and trendy Napa Valley.



Easygoing: Rob McDonald, 44, left, with Kat McDonald and Matt Stone, wants to “bring wines from the vine to you without any fuss.”

McDonald is anti-trendy, saying his mission as a winemaker isn’t “to sell a lifestyle” but to “bring wines from the vine to you without any fuss and, where possible, do a good deed along the way.” Toward that end, a small portion of the proceeds on wines purchased directly from the winery are sent to the nonprofit organization of the buyer’s choice.



“The Girls”: The 2005 Girls in the Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is Rob McDonald’s only commercial wine, farmed in the Amber Knolls vineyard in the Red Hills AVA of Lake County. McDonald refers to the vines as “the girls.”

He promises never to waste money on advertising, nor on a fancy tasting room. McDonald uses only California-made bottles, and his capsules are made of recyclable tin. His cabernet grapes turn into wine that actually tastes like cabernet, not some heady, oak-laden sorcerer’s brew.

So the Girls in the Vineyard fruit flavors and aromas are well focused and out front, with lots of cherry and cassis. Oak? It’s there, but you’ll have to concentrate to detect it. This is truly a cab from another era, before Robert Parker came to dominate the conversation.

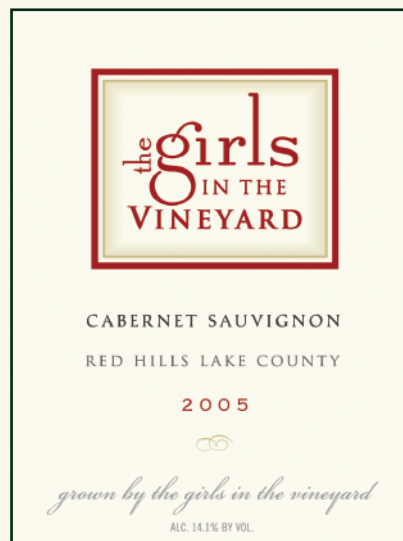
If high ratings fuel your quest for wine, the Girls probably

won’t knock your socks off. Tasted recently in a field that included several turbo-charged Australian Shirazes and classic 21st-century cabs, his wine was a bit overshadowed. Overheard: “The Girls need to work a little harder.”

But at \$20 suggested retail (\$17.61 at Spec’s), you’ll find this wine to be an

eminently satisfying purchase, especially come dinnertime. It’s wonderful with food, which once was, lest we forget, wine’s primary *raison d’être*. And when McDonald comes calling on a customer, he rarely strikes out. Almost every stop he makes produces a sale.

With one wine and no gimmicks, it’s easy to stay on message.



2005 Girls in the Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon: McDonald uses only California-made bottles, and his capsules are made of recycled tin.