

Eden's new Domaine

By Laurie Daniel
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Mount Eden Vineyards is a California classic. Legendary vintner Martin Ray first planted the property above Saratoga in 1945. In the early 1970s, investors kicked him off the estate, and it was re-christened with its current name.

Under winemaker and president Jeffrey Patterson, who has been with the winery since 1981, Mount Eden gained a reputation for its distinctive and long-lived estate chardonnay. Pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon from the estate vineyard are also very good.

But at more than \$50 a bottle, Mount Eden's estate wines have been out of reach for many. Fortunately, the winery has started a new brand, Domaine Eden. While the wines aren't cheap, they are certainly more affordable with a \$32 price tag, and they offer tremendous quality for that price. The wines also offer a good oenophile snapshot of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

In late 2007, Mount Eden bought the Cinnabar winery and vineyard (but not the brand or inventory) and renamed it Domaine Eden. The property is, as Patterson says, "two mountaintops over" from Mount Eden. Patterson says the winery was the main reason for the purchase, because Mount Eden had outgrown its small production facility at the original estate.

As for the Domaine Eden vineyard, Patterson sees it as very good for pinot noir and chardonnay. It also was planted with cabernet sauvignon, but most of it was grafted to pinot noir. "I think it's too cold for cabernet at that particular site," he says. Patterson left some cabernet on slopes with a western exposure.

Patterson notes that the soils at Domaine Eden are different from those at the estate vineyard, and "they don't produce a wine that's similar to Mount Eden." But he still sees the Domaine Eden wines as being "companion wines to the estate program." Certainly the wines have a similar elegance and finesse.

Grapes for the Domaine Eden pinot noir are almost exclusively from the old Cinnabar property. The 2009 (\$32) offers pretty cherry and raspberry flavors, some nice spice and a long finish. It's structured yet supple. The Domaine Eden cabernet sauvignon, Patterson says, is "more of an appellation wine. ... It's a real mosaic of vineyard sites." The 2007 (\$32) is rich and ripe, with black cherry, a hint of anise, firm but approachable tannins and excellent balance. The blend includes some merlot, cabernet franc, petit verdot and malbec.

The new Domaine Eden chardonnay won't be released until next year. Patterson says it will be a combination of lots from the Domaine Eden property and selected lots from the estate.

"It allows us to make our estate wine pretty much the best we can make it," he says.

One other Mount Eden wine worth checking out is the chardonnay from Wolff Vineyard in the Edna Valley. It lacks the complexity and minerality of the estate wine, but at \$20, it's a great buy.